

Sacha Archer
Terese Mason Pierre
Robert Whiteley
Josh Scott

TS Hidalgo
Michael Baptista
Stan Rogal
Zak Jones

Victoria Butler
Ron Riecki
Maxwell Koyama
John Sibley Williams

Isabelle Zhu
Alessia Disimino
T. Johnson
Terry Abrahams

Acta Victoriana
(est. 1878) is the
literary journal of
Victoria University in
the University of Toronto.

Acta Victoriana

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Imitation is the most
sincere form of flattery.

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position
h honour.

NO. 1

This is a prosperous
time in life for you.

WINTER

2018

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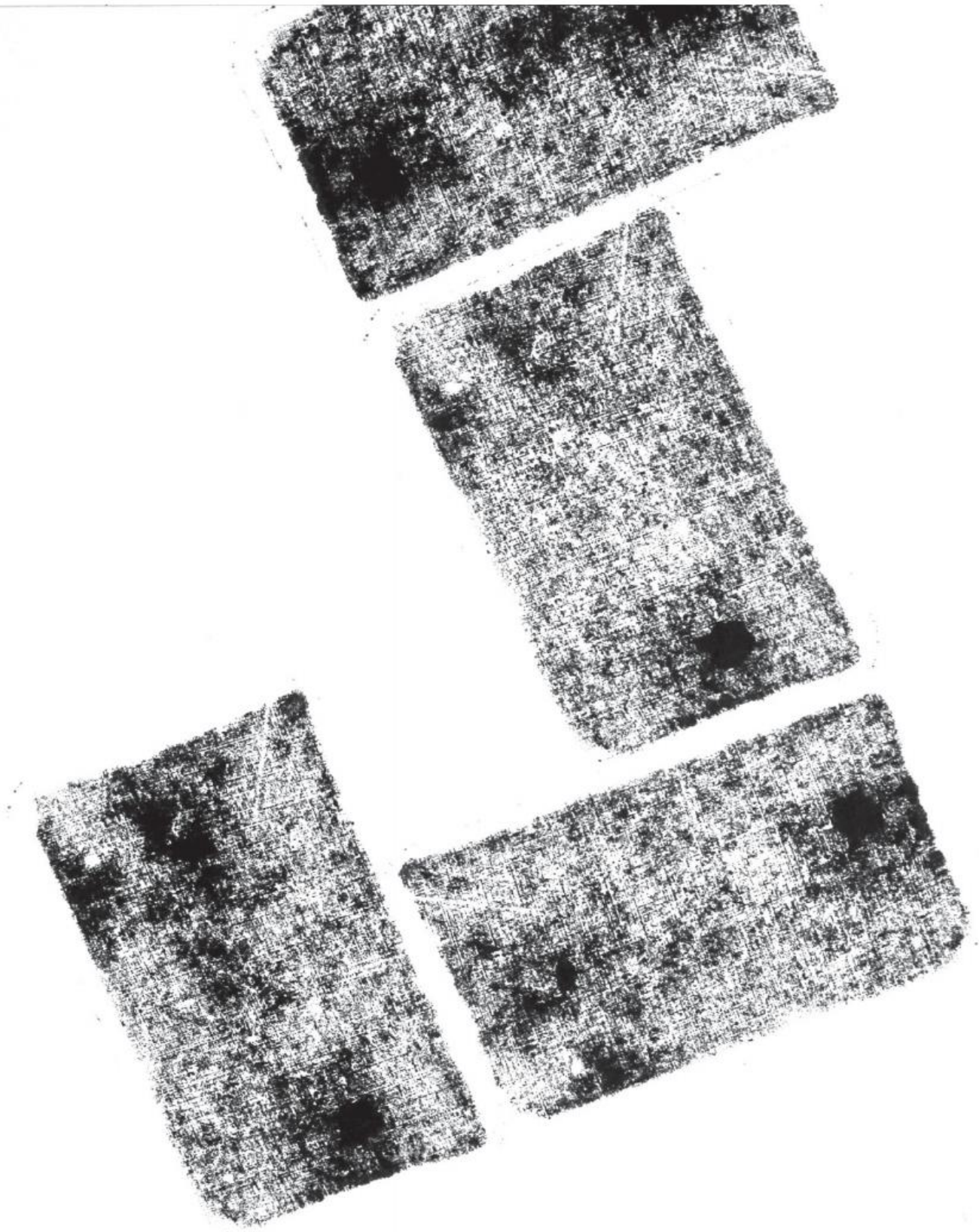


