

acta victoriana

letter from the editor

This year's journal has been a labour of love; it is a physical representation of the passion, dedication and, hard work of everyone involved. Each person connected to the publication of this journal believes that there is something both beautiful and valuable about publishing student work. Every late night and early morning of work that went into this journal was motivated by the belief that the pieces you will see in the subsequent pages are important and deserve to be seen. It is an incredible privilege to be able to publish creative work without censorship or direction and, I would like to thank Victoria University for making this possible.

I dedicate this journal to the artists, writers and poets who send us their work and with it a piece of themselves.

Victoria E. Facer
Editor-in-Chief
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substitutions

stephanie turenko

Craving some culture
The girl braided a wreath
Out of rotting herbs
From her fridge

With no river to toss it in
And no lover to fetch it
The tangled circle
Was flushed clockwise
Down the toilet

space

amy hsieh

Busy the hands to dilute the mind.
Soapy water and scrubbers — no gloves
Another sense to sluice. So
Rise little boat, in a meticulous, artificial swell,
Where water never ventured,
That preferred to fall,
The most natural embrace--
Back to the ground.

Satellites short out, blacked out sky.
No more glitter to swing through lightning-swift signals;
Words are out of reach and out of our hands.
Stare at the sky - the pendulum stopped. It's
Dead light that dances and dangles overhead.
Stare into the silence. Then venture out
A little, scraggly tune from
The thousands of years of tensioning
For the light to reach and echo
In your eyes.

cry

amy hsieh

The tear, tentative
venturing rivulet,
paws down
in silken steps—
the gliding predator
stalks my skin
steadily
until it leaps
off the end of my chin
with its warm breath
that turns
away.

eyes

nevena martinović

For a long time he lied
to me and said
they were green and that the
optician/optometrist
(he wasn't sure)
recommended blue tinted contacts
so he would be able to find them.

When cornered between
a truth and a lie, my baby
always
chooses the better story.

And it divides our relationship into parts.
Half of it is
highly fabricated:
 I'm dating a
 Sky-diving Youngest Child of Twelve,
while the other
is painfully dull:
 I'm dating some kind of jerk.

My baby likes to pretend he's a
Dog Groomer.
He makes up vaguely sexual
mostly juvenile
salon names and unleashes his story
onto well-meaning strangers:

"Our place is called Doggie Style,
we specialize in the pooch pompadour."

My baby is a baby liar,
he only lies when there's no need
and absolutely no consequence.

I know what you going to say

kay dyson tam

[a response to william carlos williams
"this is just to say"]

you'll have eaten
the plums
that were in
the ice box

you'll think
I am probably
saving them
for breakfast

don't worry
they are for you
you can't resist
so go ahead

so sweet
and so cold
they look delicious
I know

but I know you
so I licked them
all and twice
forgive me

the secular tragedy

alexander morrow

It happened (to relate this tale to scholar or attorney)
Approximately midway through my academic journey,
Fresh faced and ambitious, and with intellect so keen,
Stranded since that dreadful flood, I stood before The Queen,
Not Lizzy number two, to whom we all salute off shore,
But a certain Older Vicky, who had reigned some years before.
Her threshold beckoned forth to me a feat of beauties form,
William did a nice job, and yet I sensed a Storm.
Dismissing this gut feeling as quite far from grand decree,
And content in V's assurance that the truth would make me
free,
I abandoned anxious feelings and found no need for concern,
I entered thorough her gates, and from her voice began to
learn.
Our loving Queen embraced me, with works of words so vast,
And caressed my mind with stories from the heroes of our
past.
A learned, wise professor then did giveth unto me,
A list of books I must obtain to spur my learning spree,
With syllabus in hand a list of reading then addressed,
The headquarters of wretchedness: One-Eighty Bloor Street
West.
Then torn between emotions of excitement and of wistful,
I ran but one block north across from Michael's jolly crystal,
And thought I to myself, as I gazed through transparent gates,
That this must be that building where my destiny awaits!
A spotted kitten crossed my path then meowed as if to say,

"I must insist you turn around!" and seemed to block my way,
I could not fathom meaning, nor establish some rapport,
And abandoned hope for trying upon entering the door
Towards a long dark passage, this is how my journey went,
Found the staircase leading downward, and began my long
descent.

The first work on my syllabus to start my expedition,
Was the works of Mister Chaucer, printed in its third edition,
I saw it there upon its shelf, it radiated glory,
I could not wait to take it home and read the Miller's story,
The Riverside had bound it in hard cover royal-red,
With glistening golden letters, to entrance a weary head,
Medieval artwork dazzling, to depict the three estates,
And what a tempting piece of fruit bedazzlement creates!
Then noticing its price tag, there paralyzed I stood,
Was this not grossly overpriced, for scraps of pulpy wood?
And where does all this money go? Alas who profiteers?
Certainly not Geoffrey, Hve's been dead six hundred years.
So I asked a wondering figure, nonchalant and bye the bye,
Of how it was their prices, were so o grotesquely high,
A trembling voice did waver and let out a mournful groan,
A bony finger pointed t'ward a dreadful, fiery throne!
And now our story takes a turn from realist to thriller,
As I beheld pure evil: The Bastard Bobby Miller.
Upon his throne of infant skulls adorned with crooked thorns,
A wicked face did smile a smile and stroked atrocious horns,
I saw the place where knowledge goes, is squandered and
then dies,
As I stared directly into Miller's piercing, yellow eyes,
Such vile sounds came forth from chords horrendous and
a cacklin',
Beneath a reminiscent moustache, of the actor Charlie Chaplin,
Atop his throne he bid his minions carry out his tasks,

In his brothel run by crooks, and yet these villains wore no masks,

To not conceal their faces? Were these creatures not ashamed?
But vacant were these demons and their lifeless eyes remained
Uncovered by the robbing mask. A rational they'd built,
For being under orders helped to reconcile their guilt.
How now to defeat this creature, surely Satan's spawn,
I imagined then a friendly face, and called my mind upon
The man who'd journeyed once before, who knew its circles
best,

The guided now the guide came forth to help me on my quest.
Appearing he came forth to Miller mocking at the wreck,
And bound him tightly with a chain around his wretched
neck,

Binding then as Miller had our words in such disgrace,
He pulled the chain more tightly now, and spat upon his face,
"Come now poet!" said my master pointing straight at me,
"We must destroy the bastard now! And set our stories free!
So make haste poet come with me, for justice is now due!"
Then conjured up a swirling gyre and bid that I go through.
There paralyzed I stood with fear, entranced by disarray,
And recognizing this, my master then went on to say,
"The stain of Adam's sin remains a choice we all must make,
He knew of passion not his own and yet he chose to take
The fruit of that forbidden tree with mortal taste that
beckoned,

If that was man's first greatest sin, then Miller's was the second.
For this he must be punished, an exemplar we must show,
The gyre is slowly closing, so we must make haste and go
Off to a place where usurers and treacherous must stay,
Now take my hand and jump the gyre, I'll guide you on
your way."

I recognized my poet's source, familiar with allusion,

That being said I could not help but feel some slight confusion,
Afraid now of my destiny, yet chancing on a whim,
Still shaking from my fearful state, I did say unto him,
"Please do not think it rude my master, surely I adore you,
But how is it you quote a man, who did not come before you?"
"Don't get smart with me" he said, "as I do speak of choice,
If anything it's your fault as it's you who gives me voice,
You're but a fool for thinking this, a feigning academic,
With untamed imagination, or perhaps just schizophrenic,
It makes no difference either way and not to sound a grump,
But our portal's slowly closing, so please hurry up and jump!"
Before I jumped the swirling gyre, I puzzled by the loam,
For who'd have thought th' infernal gates, would be so close
to home?

And promptly losing patience, with his temper running quick,
The poet sent me whirling with a swift and mighty kick,
Tripping through a dreamlike state through spirit, space
and time,

We jumped infinite quantums, and beheld a world sublime,
Then arriving at the gates, we saw not fire, death nor gloom,
But a blank and boring space much like a doctor's waiting room
With a help desk situated for the newly coming signup,
The heretics and fornicators made for quite a line up,
But Dante being quite well known for his comedic stunt,
By power of celebrity he got us to the front.

He signed a couple autographs, to which he was akin,
And Charon checked I.D.s and stamped our hands and we
were in.

And as we ventured circles, with our captive now in toe,
I wondered where we headed, where was it we meant to go?
We came upon the circle where the weighted souls did
wander,

They shouted back and forth: "Why do you keep, Why do

you squander?"

And to and fro and to and fro they sang monotonous songs,
Surely this must be the place the stinking swine belongs.
And thinking this, I stopped in front of where I thought he led,
My dearest guide looked back at me and softly shook his head.
"To push a weight is far too kind for one who stole our creed,
The wretched Sin of Miller far surpasses that of greed."
Then came upon a circle that did make my nostrils clench,
Where flatterers were drowning in a vile and putrid stench.
Seeing people churn in filth their faces all but plastered,
Would this not be fit for likes of such a rotten bastard?
I asked my poet, "Could this be the place where he must rot?"
My master shook his head again, to say that it was not.
"Although it might please both of us to see this man immersed
In excrement, a punishment awaits him far the worse."
And now towards its centre, we did round the final bracket,
And feeling somewhat chilly now, I wished I'd brought my
jacket,
Beheld we Satan's misery, well knowing he had sinned,
His teardrops ever frozen in the cold and icy wind,
We could move no more closer now to evil and the beast,
And came we to a standstill for at last our movement ceased.
And Satan's horrid jaws let loose, who'd caused The Christ
such grief,
For the first time in two thousand years the traitor felt relief.
And soaked in putrid discharge, Judas lay upon the floor,
To make way for his successor, who deserved to suffer more.
Then Dante looked upon me and prepared to right the wrong,
For in the mouth of Satan's where the treacherous belong,
As Satan chewed I thought it right to toss him to the herds,
For Miller was the man who had betrayed our precious words.
And seeing me now tried, Dante said "No time to slack,
Our journey is not over we must give these verses back."