Poetry is always at a distance; it is cursed by Plato to be “third from the king and the truth.” Lately, one might envy this distance. Yet the texts in this collection do not use distance as an escape. To use a phrase from Terese Pierre’s “Still,” they do not “hold [themselves] above experience.” Rather, they offer distance as a purposeful, even political stance: a gift of patient space so that things might reveal themselves. The clouds which mark the temporality of loss in Zak Jones’ “Just Saw the Truck” become a fetish for an unspeakable tragedy in Ron Reikki’s “In Pensacola, in the Navy, They Drowned”. The wild dog that serves as a memory of urban apocalypse in Isabelle Zhu’s “The Book of Life” reappears in Victoria Butler’s “Porter Crescent,” its bark sounding out the edges of space in a Toronto suburb. My hope with this 142nd issue of *Acta Victoriana* is that these distances, both separate and together, might let you see the outlines of deeper, fuller shapes: truths, if not kings.

Carl Christian Abrahamsen

There is a potential tyranny in representation –as soon as a perception must be materialized into language or image, there is always the risk that something is lost. While the poets, writers, and artists in this volume must inevitably reify their ideas in this manner, they all reflect an impulse to preserve without diminishing these initial sentient traces. I like to think of the works in this issue not as impressions caught on the fly, but ones that are hoarded for safekeeping; in this way, they become some measure of the eternal, one that continuously gestures beyond itself.

Eleanor Lazarova



Ink Pad Poem 2 by Sacha Archer

Still

Terese Mason Pierre

Walk deeply across black sands before sunlight
Padded toes against weather-worn edges,

it's almost embarrassing
to hold yourself above experience.

Faith is chance and charming,
you forget, palm entering the white air before your body,

a new path every time, you think
you come here to be.

You are not lost in art, here
the stills are in your cells

inked in the white of your eyes
and the shadow your laugh leaves in cluttered photos.

There is sound when you move over the rocks
Existence knows the whine of your energy

and delivers inside this dead channel, white and
bottomless. It's pitiful to want to transfer the

tableau onto any old stained wall.
You know this, you hope something sharp will cut your foot,

make you feel divine
and dark in equal measure



The George Variations

Robert Whiteley

Dan came from Edmonton
beneath his bus seat
is a suitcase full of other people's poems
and a typewriter

He is moving to Toronto
to be a different kind of poet
and once he finds a place to stay
the first thing he'll do
is take his typer
and travel by streetcar
to the CBC

where he'll sit
next to Glenn Gould
and retype other poets
poems

Dan believes people deserve to hear
the music behind a really good poem
he wants to serenade the crowd
in the key of uppercase B

he's thinking about calling his latest work
Bowering: The George Variations

Types & Tokens

Josh Scott

My father was a Trotskyite, my mother a Stalinist. Their life together went swimmingly until my father drowned in the river during the raids perpetrated by the very bureaucracy his addiction to HBO had led him to view anew/forget. So much for “permanent revolution”—he only turned once before the current carried him under. Supposedly, the contemporary medium made the tedium of the old movement apparent; whatever that means.

When, later, I asked my mother’s stance on state-sponsored murder, she told me she herself abstained. As a result, I, too, try to ration my regard for breathing people and things. My wife tells me never before have I met someone so afraid of the farmer’s market. Really, I just prefer the gloss of the theory to the grime of the reality. Then again, she finds the whole place rank as well, so perhaps we’re all the same.

That being said, it is clear that the workers of this great country do their best, given our circumstances. I try to fight the small, abstract battles for them in the hopes that eventually, they will finance our cause without asking too much of me in return.

Serving as a radical Leninist is a full-time job. It does not leave time enough to consider the plight of the particular person; thankfully, because people are tiresome—not to mention, inconvenient. I much prefer idea states and contrived situations.

Keep it clean, I say: trim, trim, trim. When I sleep, it is so.



Gallos modificados genéticamente

TS Hidalgo

The latest fad this season as far as pets are concerned, says an advertising feature broadcast at the same time on the two state-owned television channels, after respective documentaries: on Silicon Valley, on channel 1, and another called Career Opportunities in Spain, Part I, on channel 2, is a guide rooster. It is the result of a long and costly genetic engineering project backed by 100% Spanish capital - deeply Spanish R&D. This new variety of *gallus gallus* or common European chicken, some seventy centimeters tall, with the same arrogant appearance and head adorned with a red comb, thick and usually erect, has a series of substantial and pragmatic differences for its new use as a pet.

They are designed for a highly diverse target of potential users, all of them with a common denominator: they like to go out for a few drinks, in any state, place, or circumstance. Partaking in – copious or not – alcoholic ingestion but responsible enough to not drive home, even so.

Thanks to this new genetically modified rooster, you can drink without later – spatial or temporal – location problems. The guide rooster – supplied through modification with a remarkable ability to pull – will guide you at all times throughout the night, bar to bar, and will bring you home safe and sound at the end. Once vaccinated and implanted with the pertinent obligatory chip, you'll only need to clip on a special rooster leash and give him clear commands. He'll understand. The stuff of trial and errors at the hands of a group of persevering and methodical scientists.

It should be taken for a walk around the area to be frequented to get familiar with it, and be shown a map of the neighborhood and/or town beforehand with a series of basic directions. And you should introduce it to your circle of friends, so it doesn't feel left out.

They require a very Spartan keep, basically corn – also compound feed-based – and water. In that respect, several establishments in the hospitality trade at the national and international levels have joined the initial proposal put forth by some bars in the area of Malasaña in Madrid which consists of placing bowls with corn on the bar to give to the guide rooster right next to – with the hope of creating symbiosis, and economies of

scale – the popcorn bowls for their owners.

The idea is to create a certain atmosphere in any given bar, of an undeniable comic element for the person who bumps into a situation of this sort for the first time upon walking into their local watering hole. The rooster is just as useful for dating: a shared fondness for the same kind of pet is as good a way as any other to break the ice. And, of course, it acts as an alarm clock in the traditional method – if you have early obligations to attend to the next day.

Other benefits of the recent lab pet which came about unexpectedly a bit collaterally: if you have a rooster with a certified pedigree it makes you a little chic, makes you different. As with all things, there will always be classes, and everyone knows the unspoken rule in Madrid that you can't get into places like Bangaloo, Gabana, or Vanitas with a common street rooster. Not to mention if you go to Cock, on calle Reina. It has also been a great help verbally alleviating daily tensions, if needed, without having to engage in fisticuffs. "I'll sic my rooster on you," has been, it seems, a leitmotif of their owners in recent times.

Another practical side of these lab roosters, after ruling out options like bricklayer roosters, or automotive driving industry operators, on the one hand, or, on the other, hunting or fighting roosters – due to economic unfeasibility in the first two, due to legal issues in the second two – has been to train them as police roosters, continues the advertising feature. Used in the different State law enforcement as narcotics, intervention, rescue, or forensics roosters, they were given characteristics genetically like an incredibly acute sense of smell and tracking ability – of cadavers, explosives, and drugs, for example – as well as for crowd control and lifeguards, among others, mentions the aforementioned televised spot in closing. Afterwards, a clearly revival-type program on channel 1, with interviews with famous Spanish inventors: foosball, Chupa-Chups lollipops, and the yarn mop. On channel 2, the Career Opportunities in Spain, Part I, documentary continues.