Then glancing at his wristwatch, seeing hands well past eleven,
He said that, "We must go now and disperse these works
from heaven."

Not wanting then to disappoint, (his words were quite
adorning)

But it had been a long day, and I had class in the morning.
I told him this and he did say, his voice now sounding shrew,
"I'm open to suggestion what do you suggest we do?"
Alas to heaven was too far, to give back from the cheaters,
But I knew of somewhere just as good above five hundred
meters.

"To paradise we can't quite go to stage our awesome shower,
But the best place I can think of is our city's tallest tower.
We can climb five hundred meters and then climb fifty more,
And with just another three we'll be well past the glassy floor,
At that height we'll be far above the highest soaring birds,
And from there can we send forth all our ever precious
words."

Not wanting to exert as it was almost time for bed,
I suggested that instead of walk, we take a cab instead,
Our driver seeing us so tired, asked us where we'd went,
"To hell and back" said Dante "and it's been a long descent."
And seeing what we carried he was careful not to rupture,
And dropped us timely at the base of that free standing
structure.

We took those words and from atop that mighty tower high,
We sailed them out as paper planes across the midnight sky.
We gave back The Aeneid, fresh pressed and copied new,
We gave back Homer's Iliad and Charlie Dickens too!
We gave back William Shakespeare, we gave back Yeats
and Pound,

We gave back Chaucer's merry tales and heard the cheers
resound!

We gave back verse of Milton, to the public free from cost,
And reconciled the paradise we thought forever lost.
I felt a sudden sadness for these epics of our ages,
And could not help but think it wrong to tear their sacred
pages,

It played upon my conscience and it made my stomach churn,
So I tapped my poets shoulder and I voiced him my concern.
My guiding poet looked at me then offered truth profound:
"These words are simply words my friend, no matter how
they're bound."

Then seeing what I could not tear, the poet scoffed a chuckle,
As Gertrude's were the Tender Buttons I could not unbuckle,
"Paper is but paper friend, we bind but scraps and tatters,
And in the case of Trudy Stein, I don't suppose it matters."
Content now with his answer, gladly did I break the chains,
And ripped the bindings happ'ly as I folded paper planes.
We liberated history, and set those stories free,
To watch them sailing now unbound, was quite a sight to see.
Now scholar or attorney asks if my descent be true,
In avoidance of this question, I shall pass this on to you:
Can I be blamed for silliness and follies of my youth?
To be sure I only lie when I intend to tell the truth,
A reality it lacks, for truth be told my tale is tall,
Yet the best jokes ever written, are not really jokes at all.
We've squandered all our precious words, forgot what writing
is,

Just ask my good friend E.J. Pratt, I'm sure he'd lend you his.
So here is truth dear reader as we strive towards tomorrow:
For words can have no owner, they are only ours to borrow.

my mother rang to tell me

kevin halligan

My mother rang to tell me
Christ was on Oprah yesterday,
Flogging his newest book
And denying he had used a ghostwriter.
Oprah had him talking about his upbringing
And especially His Mothers, how much He loved Her
And all the adversity they had overcome together.
My mom said you could hear a pin drop in the audience
And some of the guests started crying when
He pointed behind him with his thumb
At the two centurions waiting in the wings.
It was time to go, He announced, adding
To Oprah how much he had enjoyed their talk,
And not to worry either because
He was coming back in the Spring -
That was the Good News - and Oprah
And everyone laughed.

aubade #1

tea hadziristić

Unearthed by morning like a
fragment—
bad dreams battered into bad dreams.

Everything is unattainable:
four walls yawning
their perfect dusty square
and the house
innocently surrounded
by a sharp, cold little number.

The freckle that I know exists
burns under your shirt, my back.
Its realness is a pin.
I sink back into morning,
swallowed in the comfort
of not being yours.

siren, silent

michelle speyer

Face-up on the cool white duvet, she lies: prone, but insensate. One leg hangs over the edge of the mattress, toes pointing down; an arm across her stomach, the other angled above her head on the pillow. Fingers relaxed, open. Unfocussed eyes internalize only the blue-striped ticking that demarcates the border of their downy territory.

His thumb brushes across her forehead, shifting loose waves and revealing the new Arctic diamond on her finger. For a brief moment every nerve ending prickles—like exposure to a windstorm, when you have been safe underwater—but then her skin numbs. Encased in an exoskeleton of glass, she sees everything, but not through her own eyes: through the transparent surface of artifice and ritual that coats what some would term their love. No, it was not always like this.

He was close by, but he didn't quite see what happened. He tries, though. Everything that used to make her purr, he does. She sometimes does, too, but it's not quite the same. He can't always tell the difference between her bliss and her sorrow anymore. It's the same kitten sound. Now she'll drink a third of the bottle before sending liquid runnels down her naked body. Aquatic channels of communication cascading from pools in her clavicle down to rivers in the creases of her thighs: ritual anointment of the unholy.

Morning has come, but the heavy cream curtains are still half-drawn across the tall, arched window. Rain-thinned light is silently smothered in the white glow from a corner lamp. On the plump club chair are items cast aside with violent haste the night

before: his key card; that long, backless dress; hotel towels. It's funny, he thinks, how carelessly she slipped inside the ceramic oval bath, down beneath the warm water, and squirmed with a hysterical grace, her legs forked beneath him. Each mewling echoed a dormant siren note. But for when she said that it felt like there were fishhooks tearing into her skin, she was every cubic inch alive. At this he traced the outline of her arms—the sides of her body—her legs—the circumference of her neck, and he showed her with light fingers that her skin was so smooth, unbroken. She was still. They woke up shivering in clammy water, coated in pale residue from the bubbles, and when she opened her eyes they were cloudy. He thought she couldn't see for a moment: the calcium carbonate and the air were anathema to her senses. The water drained. Her body shed shimmering scales; she looked forlorn.

And now these could be classic Saturday morning sexual exploits. Come here, she says, just by parting her lips. One more time. And then another, because you love me. Even mute her voice resonates in his ears. She is half-drowning in this alien, alias love.

He can see that the sex and the pageantry are mechanical. Their arms and legs tangle beneath the white sheets and it's as if rigor mortis sets in and he's cuddling a corpse. She gets cold, too, like she's preparing to die. Of course that can't happen. Everyone loves a tragedy, but they have always loved her more. It makes her sad. He will put his arms around her and she will thaw back to animation. Her glass exoskeleton melts away as if she is sublimated again in unifying liquid, heated now by his gaze.

She turns her head to face him and her eyes seek the morning. She sees the white diamond and recovers the night. Her backwards-arching body smiles at the press of his lips on her navel.

delicates

anne rucchetto

There's lace and chintz with colours abound, the cement adds a flavourless contrast. An intimate murmur upon the ground gentle feline nudging encircles my ankles

I wring and hang each small garment with consideration
These ornate, gathered strings dictate what kind of woman I am

and I thank goodness
or decency
or discrepancy
or solid brick walls
there is no one here to see

kinds of white

brandon martin-gray

A cool white morning, white light through
the basement window, white
light on skin and in eyes, white
as a search bar or shampoo
when foamed—I'm feeling lucky.

Small white breasts like meringue,
stiff peaks shading white sheets

as other whites meet tenderly.
It's as if muslin and milk fucked
and made this, made you in fact,
the vegetable lamb of Tartary,
domesticated and asleep.

The zebra and the vanilla bean
are interesting cases, and different,

but let's not worry about them
for now. The more important ones
(cases) cover pillows, hold suits. Shun
off-white: eggshell breeds ennui, ecru hems
what's best left ragged. See,

I'm interested only in cartoon bones
and the white unambiguous present.

ode to the girl on the streetcar carrying a bag of eggplants

kay dyson tam

Purple is obviously your favourite colour.
Everything from your backpack to your plaid coat
To the fur on your velcro snowboots
To the plastic grocery bag of eggplants you hold –
The bottom of which just grazes the slush on the floor –
Tells me this.
This is fitting.
It suits you.
As your mother yammers loudly on her cellphone in a
French creole,
You remain quiet, poised.
Regal.
It's a complex enough colour for you too,
not over-associated, to the point of cliché.
It's not a colour that has a place in the city's dreary grey
landscape.

(Except on your hat, of course.)

It's not an infant's colour, like blue or pink;

Not a grown-up colour like black, charcoal, caramel or navy blue.

They don't make purple buildings.

Rarely, purple cars.

And I will be amazed the day I see a naturally purple person.

Even Mother Nature uses it sparingly;

She must know this is your colour.

That the colour of eggplants, of velcro boots, of plaid winter coats –

Purple –

Is your colour.

Better than your purple socks (I'm guessing),

It fits.

my mother rang to tell me

kevin halligan

My mother rang to tell me

Christ was on Oprah yesterday,

Flogging his newest book

And denying he had used a ghostwriter.

Oprah had him talking about his upbringing

And especially His Mothers, how much He loved Her

And all the adversity they had overcome together.

My mom said you could hear a pin drop in the audience

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He pointed behind him with his thumb

At the two centurions waiting in the wings.

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To Oprah how much he had enjoyed their talk,

And not to worry either because

He was coming back in the Spring –

That was the Good News – and Oprah

And everyone laughed.

lamplights

anne rucchetto

On the road	Look	The streetcar rattles by
The lamplights flutter		As the bearded man begs
People shuffle onwards	Ahead	With helpless stares
Their expressions morphed by		Scarves, hats, frayed gloves
cold wind and empty eyes		Won't keep him warm
	And,	

People have said		Make the best of a bad situation
You control your future		A bright attitude triumphs
You create everything	Think	Is what they say
But here, tonight		This may not be true:
In these gloomy shadows		No struggle justifies the means
enshrouded in darkness		For those, here, that amble by
I realize, sometimes, you can't help it	Quickly	the only option; defeat

192 airport rocket back to kipling station

catriona spaven-donn

If each move was marked,
plotted on a living map,
we would be a land growing through paper,
yellow lines twisting with crawling cars,
buildings rising to nonexistent skies.
Cities would breathe between our hands.

On this page
bodies come together,
share a small piece of motorway,
travel one line, one coordinate,
before
crisscrossing this vast country,
complicating the map.

I sit through each bump of a road that millions drive.
Trees lost to winter,
window streaks colouring a new world
brown and grey.

Around me
strangers speak
or
don't speak.
Eye contact
or
the avoidance of eye contact.

I look at hands
folded knotted grasped clasped.
I wonder what air they have trapped between fingers,
what continent's grime and
magic?

The red lights from advancing vehicles.
The darkening sky.
The sound of African French
mingles with music,
seeping from one reality to the next
through my earphones.

Their eyes tell stories that I will never know.
Their voices rise and fall with secret cadences.
Their foreign lips purse in different shapes
to form different words.

Unperturbed, eyes keen with interest,
the man opposite me folds out a map –
looks around.
He searches for a landmark
amidst cement, amidst
lonely thirty-metre-high signs,
a lurid orange,
proclaiming discount holidays.
Amidst new build high-rises,
too far from anywhere to be desirable.
Amidst electricity pylons,
amidst strip malls
and women in headscarves
pushing screaming children
homewards.

He puts the map away.

We sit through each bump,
we grimace at the turns
and now
faint smiles cross lips as we
make eye contact, as we
defy language.

The living map splutters,
speeds up,
congestion, consumption,
the cars crawl slower,
the people race.

The map alters: the travellers dismount.
Together for a moment in a life,
a mutual coordinate on a temporary page.
We sat too close,
we shared each others' smells.
We guessed at stories
and then
they became irrelevant.

New ones surround them.
They grow uncertainly,
ropes around necks
encircling bodies.
The old stories fall off like
dead skins.
Whole continents are lost as
feet stand on new ground.

chrysanthemum

robert dipardo

I used to think that memories could gather on your clothes
like dirt; cling to the bottom of your jeans;
stain the shoulders of your jacket like the reek of cigarettes;
colour the ragged edge of your sleeve:
you wake up, there're there;
you slept in dirty clothes;
you feel less whole taking them off.

I remember thinking that memories were trapped in the carpet,
especially those corners
where the vacuum bumped its nose,
until they ripped the carpet out.
I saw it dumped outside
like stale cannoli.
'The room was a mess
but I remember wanting to take a picture,
something I could keep,
afraid of night, of being alone;
afraid of dinner cooling too fast
in the house we grew up in,
in the house we grew out of.
They slept while we went out.
We came back to find them still asleep,
guarding dirty laundry,
laying down new floors.
But passing cars respire like sleepers,
and the trees are still sighing in the yard.

the memory quilt

amanda tong

Fyodor Semenov had been in his kitchen when the thump occurred.

He had been standing at the counter, staring at his kettle on the stove beginning to shake as his water boiled. It was a very mundane thing to do, but Fyodor had very little on his hands since his retirement. There wasn't anybody to talk to. There wasn't anywhere to go. So he stood and stared.

When he heard the sharp whistles, his initial thought was that the water was ready, and he could finally prepare his morning tea. Then as he slowly realized that they were coming from outside the house, he began to become aware of the oncoming thump.

First, he felt the thump hurtling towards him, the kettle clattering more crazily than before. Then he saw the thump, a strange blur of brass, brown and buzzing crashing into the grass. Finally, he heard the thump, a humongous whomping noise that caused the dogs next door to bark frantically.

"Confound it to the Easternmost Ocean and beyond! What happened?"

Exactly what Fyodor wanted to know himself. Hastily switching off the stove, he hurried into his backyard to investigate this mysterious thump.

He hadn't taken a single step out of the door before his jaw dropped in amazement.

There, crashed straight into the hedge, was the most eccentric craft he had ever witnessed in his life. At first, he thought it was a ship. Certainly, there was a metal hull that

took up most of the crater now gracing his yard, with a brass railing along the top. Fyodor spied a steering wheel near the back, right in front of a sloping panel completely covered in all sorts of levers, buttons, and blinking lights that were now flashing furiously. But the strangest part was the brass rods that jutted inwards towards the centre - where a little ball of pulsing electricity seemed to be suspended from, emitting sparks that filled an enormous, dark blue canvas balloon decorated with constellations.

In the midst of all this, a very small figure was pacing the deck of this ship, talking animatedly all the time.

"Steering, check! System, check! Energy converter, check! Energy...perhaps it's the energy!"

Fyodor inched closer as the figure dove into a compartment hooked onto the side. It sprang back up, brandishing a chocolate bar. Biting into it dramatically, the voice rang out again.

"Energy, check!"

The figure was a very young boy, no older than nine or ten. Freckled and gangly, there was an unmistakable air of precociousness coupled with wild excitement, from the bright orange - save for one streak of blue - frizzy hair to the untied left shoe. He had goggles perched on his forehead, a lab coat drooping off his shoulders, and an expression of intense concentration etched upon his face.

"Everything seems to be in order..."

The boy turned around and jumped at the sight of Fyodor.

"Cripes, old man! Who are you?"

"Who are you?" Fyodor was overcoming his shock. "Look what you've done to my yard!"

The boy gazed around at the wreckage. Shrugging, he bowed low.

"I am Martin Friedl, the world's greatest explorer-anthropol-

ogist child genius! The captain of the Friedlfighter, the advocator of imagination and dreams, aiming only for the highest, to explore and visit every possible world there can possibly be, ever! And all before dinner time. Please, please...don't hold in your applause!"

He waited, but Fyodor merely stared up at him incredulously.

"The Free...what?"

Martin sprang forward. "The Friedlfighter! It's my custom-built craft for exploring all possible worlds!"

He gestured towards the bow, then realized there was nothing written there.

"Oh yes...I had conflicting feelings about what script to use... but really, this is the great Friedlfighter." Martin slapped a small hand against the brass railing. "But this crash...a mystery to its maker and captain!"

Fyodor had wandered over to the side. Shorter brass railings formed a neat ladder up to the deck. Though his brain protested strongly against it, he grasped one bar and began hoisting himself up.

"What," he panted, "do you mean by possible worlds?"

Martin was delighted to elaborate.

"Well, you know how people spend almost half their waking hours daydreaming? Obviously, there is a place that their brains create during this daydreaming-land. Actually, daydreaming-land is a prime example of a possible world! The Friedlfighter, old man, is specifically designed to go to and explore any of these worlds. The worlds we dream of ourselves. Thus, it isn't just pushing the limits of exploration - blasted straight through! Without bothering to clean up the messes! So nothing at all can stop me from travelling from world to possible world."

Martin paused. "Except for the sad limitations of the human body, of course. And the bounds of the familial. Mom says she

doesn't care which world I visit, as long as I'm washed up and ready for dinner in time."

Fyodor had reached the deck by now and jumped as the Friedlfighter's captain gave a loud yelp.

"That's it! How simple! I can't believe I never noticed!"

Fyodor watched as he rushed over to a cabinet and pulled out another contraption. Martin chattered excitedly.

"What's the point of sailing a ship when there's nowhere to go? Here I am, rambling about all the possible worlds without even having chosen one to visit!"

He pulled out what seemed to be a colander and plopped it onto Fyodor's head. The wearer of this colander-hat tried to protest, but was cut off as Martin twiddled a few knobs.

"Gathering data...converting images, emotions, beliefs... looks like some of this stuff we're going to have to dig a little deeper for."

After a few moments, the contraption shuddered and Martin cheerfully removed the colander. "Excellent! We should be getting coordinates for your world now."

He ran over to his steering wheel. The panel of infinite buttons had sprang back to life, humming with a new purpose and drive. Fyodor suddenly felt compelled to clutch at the brass railing.

"Who would have thought that there was this much life in your old head!" Martin shouted happily.

There was a whirring of gears and a puffing of air as the constellation canvas ballooned into a perfectly round circle. The ball of electricity was rising into the centre, growing more and more confident with every crackle and sizzling pop.

"I got to admit, old man!" Martin shouted excitedly over the deafening whistles that were beginning to start again. "You got a pretty crazy mind hiding back there!"

The Friedlfighter gleamed with all the energy it was generating, threatening to explode into a joyous burst of speed and excitement.

"AND LET'S GO! TO ANY AND ALL POSSIBLE WORLDS OUT THERE!"

They were sucked into a blast of laughter and light.

When Fyodor finally opened his eyes, the ship was floating delicately through the sky, all of the frenzied shaking and noise completely gone. He gingerly got up and edged over to the railing.

They were sailing high above the ground - at least, he assumed it was the ground. The landscape below bore little resemblance to the mountains, roads, forests and oceans one normally saw in flight. Clear-cut squares of all sorts of colours and patterns fit snugly against each other, wavering before his eyes. It almost looked like...

"A quilt?"

"Precisely." Martin had wandered over to the starboard side of the Friedlfighter and was now jabbing at a small screen with the butt of his pencil. "Your memories decided to manifest themselves as a quilt. Very interesting concept, in my opinion."

Fyodor leaned over the railing, gaping in awe. These were his memories, the kid had said. Indeed, he was beginning to recognize...

The dark brown corduroy of his father's Sunday best trousers. The sprigged yellow of his mother's apron. The pale blue silk of his sister's hair ribbons. Designs and patterns from old fashions, stained tablecloths, lost handkerchiefs and faded curtains.