Both varieties of rooster already discussed, guide and police – in this case more Spanish military police – were bred for the first time Friday of last week in a raid led by this worthy force in Xandú on the premises of the El Trébol chain –the leading brothel franchise since 1999, as several panels attest to around the snow-inside-mall located off the Extremadura highway.

In the aforementioned raid, a stash of drugs was confiscated. Several guide roosters were also seized from El Trébol customers. Reasons ranged from not having a chip, coming from some illegal lab, or belonging to an endangered species; some of these roosters were admittedly hung over

a few hours later; some shall we say laying hens were commandeered on the premises as well. All the fowl were classified at the police station as stateless.

“That’s interesting, stateless, I’ve never heard such a sad word or expression before,” says the sergeant in charge of locking them up – as well as of general maintenance of the station’s farm – out loud. He only finds the “He never gave me a name” that Frankenstein’s monster mourned, defeated, no going back, in reference to his creator, comparable to it in terms of absence of identity.

The next morning, in the aforementioned military police sergeant’s apartment. He is making breakfast: soft-boiled eggs on his boss’ tray – a rose as well: anniversary of their first dinner, at the Galaxia café – and Corn Flakes on its own tray; coffee for both. On the TV in the kitchen, a documentary on channel 2: Career Opportunities in Spain, Part II.

Meanwhile, his captain finishes sewing a button onto his government-issued leather jacket at the same time as he is briefed on their next trip together to Southeast Asia. The night before it – actually a few of them – popped off as two prostitutes from El Trébol tussled with the sergeant. A police rooster, shocking both of them, in the kitchen. Fear and trembling. It is no minor event, after all, to unexpectedly find a rooster staring at you and then at the two breakfast trays and then again staring at you and then at both of their hands, which touch, interlaced, and then up to their eyes, with a decided expression of growing reproach.

But they did not pay attention to him for long. A sudden and thunderous fowl symphony called the sergeant and captain to attention. The noise was coming from the living room, which the two of them approached with their government-issue weapons. There they found a team of thirty police roosters surrounded by dozens of bundles of cocaine: pecked right open. Fifteen kilometers from the police station’s farm, such was the immoderate development of their tracking abilities. The content of the bags was scattered all over the room: it gave it a certain aesthetic of fowl farm; the psychotropic drug acted as a stand-in compound feed. Some of the birds took on something-like-a-certain-ghostly-touch by almost completely coating their plumage a back wall white color: the roosters were, apparently, pretty hungry. That or the feed was pointedly addictive.

The sergeant and the captain looked at each other circumspectly, open-mouthed, surprised. The roosters continued feeding. And they clucked. A few paid homage to the pre-constitutional flag in the living room and sang *Cara al sol*. Others at least were reciting Pessoa.

Fridge Poetry (a breakup)

Hannah Brennen

dazzle me

sex has surreal impression
and hard form
imagine wild colours
think of blue death
you are too full to feel
in shards
or, above
experiment



by Michael Baptista



The Lesson is Done

Stan Rogal

what powerfully was : a joy of voices, antic & alive
an indomitable thrust of weed & flower from solid rock
where a glass revealed a snatch of landscape, a horror of chaos
adopted the intentional stance : assumed the position

the lesson is done, darling
I don't like my feet so much
broke up upon the rocks
(t)here is no (t)here (t)here

who bought a new electric toothbrush to clean her poodle's paws
experienced the object as a plurality of moments : shifting
so maybe she is/was a human being after all
& being old laid her old skin on everything she touched



Just Saw the Truck

Zak Jones

Love you very much.
It's safe to say

that we'll never live these lives again
as we do in dreams as we did before I awoke

I saw you like a cloud
coming like beside the sun like

I've been clambering for a new
unheardness,

like a quiet yet unrecognized:
a breath in the night heard loudly by the awoken—

and tonight I thought I got it—
at least a whiff of you—
thought I turned into the breath of it
as I'm wont for my own to be diminished within it.