The ship lurched. Martin sprang back to the wheel, muttering indignantly to himself. Fyodor felt the craft beneath his feet shiver, then change gears as it descended.

"Are we going to..."

"No, no!" Martin had picked up a purple notebook and took position beside the old man. "I only want to observe. Any unplanned interaction could severely alter the fabric of this memory-verse's time stream!"

Fyodor frowned. "What?"

The little anthropologist pointed. "Look!"

Now that they were closer, they could see that there were things on the patches. Fyodor squinted. And gasped again.

Toys, little wooden dolls, painted simply but so truthfully. As they passed a plain white patch as blank as a pillowcase, Fyodor cried out in amazement.

"Why - it's papa! And mama! Varya, and me!"

There were four dolls, in a straight line from tallest to shortest, facing the same direction.

"Yes, yes..." Fyodor muttered. "In the winter, papa had to break a path for us in the snow, just so we could all get to church. It was so hard to keep up..."

Sure enough, the smallest doll was now far behind the other three. Fyodor sighed as the Friedlfighter floated on.

"What...what are these things?"

"I told you, it's your dreamworld," Martin said. His notebook was covered in scribbles. "You seem to dwell upon past memories a lot. Especially about being a kid. Like over there..."

He and Fyodor peered down again to watch a soft green patch of towel with two dolls on them. The taller, curved and brightly painted, bent down over the shorter, stouter figure.

"That's my sister, Varya..." Fyodor was transfixed as the Varya doll lifted its arms and began to move in a stilted, clockwork manner. "This was the day..."

"That she gave you her scarf," Martin finished. Indeed, doll Varya was winding something long and pink around little

wooden Fyodor.

"It was her favourite," Fyodor said. "But it was my first day to go away to the academy. My uniform was thin...she said, Fedya. Brother, remember me and study well!"

"My sister was wonderful," he continued miserably. "I was happy to have her gift. But when I entered the academy..."

He and Martin watched the wooden doll cross a bridge of rust-coloured embroidery to arrive upon the dark blue plaid of a school uniform.

"The first thing all the other boys saw was this pudgy wimp, lost under a mound of pink wool. I stepped into the classroom and they all burst out laughing."

There was a double ring of student dolls crowded around doll Fyodor. The real Fyodor, on the deck of the Friedlfighter, scowled.

"Those brats, those bullies, made me ashamed of my sister's most treasured gift! That night I hid it at the bottom of my trunk. I never wore it again. And when I went home, Varya never asked me about it. The day she married and left home, I still hadn't told her, and asked for forgiveness..."

The old man settled into a cloud of gloom. Martin blinked at him curiously, and made another scratch in his notebook.

The Friedlfighter floated along puffy clouds of cotton. Fyodor averted his eyes and refused to look down at the patches of memories on the quilt, even at Martin's behest. Finally, the boy genius voiced a question.

"Hey, who is that?"

Unwillingly, Fyodor couldn't help but to look over the brass railing. Eyes widening, he clutched it, gasping for breath.

The two dolls below were accompanied by a paper thin house and a paper thin car. A few clumsily whittled trees lined a crude road on the black velvet.

"Yu..Yuliya!"

The doll in front of the house was painted with yellow hair, green eyes and pink lips. Two wooden arms were raised, pleadingly.

Fyodor gripped the railing and moaned. "Yuliya Lyubova, the tailor's daughter!"

As he leaned towards the scene, the Friedlfighter seemed to dip downwards a bit more.

"She was so bright, and so funny, and kind," Fyodor told nobody in particular. But the words kept on pouring. "She was my best friend, and I was so proud to know such a clever, perfect, beautiful girl -"

The other doll was painted in a suit of greys and browns, and at Fyodor's words had turned around towards the car.

"But I had been given a job, a contract in a company located three times over..."

They were close enough to see the curvy lips of the Yuliya doll. They were curved downwards, and the green paint of her eyes had an added streak of blue beneath both.

"I didn't need it, there were many other opportunities, but I thought...I thought I wanted to see more of the country. Little did I know, it was just the same over and over again!"

Fyodor didn't realize how close the Friedlfighter was until his tears splashed down upon his doll counterpart's head. As he stared at the liquid inch down the wooden surface, Fyodor sucked in his breath.

"I would change it, if I could..."

At this, Martin's head jerked up from his notebook.

"Hey...wait!"

Head reeling, Fyodor grabbed the brass railing and pulled himself onto the ledge. Martin's frantic shouts made no difference on him.

"You...you can't! It happened already! This world will

disappear, it won't be in your mind anymore if you mess it all up!"

Fyodor's toes were dangling over the edge, now. All he had to do was let go of the brass railing...

"I'm not even sure if you can change it!" Martin's anxious voice was now tinged with a hint of curiosity. "It's...unheard of. I wouldn't do it. But if you did, well...that would...be fascinating to document..."

Fyodor looked at the painted tears on Yuliya's wooden face, and jumped.

His knee painfully colliding into solid wood, he tumbled most ungracefully to the velvet ground, his stiff fingers brushing against the softness. Staggering to his feet, Fyodor's welling eyes met Yuliya's.

Except they weren't painted anymore. Clear, green and true as that spring morning had been, now so raw and fresh in his memory, she was gazing at him in confusion, and despair.

"To where?" She repeated. "To where, again?"

Fyodor looked down at himself. He was wearing a suit of greys and browns, smooth twenty-some year skin over his knuckles.

"To Belkyev..." He stopped himself, and his new young hands clenched. "To Be...To be with you."

Yuliya's green eyes widened. Her arms were still outstretched, and Fyodor allowed himself to collapse into them.

Neither noticed the little dot of brass and blue floating off into the sky.

bartek's bike

stephanie turenko

They worked all night on
His winning costume
Transforming a rusted bike
Into a reindeer
The handlebars were antlers
And he wore a red coat with white fur
The expensive bike he won
Made him feel like a kid again
Better than he'd felt in a long, long time
For the three weeks
Before it was stolen

the repair

robert dipardo

He knew by the snow on her car
she hadn't left the house all day;
and by the sun's declining arc
he'd lose the daylight if he stayed
for that frittata she had made
to lure him here, as women do,
who know their food will be repaid.

He let himself in. The den's blue
wrapped her like a blanket.

"Would you
mind if I just fix the tap and run?
Ruth is sick, I think I am too,
and Y&R's not my kind of fun."

Secure his heart was all her own,
and just like she had on the phone,
she said, "I won't make you stay. Just
don't leave the frittata behind."

But the valves beneath the sink must
have come with the house; an orange rind
rotted sweetly somewhere behind
the garbage pail, and stung with shame
he got up and for the first time
noticed that a fridge opened same
as a coffin.

That's when she came
red and sniffling into the kitchen
(at least her sadness had a name)
and spent her program's intermission
setting out a plate for one
while trying not to face her son.

angel

jeannine pitas

I thought that I'd made you -
when I lay down, eyes to the clouds
stretched my arms and legs outward,
then jumped up so that your cloak, your wings,
even your halo were my doing -
one bit of good to believe in
before the next snowfall came to erase you

but every time I came back you were still there,
your cloak unfolded over the snow,
head staring up from the earth,
wings motionless, flying
and even after spring's thaw
I could still trace your outline
engraved in the mud like a name

after years of searching
in crumbling cathedrals, in forests, along beaches
maybe I can finally admit
that heaven is nothing more than a park
on a crumbling street corner
where you are
the one who made me
just as I made you.

rosary

jeannine pitas

those whom I've hurt —

I'd like to say I could count them on one hand
but instead they seem as numerous
as all the perfect leaves I've admired and crumpled,
all the marigolds I've ripped from their soil —

the student caught drawing during my lecture,
the rainbow I tore from her hand

the lovers to whom I whispered "forever"
though my caresses were just-for-now

my mother, who made me in her image —
a mask I peeled off and discarded

those who've hurt me —

these seem as numerous as the hairs on my head
but really they fit in one palm—
a few false friends,
unfaithful lovers
the occasional schoolyard bully.

now, they are all out of my view,
blocked by canyons built
from years without communication.

and yet there are nights
when I ascend to the wires
and walk with arms outstretched
among the sparrows.

I see them, gold stars scattered
over the map that I've made,
each one the capital
of her own mournful country

I descend from my tightrope
and go off to find them,
gather them up in my hands

each one a sorrowful mystery
I'm slowly stringing together
bead after bead

of seed

michael chernoff

flower-dropping;
the apparition of seed
confuses

the gentle charms
of nothingness
the toothless grins
of trifling men

have been rendered
insignificant

as are
lovers'
follies

muddied garments
tonguing absences,
wry convictions

.time of course,
child of
the human crisis —

doltish and insatiable
in foresight
in foreplay

a nameless becoming
in death
in life
delivering minimal
strife, seen from

jovian moons;
time swells,
flowers wilt

icarus survived

fan wu

*reflections on sally mann's 'the last time
emmett modelled nude'*

Photography holds the same raw, incomprehensible power to me that music does, whereas writing – and thus theatre and cinema, to a lesser degree – is partially decoded, undressed by my chosen affinity for it. Photography does not speak, but I feel the need to speak to it, though never on its behalf. In the unstudied gaze through which I perceive photography, I cannot distinguish between the accomplishments of the artist and of the subject. In the interplay of desire and suffering, I cannot distinguish between the pull of the loved one and the push of the lover.