The click I heard was only
like a raised fingernail against brick, but only one:
in time I've lost it as it scours me.

Now I lost the dream and wonder:
If we could, would we ask together
for what I ask for now?

Would you have guessed as to what I ask for now?
Does time work on you like it works on clouds
moving?

I farted around and
found art laying, as it does, unfinished,

in a creak of light in the mudroom, still
as the solitary beauty of a crescent moon
lays in the basket of a dawn
piquing our slumber while still suspended and hanging small,

in a world of in-betweens and almoses.
Planes fly under it:

screams in the night air,
in the mourning unheard.

I think of you as a cloud and full about to rain.
Only awake have I shooed you away

and while asleep pray
to you and wishing you a pouring on another
house.

Just saw the truck
parked out front and I love you very much.



Elliston, NF by Victoria Butler



In Pensacola, in the Navy, They Drowned

Ron Riecki

the recruit, a kid. It was training
on how to save the drowning,
but the kid, a child really, a teen,
only just months away from his parents
was held under water as punishment
for not knowing something none of us
knew, all of us in our boxers lined up
around the pool with our backs to it all,
singing the National Anthem as we were
instructed, with the sound of gasping
for beginnings behind us and I remember
the morning sky, the way you could see
the veins in the clouds.



[The day after the anniversary]

Ron Riecki

The day after the anniversary
of the terrorist act—that I don't want

to name because it triggers panic attacks
in the deep ashtrays of my chest—

my brother told me he wanted to do
the opposite of commit suicide,

which means he came out of the closet
& the bedroom & he bounced into the living

room with his pink money in fists
and we went deep astray into the night

with him announcing to the gay piano bar
that he was single but wanted to be plural

and we looked like twin towers, our thin
tinmen bodies drowning by the pool table

and that night he took a fireman home
where they committed arson and my mother

the next morning heard it all, arguing
with our father, saying "our son

is of indigenous heritage which means
there is no such thing as gender" & the ancestors

were above us all shaking their heads yes
in the great painless sky with its reindeer heart.

Ambrosia

Maxwell Koyama

In the yellow-wooded orchards of our town, Gertrude and I picked apples, placing some into a basket and eating others straight away, hidden behind the trees. At some point I was lost, and Gertrude came whispering: quiet, Leo, dry your tears, or mother will see. A breeze had welcomed itself to the grove, and it carried with it the sounds of laughter, of happy siblings at play somewhere in the distance that we could not see. We carried the baskets back to mother where she waited in a cane chair beside the road, her vision fixed itself towards the graveyard where our baby brother was buried. We would walk home along dusty footpaths, the reds and oranges and bucolic scenery behind us. This was the way that everything always was.

At home, mother would call through the slats of the bannister at dinnertime, the wood dripping with the steam from years of clouds of cooking vapors. She was always in the kitchen, boiling, taking a private joy in the destruction of well-marbled beef, lamb, venison, vegetables, and fruit that we had picked ourselves and which were important to us. The fog of mist grew denser and denser, filling the rafters. In winter we would scrape the fatty jelly from the walls where it had accumulated like aspic. She worked at the stove through the night, sending steam rising through the grates that tickled my skin and made me scream, and I dreaded her rising up the stairs as if she herself was a cooking-vapor, spiraling through the foyer and towards the second floor. I fell silent when she entered my bedroom, her face twisted into the shape of concern. Then she would lift me out of my bed, her fingers sinking into my sides as if my muscles were soft as suet, and I would be carried down to wait by the stove while she invented something warm for me to drink.

He had been her only interest, her nameless child, the monster of an infant who was born after me. He nursed until she was dry, until her body became svelte and barren, and then moved on to bread, loaves of bread, whole fish and well-done steaks, oysters and pies, chicken and lobster, huge quantities of cream and milk, eggs, raw eggs, cheese, salt and molasses, butter



and flour. She was delighted by everything he ate, fed him more, picked fruit and slaughtered fowl for him, admired his size and the folds of his greasy skin. Then it was Christmas, and mother emerged from the nursery with baby in her arms while Gertrude and I waited until we were allowed to eat. O my darling, she whispered into his tiny ear, isn't it wonderful, eyeing the round brown gooseflesh that she had prepared for all of us. But the warmth began to fade when baby, set down to feed on the floor, howled in pain from the foyer, his stomach distended with turkey spines and pine needles, paper and twine, and a sphere of green glass, smashed on the ground, whose pieces were taken delicately from their lodgings in his bright red throat. His screams fell silent under the scalpel, and as the surgeon struggled and labored over the body, the child bled out until he was dead. She cried into the cutting board, beat her fists against the countertop, wailed and tore her skin to shreds.

We left the hospital quietly, made our arrangements for the plot and the burial. When we returned home, mother receded into the stomach of the house. She built walls of pots and pans up around her and stayed there always. When Gertrude would see me home from school, she would take my jacket from me quietly, and lead me past the doorframes through which mother was waiting, undisturbable. Then late at night the kitchen would stir, the sound of spoons at pots at work, and a pungent steam would rise from the stove, sticky and dense. Ambrose, she named him, by carving it into a headstone that the pine-box was buried under, in a little graveyard by the yellow orchard where Gertrude and I picked fruit. We did cry that day, when the apples found their way into the water like the meat and the vegetables and everything else, boiled to thinness, boiled away into nothing. My dears, mother said and stripped the soaking shirts from our shoulders. First have a bath, and then when you are clean of sweat and grease, you will join me in the kitchen, and together we will eat.

Poem without Wildflowers Growing from It

John Sibley Williams

As a phrase, *wildflowers fill a dead deer* hurts more than fingering their fuchsias & wild violets. The stink is radiant in person. The upturned half-skull, a vase of light. I admit *loving* sounds better silently scratched onto wanting flesh. No accusation. No assumptions beyond sweat & strain. No promises, metaphor, just bodies briefly writhing without a language to cage them. Which reminds me of *suitcase bomb*, how undetonated it sits there on a street corner like any sane, useless thing. Or *drone*, when wordlessly the distant factories join with cicadas to hum me off to sleep. Or *mother* back when I could pin it to warm hands, warm open window. Or a *war* with pinecones standing in for grenades, twigs for rifles; *river*, as if we've left any deer to drink it.



The Book of Life

Isabelle Zhu

On the last day of August, city after city become flood headlines.
No ark this time, and the animals stay with us in our watery graves,
companions until death. Even a natural disaster can't shake off

the disaster that is love, a woundedness that won't let you skulk away;
ill-starred lovers continue to stab themselves (and each other) to death,
a dog waits at a train station for an owner that's ten years deceased.

In sun-spotted rain, you wonder if he feels time passing
through his mangled fur, if today still feels like yesterday
so ten years is no time at all. It's been no time at all

since the last flood, the last day I saw you, the first crack
of the continental drift—you looked at me like you'd see me
in what we'd call an hour, which is no time at all.

Porter Crescent

Victoria Butler

Maybe there are places to go but
right now all I can see is
the porch, and
that dog somewhere down the street
that sounds more like a sound effect
than a heart beat,
and this moment, where I am in this space
instead of longing for it.



Untitled by Alessia Disimino



Return Flight

T. Johnson

Tears cry down the water pitcher;
Lonely lip-marks wreath the wine;
Steam curls out the coffee cup—
The only thing that's getting milk'd.

Sometime flows like rustling river;
Sometime drips like cul-de-sac;
Sometime overbears the liver;
Now there's something which I lack.

She isn't mine! she isn't mine:—
I feel it shooting through my nerves;
Longtime waiting in a line,
Short time capturing her curves...