Sally Mann is at her best when she does not perform, as she does in 'Candy Cigarette'. (The difficulty with that statement is the difficulty one has in discerning a 'performed' photograph from a genuine one. Because facts are lazy myths, we have little more than our feeling of the photograph to make the discerning judgement.) Her son is swimming in a backwoods stream, his face a wilderness backgrounded by the idyll. The lushness of the surrounding land does not disturb the starkness of the boy and the water. What disturbs is the Look on his face and the splayed reaching-out of his hands. These things in 'Emmett' remind us that the most unsettling element of human sexuality lies in the wiry, post-natal frame of the child. The social analysis works to block and delay the personal analysis, and must be

worked through. As a society we have not breached the so-called 'last taboo' of pedophilia; we interpret attraction to preadolescent nudity exclusively as dangerous, disgusting. Mann titled her work indignantly against this taboo, but the question remains: how far has she come in warping this taboo? And how far do we want to go?

If her work does not answer any social questions, it is because it succeeds as an aesthetic triumph on its own terms. My eyes skim the landscape, but Emmett's body negates its tranquillity. I trace the taste of the sluices of water that run between his fingers. I fear myself most when I begin to crave, when I begin to need, when the lean male body becomes improbably fertile. Mann uses nature to censor that banal piece of masculine sexuality; in its place is darkness, shrouding the implication. The trees are pristinely reflected onto the water but Emmett is not. What little of his shadow exists is distorted and distended, almost waived by his own touch. I return to the Look on his face, which, beyond annulling the peace of his environments, deflects interpretation: he is disgruntled and then violated, intent and then frustrated. It is a face that leans beyond magnetism, into the void-like. The carved granite of his body is too old for his age (ten? eleven?) and his hair is carelessly in place; but both seem to grow from the vacuum of the face.

Emmett will forever be tied to the myth of Icarus through my eyes, and here we can imagine Icarus alive, after the fall. We can imagine him phoenixing from his fatal hubris as a child indignant, flightless and sexless. My desire for the object of the photograph hovers between its metaphorical richness and its wounded sexuality. Because this desire never finds its settlement, never finds the strength to rest, the photograph remains poignant and immortal.

a tree

laura ionico

Branches still on the water,
delicate reaching
over, barely touching the still pond water.
As if fallen,
frozen in mid-air.
Overcome by thirst,
a bend and a dip,
gently resting.

postsynaptic

michael chernoff

Beyond the taps and
shuffles of one trillion
synaptic reflexes
lay a force
like no other.

de l'esprit, vom geist,
de anima;
the inclinations
remain,

awakened by distances

between unlit homes
irksome and ghostly brickwork,
confining couch-potatoes and
corroding patient grandmothers

between lush forests
yellowed leaves trickling down
like yesterday's rain,
stifling the sound of wind

between boundless oceans
sending thoughts adrift
ebbing, always ebbing
stirring ships into apparitions

as if thou wert

born
anticipating
yearning for synaptic clamour
disseminating –
“words, loves.”

the score

tajja isen

I. moderato: a little rach music

Arthur Lowell is slowly losing the love of his life to a dead man. A turgid loop; an aural worm. That the words were rhythmic, their legato lulling into the poke of a sharp staccato, threatened to hit a nerve. That the phrase drilled through Arthur's mind as a line of music played upon this nerve, fiddling over his fear with all the finesse of a backstreet dentist. Intensifying the pain of this musical cuckolding were the singers who gave voice to it: largely drawn from the popular radio stations at the office, a product of Arthur's benevolence and the hygienists' penchant for eighties rock, the primary timbre of his anxiety was the leathery power-ballad screech of, dear God, Jon Bon Jovi.

Swaying at the end of a delicate neck and enshrined in a halo of reddish-blond frizz, Arthur's tortured head presided over the fleshly crush of a rush hour train. One palm curled around a pole, holding him rigid against the motion of the car. His lips silently recited the remaining stops, determined to force from his head Pat Benatar's gleeful hawking over his limited days of husbandry.

Sergei Rachmaninoff. To Arthur the name was a threat, the only words he allowed himself to utter through clenched teeth; to Vida, his wife, the name was an aphrodisiac. The thick mulch of it was a dirty phrase in a language unfairly foreign to her husband, able to tip her over

into glissandos of ecstasy. A concert pianist, Vida's infatuations with dead musical geniuses were innocuous, if a bit humiliating. But this had gone further. It had begun with raptures over the pertinent parts of the fellow's anatomy:

"He was so tall. His hands, his hands," Vida had moaned from the Steinway as she scanned the score. She accentuated this with a backward dip of her head, her curtain of hair sweeping the bench. Being of similar height and hand-breadth, Arthur hadn't been concerned enough to look up from the Canadian Journal of Anaesthesia.

"God, I wish this piece were a man. I could make love to this piece."

Arthur looked up. "Really? I don't mind if you want to, the stereo, while we--"

"No, Art. To the piece, as in with Rach's piece."

Arriving at St. George, St. George station, the train's belch of moist commuters deepened Arthur's flush of shame. Rach. A repulsive little nickname for the man that had swelled to a formidable presence in Arthur's home. Arthur's home. Having been invited to play Rachmaninoff's Concerto No. 2 in C Minor (or, in the vernacular, the shudder-worthy "Rach Two") with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, Vida had become a woman possessed. Never before had she lived in such glazed-eyed sin with a piece of music. When Arthur lured her from the piano to eat, her lips refused to be still, mouthing the fingering for the runs of the first movement. Dinner with Rachmaninoff. When Vida slumped into bed long after Arthur, he was woken by the flutter of her fine-boned fingers against the duvet, ghosting the arpeggios of the second movement. Sleeping with Rachmaninoff. On the evenings he could coax her into the bedroom before she passed out, her humming of the third movement made even the most intimate of acts into

a triumvirate. With Rachmaninoff. Arthur was a tolerant man, but he had to draw the line somewhere. It had been six weeks. Six weeks of emasculation in the key of C minor. It was during the third week that the looping had begun. Rooting the canal of every thought was the agony of Arthur Lowell is slowly losing the love of his life to a dead man.

The wind caressed Arthur's burning cheeks as he ascended to street level. Exiting at Bedford Road, he could see the Conservatory as he crossed toward Varsity Stadium. Bloor Street recalled him to the winter of '91, his graduating year from the Faculty of Dentistry. He found himself searching for that startlingly pale girl, five foot one, with the hollow cheeks and inky hair, hurrying toward Philosopher's Walk while juggling an armful of scores with an entirely asexual appreciation for Bach, the collision imminent as he dashed towards the lecture on sedation that had begun ten minutes ago...

Arthur paused on the steps of Ihnatowycz Hall. The arched windows regarded his wavering resolve with condescension. A sign warning of video surveillance heightened the guilt of texting his wife I'm working late this evening. There was a note of peace in his mind as he considered turning back, but it was drowned out by a blast of Supertramp: Arthur Lowell is slowly losing the love of his life to a dead man – and there's not a lot he can doooo ... "Yes there is," he said aloud. A wave of nausea pushed him over the threshold, and Arthur entered the Royal Conservatory of Music.

II. adagio: the art so long to learn

The silence of the entrance chamber was occasionally punctuated by the footsteps of an anxious-looking young person, hoisting a black case of frightening shape and proportion. Heart triple-tonguing like a trumpeter past his lung capac-

ity, Arthur followed the signs into a clinical reception area, shuffled up to the desk, and cast a beseeching look at the girl behind it.

"Hi, I'm here to meet with, uh." He consulted the sweat-blurred ink of the paper he had been palpating in his pocket. "Gerald. Gerald Schwartz?"

The receptionist, a cross-eyed young woman, looked mightily unimpressed with her nose. "You're late. Professor Schwartz left like twenty minutes ago?"

"But, I had a meeting with--"

"He leaves early on Friday afternoons. Shabbat dinner?"

"But--"

"Ex-cuse me," came a grating voice from the air level with Arthur's collarbone. Arthur looked to his right. A meaty, white-bearded man, packed into a grey three-piece suit, stared up at him with murderous intensity.

"Theodor Bechstein," the man said in sharp, German-accented thrusts. He extended his hand and partook of Arthur's without invitation. "You have come," he said.

Arthur swallowed a gasp. He knew someone had been watching. What if this man had worked with Vida? What if he told her? "Well, but I was just, uh--"

"Looking," interrupted Bechstein, with another pump of Arthur's wrist.

This was an encouraging gerund; it was something to hide behind. "Yes, yes, Mr. Beck-steen, I was only looking--"

"For a teacher?" Bechstein finished, or so Arthur hoped. Each verbal pellet that managed to escape the man was fired aggressively into the ear.

"Yes, for cello," Arthur began in a rush, the truth his final line of defense. "I just want a few lessons to--"

"Follow me," barked Bechstein, and barreled away.

Arthur stared helplessly at the receptionist, who was

offering a hostile cheshire grin to her nose. "Bechstein has strange methods," she said. "Like, enjoy?"

Arthur had never been inside a practice room, but very few of his and Vida's early dates had not begun with her breathless thanks for providing a reason to escape one. The pale brick walls, scored by what Arthur hoped had not been fingernails, resembled the cheeks of an underfed music student. The lights cast the glow of failed ideals, lingering a moment in the air before being swallowed by the utilitarian blue carpet. Bechstein's balding head produced the opposite effect, reflecting the light back towards his student. The teacher had settled the steaks of his body into a chair across from Arthur, one hand on his waist and the other fondling the cello bow like a cigar.

"Your legs. Open."

Bewildered, Arthur spread his knees apart and grimaced at the feeling of vulnerability. Bechstein lifted the cello from where it lay sprawled and pushed it against Arthur's chest. It felt foreign and provocative against his body after so many years.

"I didn't think we'd be starting so-- uh, maybe a review of basics would be--"

Bechstein tilted his head back, analyzing. "We begin with impartiality. Play."