I can both stoop down or stretch up;
I can't stand where I sit:
Another man I'd call a shlup
To plunge from pit to blacker pit.

Heaven's pleasures coolly bilk'd,
She calmly walks away;—
My coif is slick'd; my clothes are silk'd;
My heart's in disarray.

Tears cry down the water pitcher;
Lonely lip-marks wreath the wine;
Steam curls out the coffee cup—
The only thing that's getting milk'd.



two evenings parallel to one salt-baked fish

Terry Abrahams

rock meets water
meets flesh

same as my hands
rubbed raw

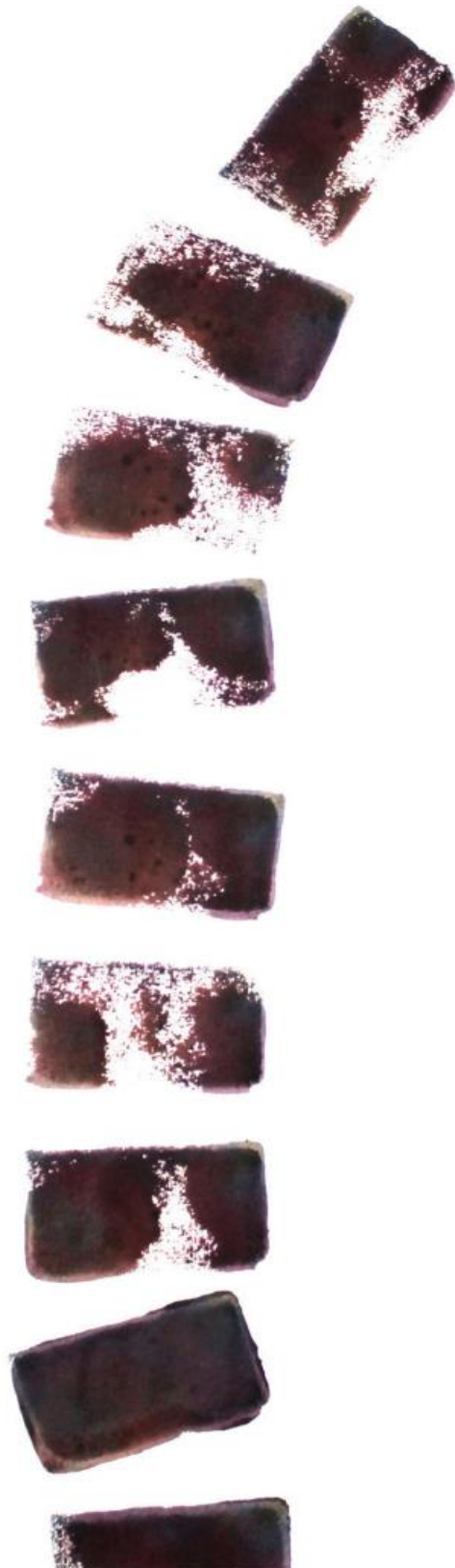
by the process: erosion
a better name

for water drawing rock
away from itself

after dinner conversation
silts into a question

I want to know how soon
you will come to bed

Ink Pad Poem 1 by Sacha Archer





Terry Abrahams has been here before.

Sacha Archer is an ESL instructor, childcare provider, father, writer, and visual artist. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in journals such as *filling Station*, *ACTA Victoriana*, *h&g*, *illiterature*, *NōD*, *Experiment-O*, *UTSANGA*, and *Matrix*. Archer's first full-length collection of poetry, *Detour*, a conceptual work with the *Dao De Jing* as the source text, was recently published by gradient books (2017). His most recent chapbooks are, *The Insistence of Momentum* (The Blasted Tree, 2017), and *Acceleration of the Arbitrary* (Grey Borders, 2017), with two chapbooks forthcoming, *TSK oomph* (Inspiritus Press) and *upROUTE* (above/ground press). A collection of broadsides from his work *Ghost Writing* is his latest publication from The Blasted Tree. One of his online manifestations is his blog at <https://sachaarcher.wordpress.com>. Archer lives in Burlington, Ontario.