Arthur took in a shuddering breath, grasped the bow and jolted it across the strings. Instead of roaring for mercy, what Arthur had rather expected, Bechstein nodded. Smiling delicately, the clipped repression of his speech gradually loosened into a swaying rhythm. "Artur--I can call you Art? You are too stiff. Tell me, what does the cello make you think

of?" Arthur jerked his shoulders up and down. A gravelly laugh rumbled in Bechstein's throat. "Come now, Art. You have never been with a woman?"

"Have I--I'm married," Arthur said, his voice jumping the octave.

Bechstein frowned, somewhat put out at his misinterpretation. "I mean you have never been with another woman. This is the cello--the other woman. Sensual, dangerous. Between the wife and the other woman, there is a vast deferens."

Arthur blinked. Surely he hadn't just said-- "A va ... a vas..."

"Deferens."

The proper frame clicked into place. "A vast difference!"

"Yes," agreed Bechstein. "You must make her sing. Every nerve becomes hypersensitive. You must feel it, Art." He snatched the cello back, his movements agile for a man of his density. His application of the bow seemed to penetrate the cello's wooden surface. A series of unearthly moans escaped the instrument, and Arthur shivered. If Vida could see him draw forth such sensuality from his long-abandoned instrument; that he too was a source of the intimacy so liberally granted her by Rachmaninoff, she must surely open to him once more.

"Feel it," repeated Bechstein, finishing. "You will do this for your wife?" The older man's meaning was unclear, but his oily look hinted at the less savoury possibility.

Arthur cleared his throat. "Eventually. My wife--she's a pianist. I want to, uh. Surprise her."

Bechstein's grin segued into an unmistakable leer. "Of course you do," he said.

Long after the office had closed for the evening, Arthur sat at his desk with his tie loosened and his hands in his hair. His routine text to his wife--Working late, love-- had been met with silence. Six weeks later and he was still unable to confess to Vida his musical self-flagellation, as well as his habit of staying late at the office to practice it. Six weeks of Bechsteinian torture--a method that involved the small German snarling "Feel it! Feel it!" and "No, Art! No, Art!"--had yielded limited progress. Though Arthur's several years of childhood training allowed him to reacquire theory with ease, his tone was an unshakable problem. His body refused to loosen, denying him the power to coax from the cello the cries that Bechstein had provoked; those sounds that his Vida rarely made anymore, which he hoped to draw from her by the ostensible seduction of another woman before her eyes. Another woman. This was his other problem. Bechstein's metaphor had metastasized into the anxiety of infidelity; the feeling that his attempt to learn the cello was the failed seduction of a woman not his wife. The slow corrosiveness of guilt had him too keyed up to even sleep at night.

A dark giggle slid through the silence of the office. Arthur's head darted to the left, catching the impression of a shapely leg vanishing around the corner. Rising, he stalked into the next room, linoleum squeaking under his heels. His dry eyes were drawn to the hydraulic chair, in which the cello lay. Impotent, impotent, impotent, it moaned with mellifluous contempt. Arthur's chest tightened, his heart hammering its irregular rhythm. He couldn't make it stop, but how was it speaking at all if it was just a piece of wood, stiff, useless, incapable of all

feeling, like himself?

Arthur was hyperventilating. "I need--to relax," he choked. His knees buckled and he collapsed into a wheeled chair, rolling a few feet. Head swinging in desperation, he was too panicked to be surprised by the discovery that he was not alone. A man ducked beneath the doorframe, his edges blurred and his spectral eyes bespeaking melodies of interminable sadness. Removing his newsboy cap, he offered Arthur a smile in a minor key. With a melancholy gesture of his spidery, I'm-fucking-your-wife hands, he indicated the cabinet beside him.

The cupboard was of blond wood, expensively varnished. Engraved in its surface were the glinting letters: Dr. Arthur Lowell, Anesthesia and Dentistry. His bottom lip quivering like a child about to go under, Arthur fumbled in his pocket for the key and sought approval in Rachmaninoff's sorrowful eyes. But the apparition had disappeared.

Within a few breaths of clamping the mask over his face, Arthur felt deliciously loosened. The sweetness bloomed at the back of his throat, his wooden skin softening into something supple and responsive. The giggle resounded again, throatier this time. Draped across the chair was an impossibly alluring woman. Arthur laughed as she invited him towards her, utterly assured of his success. As he swung himself onto the chair next to her, his foot must have hit the lever; he felt himself rise. Taking the woman in his arms, he applied the bow and coaxed from her body the elusive moan.

* * *

It was after ten o'clock by the time Arthur, dizzy and dry-tongued but still quite mirthful, reached his house on foot. A

cavernous vehicle was parked in the driveway, a grave young man packing something into its trunk. The man nodded to Arthur, his eyes lingering a little too long on the cello the dentist carried on his back. Before Arthur could form the thought that he should be faintly disturbed by all of this, the man slipped into the car and reversed with remarkable speed into the road.

The opening chords of the concerto had never sounded so beautiful. Leaning his conquest by the door, Arthur glided into the living room. Vida looked better than she had in a while; looser, somehow. A few bars in, she stopped and scribbled on the score.

"I just love listening to you play," Arthur drawled.

"Art!" She spun around on the piano bench. "I thought you were working--late!"

"It's ten o'clock." He giggled. "Vee, I have--I have a surprise for you."

"What's so funny?"

Arthur found this hilarious. "You'll love it. But first--who's driving the hearse?"

A faint note of pink crept into Vida's pale cheekbones. "He's a cellist from the TSO. He's rehearsing with me. What's the surprise?" For a moment she thought she saw a flash of pain in her husband's eyes. But she was sure it had been her imagination when he burst into desperate, jaw-popping laughter. His large, square teeth filled his face like gas expanding. He gripped the doorframe and his knees shook. Vida rose, frightened.

"Arthur? Are you feeling--?"

mary-making

brad shubat

hear sub-sonic nursery rhymes
of warped chopped apple seeds
splice, no,
breed! >> charred cherry trees
doubled traces for close those
openings places where
she's stuck he's sucked we'll cut
your fingers off if
you-ever-were-to-touch your
organs or self

ha He knows her teapot tantrums
now she knows her teapot whirring
nothing stirred

brandy and dave

brandon martin-gray

life is a highway loose
footloose don't stop
believing men stuffed
into shirts and ties like

red sausages concatenation
of big drunk uncles seated
while the kids dance drink
and fizz together darkly

like diet cokes in whipped
potato gowns which match
the salad days like today slip
past unnoticed as a zipper

the first dance was Buble's
Everything how do you spell
congratulations can I leave
this here for a minute

it rains

alefiyah amijee

Wet drops slide

the tips of their fingers

on the skin of my home.

It shudders

Holding fast against the wind

Rain drips on every side

The walls melt

Inside the heat rises

Cold air whips and blows

Against the cracks, the crevices

Water drops rush

This way and that

Hushhhhh shhhhh

Floors groan

The warmth shivers

Pulling inwards still

Windows breath heavily

And open

Water rushes in

The air is drenched in sounds

Suddenly

The clouds descend.

water

inna rasitsan

She heard only the beating of her heart resonating through the water. It was as if each sound began and ended in her eardrums but its echoes were small persistent streams spilling steadily out.

She listened. She felt a slight indifference that gave way to reluctant warmth.

The small oval of exposed skin left in her face began to shiver, to ebb, and to vanish.

chemical burn

joe sheph

The pheromones no longer play white rabbit to her inner Alice. Her oasis turns to desert as our love turns to sand, and the hour glass grains asymmetric. I await the wind: let it disperse this afeard handful of misery.

Protected sex prevented an heir so her reptilian brain and its correspondent (i.e. an empty womb) pressed her onwards and backwards into another's bed. Love is never enough. What is more [?]: it is a deterministic gamble – bet your genetic dice on the right time, right smell, and the right jive. Du-wop. Om-bop.

The friends say: "get back on your horse and be on your way." Basking in the brilliant darkness of some loud, crowded, and lonely Queen Street-College Street-any-street-club, we mash lips, gnash teeth, press into disoriented mating rituals, and dance to initiate and inaugurate the pollination of the shiniest, waxiest, most glamorous and most promising of these midnight flowers.

So far, so forced; this game is beneath me, and then several drinks later she is beneath me, draped in constellations of sweat. Tonight I am Sisyphus, pushing her up the wall. Or is she Tantalus, with the promise of love and life before her? Or is she Atlas — holding up my solipsistic worst-of-all-possible-worlds — losing faith with every twist? I don't know who this body belongs to, just as I do not know who I became to lure her out to my desert refuge. I am no longer. I am done. I am tired.

Dunes of failed relations piled high — so much love, and yet, we're still alone. Nothing will grow here. Gripped by nostalgia and a sliver of humanity I break into a prayer, sent and received only internally: "may cool wind caress you and keep you." We're not meant to be alone, but we're not meant to be together.

I am not alone in this wasteland. The lingering cry of a train / barrels through the blue hanging / behind the black, whispering/ metal on metal screeches. / There's darkness, and this darkness – / the scrambled, static version / of the two empty rivals –/ bleeding blue and making all / of the silhouettes one whole. / This – the desert after the fall, / seen just before the ascent –/ is desolate, cold, and still. /

The wind caresses and disperses me, and I am no more.

the mime and the pigeon

christopher greer

I was in Paris crossing over the river when I saw a mime with a yellow, plastic butterfly tied over the white glove on her hand. The makeup on her face was thick and white — the layers looked like shale — and overtop of it she had painted red, puckered lips and black crow's feet. Her hair and her clothing were black like the crow's feet and as I watched her move the wings of the butterfly, crouching — fluid yet mechanical — to bring the glittering, plastic insect closer to a young girl, I felt an old lightness returning to my chest.