Michael Baptista is a 2017 English-Major graduate from the University of Toronto.

Hannah Brennen spends her days working at a law tech startup in Toronto and studying English at U of T. She writes both prose and poetry, with recent publications in the *Goose* and the *Northern Appeal*. Earlier in 2017, she was a top 25 finalist in Glimmer Train's New Writers Short Story contest. She also cut her own bangs.

Victoria Butler is born and bred in Barrie, Ontario, where she serves as the Editor-in-Chief of the literary journal *The Northern Appeal*. She takes being The Mom Friend way too seriously.

Alessia Disimino is a professional violinist and educator based in Toronto. She is a graduate of the Master of Music in Violin Performance program at the University of Toronto, where she also obtained her Bachelor of Music in Performance with a Minor in English. Alessia's passion lies in the arts and in community engagement, and she is also active as a poet and painter.



TS Hidalgo holds a BBA (Universidad Autónoma de Madrid), a MBA (IE Business School), a MA in Creative Writing (Hotel Kafka) and a Certificate in Management and the Arts (New York University). His works have been published in magazines in the USA, Canada, Argentina, Chile, Venezuela, Germany, UK, Spain, Ireland, Portugal, South Africa, Nigeria, Botswana, India and Australia, and he has been the winner of prizes like the *Criaturas feroces* (Editorial Destino) in short story and a finalist at Festival Eñe in the novel category. He has currently developed his career in finance and stock-market.

T. Johnson lives in Toronto and likes blues music, billiards, and formal poetry. Two of his favourites are A. Tennyson and E. Poe.

Zak Jones is an expatriot of the American South working on a MA in English Literature and Creative Writing at the University of Toronto.

Maxwell Koyama is a Victoria student in English and American Studies.

Terese Mason Pierre is a writer and editor with a Bachelor's degree in Bioethics from the University of Toronto. She has been published in various campus journals, as well as online. She is currently pursuing a Master's degree in Philosophy and aims to become a medical doctor. Pierre lives in Toronto with her family and volunteers her time with many organizations and committees. Visit her website at: www.teresemason.webs.com.

Ron Riecki wrote *U.P.: a novel* (Great Michigan Read nominated) and edited *The Way North: Collected Upper Peninsula New Works* (2014 Michigan Notable Book), *Here: Women Writing on Michigan's Upper Peninsula* (2016 Independent Publisher Book Award), and *And Here: 100 Years of Upper Peninsula Writing, 1917-2017* (Michigan State University Press, 2017).

Stan Rogal lives and writes in Toronto. Work has appeared in numerous journals and anthologies in Canada, the US and Europe. The author of 21 books, most recent being, *There Goes the Neighbourhood*, a collection of short stories.



Josh Scott studies English, Philosophy, and Writing & Rhetoric. He is the Editor-In-Chief of St. Mike's *The Mike* newspaper. He writes short fiction and poetry, and his stories and poems have been published in the *UC Review* and *The Trinity Review*.

Robert Whiteley was born in Burlington, Ontario, but now lives just beyond the shadowy reach of the CN Tower where he owns an online bookstore called, The Poet's Pulpit. His poems have appeared in Canada and the United States.

John Sibley Williams is the author of nine poetry collections, most recently *Disinheritance*. A seven-time Pushcart nominee and winner of various awards, John serves as editor of *The Inflectionist Review*. Publications include: *Yale Review*, *Atlanta Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Midwest Quarterly*, *Sycamore Review*, *Massachusetts Review*, *Columbia*, *Third Coast*, and *Poetry Northwest*.

Isabelle Zhu writes and lives in Toronto. She is currently researching theories of friendship and hauntology in postcolonial literature. You can also find her poetry at *The Puritan*.



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