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There were people stopping to take pictures and I walked behind them as I passed. She was standing on a box with a red, silk sheet draped overtop of it. In front of the box there was a small bowl and a cardboard sign. I had not been in Paris for long and could not yet understand the writing on the sign, but I assumed that it contained a plea for donations. There was a coin in my pocket, but I

needed it to buy bread: in my stomach there was only eggs and coffee and a sour feeling from not sleeping.

I reached the street at the end of the bridge but there was traffic and so I could not cross. I turned back to watch the mime as I waited and saw how the corners of her mouth continued on past the painted, red, puckered lips; they were not lost completely in the whiteness of her makeup and — like the beautiful structure of her face — could still be seen. Forgetting my destination I walked back toward her, passing directly in front of her this time and noticing that her eyes were not seeing: she had the look of someone remembering or dreaming and I dropped a coin into her bowl, hoping to get her attention. She heard the metal hitting the porcelain and brought the yellow butterfly swooping — flexing and relaxing her fist in turn so that the wings appeared to move — toward me. She smiled and I was embarrassed and so I walked away quickly, sitting on the stone railing of the bridge and lighting a cigarette.

Her black clothing was like a shadow against the white buildings behind her and her white face like a cloud against the blue of the sky. The cigarette had been in the breast pocket of my shirt for most of the day and so it was bent, the end drooping pitifully toward the ground. My coin was still the only one in the bowl; I had been hoping to inspire generosity in the other spectators, but they simply stood taking pictures.

I would have to stop by my apartment to get another coin before I could buy the bread now. I was hungry most of the time and that made it difficult to sleep; I had stopped shaving and my beard was growing thick, the blond and red hairs hiding my childish, rosy cheeks and rounded jaw; on my shirts there were small, brown specks from splashed

coffee, but still I did not wash them; I had only one tie and it hung loosely around my neck.

A letter had come from Canada a month earlier and that morning at the café I had read it for the first time: It said that I was no longer going to be a father and that it was safe to come home.

I had borrowed a match from a man there at the café and he had asked me my name. He was a tremendously fat man and on the small, circular table in front of him there were four plates, each of them littered with crumbs and half-smoked cigarettes. I told him my name and because I could see that he was lonely I asked his name in return.

"Sam Caruthers," he replied, extending his hand.

"A pleasure," I said, shaking his hand firmly, "It is a good café, is it not?"

"Oh yes," Mr. Caruthers replied, "a very good café; one of the best I have encountered."

"The waiter is a good man. He is kind and remembers my order."

"A very good man."

"The street is very good also."

"It has everything that one could need."

"Where are you from, boy?"

"Canada, north of Toronto," I replied.

"It must be snowing there by now."

"Yes," I said, "I should think so."

The man nodded, the tobacco flakes in his beard tumbling onto his jacket for just a moment and catching in the folds of the fabric. "I understand that the winters can be quite harsh there," he said.

"At times," I replied.

The man nodded again. My cigarette was nearly out and he offered me another. I took it and he lit it for me

with one of his matches.

"I hope I am not a nuisance," he said.

"Not at all," I replied.

"My wife passed recently and I find myself craving conversation."

"I share that craving also."

"You do?"

"Yes, I'm afraid so."

"You're much too young to be feeling that way," he said, picking up a smoldering cigarette from his plate and holding it between two fingers with surprising delicacy. "What is it that you are doing here in Paris?"

"I don't do much of anything," I said.

He said nothing for a moment and I could see that he was noticing the coffee stains on my shirt.

"Why is it that you've come here then?"

"It was necessary for me to leave, I'm afraid."

Mr. Caruthers nodded, the tobacco flakes tumbling once more. "Do you mind my asking why?"

"It is very shameful."

"Then you need not tell me."

"Thank you," I said.

I made to leave the café before long and Mr. Caruthers put one of his cigarettes in the pocket of my shirt. It was his cigarette that I was smoking on the bridge by the mime and when I was finished I flung it into the water that was moving past green and slow.

I did not want to leave the mime but I could ignore the hunger in my stomach no longer and so I left, walking past her once more and — hoping to remember it — looking to the butterfly.

* * *

In the building where I lived then there were many dark,

convenient corners. The owner of the building did not want the prostitutes that roamed the street out front using the corners for their work and so he placed an iron gate at each entrance. Only leaseholders were given keys to the gates and whenever I saw a stranger waiting in front of them I always felt suspicious.

As I approached then on my way to fetch a coin I saw that there was an elderly woman standing directly in front of the gate. She had a cane and large, tinted glasses. I took the key ring from my pocket and hearing the noise she turned, pointing with her cane to a pigeon lying crooked and silent on the pavement.

"Look," she said, pointing with her cane.

I knelt down to look more closely and saw that the bird's neck was broken. Someone (probably the woman) had put the lid of a jar under its head and filled it with water. The pigeon was still except for the slight movements of its beak as it drank the water.

"It came from nowhere," the woman said, waving her cane across the sky, "and then hit this window." She pointed and I looked. I did not see any marks on the glass. "It was only trying to get inside; trying to get warm."

I nodded and noticed that there were breadcrumbs scattered around the bird: sacrificial offerings. "It is very sad," I said.

"Do you have any bread?" asked the elderly woman.

"The proper thing to do would be to break its neck," I replied.

"Oh-no-why?"

"It is suffering."

The woman looked to the pigeon, its beak moving feebly as it lapped the water. "Will you do it?" she asked.

"No," I replied, "I haven't got the stomach for it."

The woman nodded. "Neither do I," she said.

We stood in silence for a moment, the pigeon still drinking the water, the sun shining on the grey of its feathers and revealing the green and purple that was hidden beneath.

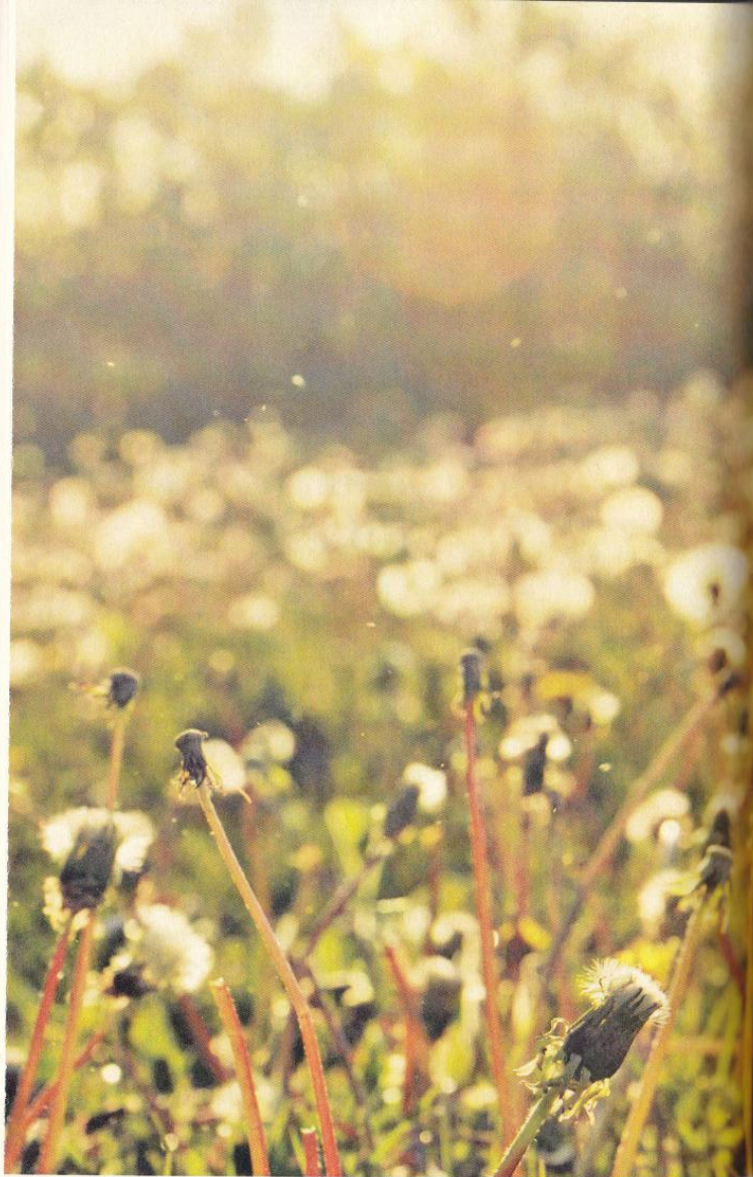
"Will you stay with us?" she asked me.

"Of course."

"It's a terrible thing to have to do alone."

"I agree."

The woman smiled meekly and looked back to the pigeon. It was drinking the water still. It can feel that something is leaving, I thought. It can feel that something is leaving and it is trying to replace it. It would be better to snap its neck, but I know that I could not do it. Let the bird drink its water. It is a blessing that there is water for the bird to be distracted by. It wanted to be warm but now it is only thirsty. Drink up, I thought to myself. There is not much time. Look at all of those breadcrumbs: you are well-loved, little bird, and when it happens you will not be alone. We are here little bird. Drink the water little bird. Drink.



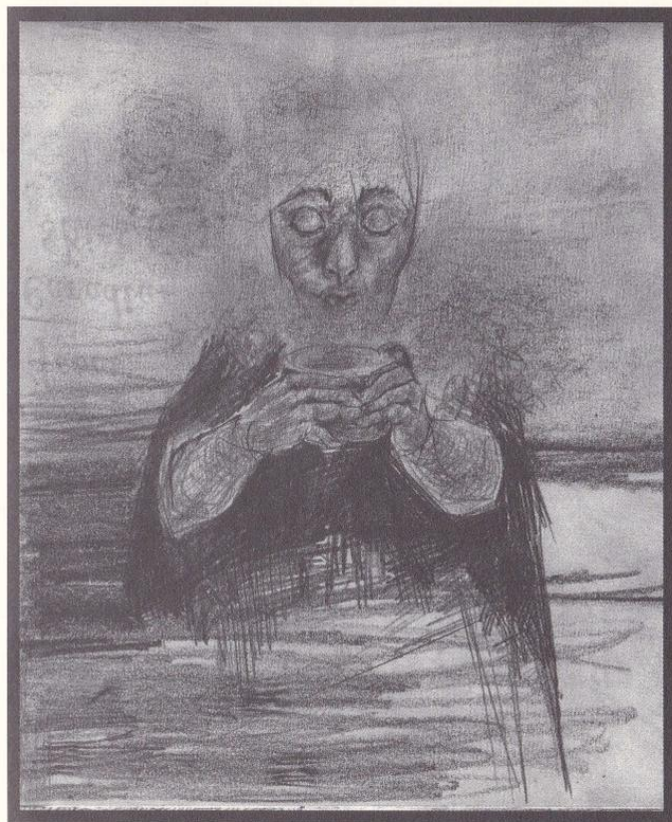
busk boy
stephanie turenko



la grande plage
marina bellisario







tea
sarah crawley



contributors

alefiyah amijee

Alefiyah is currently studying Computer Science and Physical & Environmental Geography at U of T. She moved to Toronto from Tanzania. Sometimes, she puts things she writes up on her blog: *second-inversion.blogspot.com*. This is her first appearance in *Acta Victoriana*, and she is thrilled!

martina bellisario

Martina Bellisario is in her first year, studying English Literature and Semiotics at Trinity College. She is currently enrolled in the Northrop Frye Stream of the Vic One program. "The Men" was taken in Rome during a walk with her mother, and "La Grande Plage" in a small French town called Biarritz that sits just by the border with Spain.

michael chernoff

Michael is a third year English and Philosophy major at the University of Toronto. He finds living in language to be rather comfortable, so long as he is uncomfortable. Michael enjoys 'difficult' poetry and the concept of eternity. His poems are an outlet for low-level anxiety attacks and regular anxiety attacks alike. He hopes to one day retire to Bolinas, CA.

sarah crawley

Since I was quite young I thought that I would go to some sort of art college. But the inspirations that formed my work contributed to a growing fascination with Languages, History and Political Science: bringing me here, to the University of Toronto. I have lived in Toronto for almost my whole life. Perhaps my desire to travel is why my art has been inspired by the very far away. Japanese ukiyo-e woodblock prints, Mayan carvings, Indian embroideries, Russian fairytale illustrations; pattern, line and shape from corner to corner of the earth. Often I am drawn to the older illustrations and artworks of these places, the feeling of nostalgia one gets when looking at them and the way such art is beautiful yet childlike. Yet living in Toronto has somewhat rooted these inspirations in art that often partakes of the urban—at once structured and messy. Thus I hope to draw together the ancient and the fantastical from many cultures, with an underlying tone of our own surroundings.

robert dipardo

Robert DiPardo is twenty-four and a part-time student of U of T, residing and stocking shelves at a supermarket in Thorold, Ontario. He would like to be an English professor, but would happily settle for a career in Dante scholarship.

brandon martin-gray

Brandon Martin-Gray is a Toronto-based fourth year student and insufferable dilettante who likes how his hair looked yesterday and most food except bananas. He is currently an editor at *The Strand*. His favourite M words

are maw, marmoreal, and morass. Once, when he was a kid, he caught a very big fish. He's considering dropping the hyphen from his name in order to sound more authorial. His band hasn't played in a while.

christopher greer

Christopher Greer lives in the village of Creemore and works as a reporter for the local newspaper, the Creemore Echo. He is also an English student at Trinity College. In 2011 he was a Featured Poet with the Antigonish Review and is currently at work on a novel.

tea hadziristić

Tea Hadziristić is in her fourth year at U of T, studying International Relations, wars, exiles, poetry, and philandering. Her work has appeared in the Hart House Review, Trinity Review, and University College Review. She's currently on the editorial board for the latter, as well as the Undergraduate Journal of Political Science.

kevin halligan

Kevin is a U of T alumni. He has written three books: Blossom Street, Belfast of the North and Utopia. His work has appeared in numerous publications including The Times Literary Supplement, The Globe and Mail and, Oxford Poetry.

amy hsieh

Amy Hsieh is currently pursuing her undergraduate studies in English and French at the University of

Toronto. She adores poetry, rabbits, zombie movies, and math metal. Amy writes when there is no more room and will continue to do so until the ground fills the holes in her heart.

laura ionico

Laura Ionico is a third year student studying English with minors in Book and Media studies and Drama. Growing up, she spent a lot of time outdoors hiking and camping. This poem was inspired by a fallen tree she passed one afternoon when taking a walk through High Park with her friend. One day she hopes to take her passion for nature to the next level by tackling Mount Kilimanjaro and continuing to be inspired to write nature poetry.

tajja isen

Tajja Isen is a writer of songs and fiction, and is a third-year Specialist in English Literature. Also a classically trained pianist, her dedication to music is the well from which "The Score" was drawn. She is in the early stages of a novel-length project, inspired in part by her ten years of experience as a professional actor.

nevena martinović

Nevena loves pop culture, Richard Brautigan, musicals, cheesy horror serials, her dog, and people who don't hug her too much. Most days you can find her in the library; other days, you can find her near the library. She reads and writes in near equal measure. She wants to study Shakespeare.

alexander morrow

Alexander Morrow is a fourth year English specialist at Victoria College. His work "The Secular Tragedy" deals with the duality of text. On the one hand it acknowledges the power and sacredness of the abstraction of language, and on the other draws attention to the produced commodity of the physical object. Through his humorous verse form, Alexander troubles notions of text ownership with a biting social commentary on print culture. His work is wholeheartedly dedicated to any student who has ever purchased an absurdly overpriced textbook.

jeannine pitas

Jeannine is a third-year PhD student at University of Toronto's Centre for Comparative Literature, where she works on twentieth century Latin American poetry. Inna Rasitsan is in her final year of study at Victoria College. Her work titled "Water" is dedicated to Parastoo Dokouhaki, with the hope that it brings her peace.

inna rasitsan

Inna Rasitsan is in her final year of study at Victoria College. Her work titled "Water" is dedicated to Parastoo Dokouhaki, with the hope that it brings her peace.

anne rucchetto

Anne is a Toronto native and currently lives in the west end. Besides creative writing she enjoys being a Proofreader and Volunteer at the Literary Review of Canada, a Gallery Attendant at the MOCCA, a

Publications Assistant at the Royal Ontario Museum, an Editor of Arts and Culture at The Strand and a student of Sociology and English. She has been previously published in *Poet's Ink*, *The Sheltered Poet*, *The Gargoyle*, *The Strand*, and *The Varsity*, and has non-fiction work published through Camberley Press.

emily scherzinger

Emily Scherzinger has been shooting photos since she was fourteen. She has many passions, including writing poetry and stories, reading novels, and gaining knowledge about anything and everything. She is currently studying English literature and philosophy at Victoria College in the University of Toronto.

joe sheph

Joe Sheph got his masters in English at the University of Alberta and is currently working on his Mandarin in Toronto. Up until recently he's worked as a RA with Editing Modernism in Canada. His current project addresses specific questions concerning authenticity and identity in the Scottish Diaspora.

brad shubat

Brad Shubat is a 4th year English specialist. He grew up in Wingham Ontario, the hometown of Alice Munro. This is a coincidence. His influences are Virginia Woolf, the time of day and some other writers. Sometimes he writes poetry and short-fiction.

catriona spaven-don

Catriona is a second year English and Spanish Major and French Minor at Victoria College. She arrived from Scotland uncertain of what to expect, but university so far is exactly the creative and academic inspiration she wanted. Since completing the Vic One programme last year, she can finally call herself a writer and mean it wholeheartedly. Studying literature in different languages and across continents acts as a constant source of inspiration. Catriona is excited to see where writing will take her in the future.

michelle speyer

Michelle Speyer is a third year English and Book and Media Studies student at Victoria College, where she is reconsidering the divisions between form and content, occasionally veering in the direction of media philosophy. Her short fiction and poetry have been published in *What If?* Magazine and student publications. She received the 2010 Rosemarie Hoey Award in English from Carleton University. Formerly, she has served on the editorial board of *ACTA Victoriana* and has interned at *Lifestyles Magazine* in Toronto.

kay dyson tam

Kay Dyson Tam and her writing make quite the quarreling lovers. The writing insists, her mind resists: clean lines on a page, a delicate cage. A decade ago, she had a poem about cabin fever and her brother published. This time, she has written about purple and plums. Though she tries to write on serious topics, whimsical tones and themes keep appearing – these ‘mistakes’ have become a quirky voice

and style she is learning to own. The complicated love affair continues at kayandotherletters.wordpress.com

amanda tong

Amanda Tong is a 4th year undergrad student at U of T, working towards a specialist in Drama. Prior to third year, she hadn't written anything creatively for her own amusement since the fifth grade, and now wonders why. “The Memory Quilt” is her first submission to *Acta Victoriana*. The inspiration for its plot came from staring at her own bedsheets, which were purchased in the children's section of IKEA.

stephanie turenko

Stephanie Turenko is a fourth year student who loves puns — you know the ones that make you sigh, roll your eyes, smile and shake your head? Those are the best. Her dream is to publish a book which combines her two hobbies : poetry and photography.

fan wu

Fan Wu borrows his unforgivable aestheticism from Barthes, his ecstasy for language-labyrinths from Borges, and his cold fascination with silence from Blanchot. This year, he came very near to death under the worldheavy weight of the anxiety of influence.

design— anamarija korolj

Anamarija is an architecture student who has illustrated and designed for numerous U of T publications.

This body of this journal is
set in Minion, with titles in
Futura. The Acta Victoriana
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