



Why am I to be pitied, you say? Well, there
to be crucified on a cross, not
crucified for me! And when I will go
not a week but years and tribulation
sell the rights of you, I have been
soured to the bottom of it, tears and
have; but I have a community with
and I will not let me and I will
and He will give
and I will give
already forgiven the
many are forgiven the
Sonia, He will forgive
just now! And He will judge and will
wise and the meek... And when He has done
summon us 'You too come forth' He will sa



Meghan Butcher	5
Radoslav Rochallyi	7
Morgan Murray	8, 21, 57
Kaila Gallacher	9
Brandon McCarthy	11
Jaelyn Pahl	13
Ellen Grace	20, 30
V.J. Hamilton	22
Marie Gamboa	31
Katharina Davoudian	32
Uliana Hlynchak	33
Radmila Yarovaya	38
Bronwyn Garden-Smith	41
Cheryl Cheung	42, 46
Josie Di Sciascio-Andrews	43
Veronica Spada	48
Amory S. Zhao	49
Ada Bierling	51
Caitlin McKenzie	52
Tammy Yu	53
Rion Levy	55
Adam Zivojinovic	58
Yasmine Shelton	60

**Editors-in-Chief**

Marco Istasy

Claire Ellis

The Associate Board

Katrina Agbayani

Janice Hu

Marissa Lee

Jeanne Polochansky

Veronika Zabelle Nayir

Design Editor

Janus Kwong

Cover Art Credits

Adri Luna Studio

Spring 2021 Acta Victoriana CXLV II

Acta Victoriana

150 Charles St W, rm. 152

Toronto, Ontario M5S 1K9

Acta Victoriana, est. 1878, is the literary journal of Victoria College in the University of Toronto. It is produced and published on the traditional lands of the Mississaugas of the New Credit First Nation, the Haudenosaunee, the Anishnaabe and the Wendat, as well as other Nations that have been subject to historical erasure. As members of the literary community on campus, we recognize the need to be part of the collective conversation required for the ongoing process of decolonization and reconciliation.



Letters from the Editors

I believe in flipping through poetry collections. That said, if you read this supplement in order, you'll find a quiet walk.

The collection starts with early morning frost and rising sun. Some of these works anchor themselves lightly in downtown Toronto. They hold the calm observation of walking by yourself.

Other people intrude. You'll witness fraught social encounters that isolate the inner self, and hear the voices of imprisoned inner selves directly. As you move on, poems with heavy playfulness: an open letter from Thais claiming divinity, a list that shapeshifts sixteen times, a science-glazed reading of a Bosch painting. If you were walking, this might be your mind wandering, getting stuck on riddles.

Back to the real: the hard and painful and a fascination with living green things. As if you had wandered out of the city centre and into someone's backyard, or out of the city altogether, to highways and pines.

Near the end, two pure voices disintegrate over the page in giant motions. The walk could end here, but if you stick it out to the end, you'll get one last surprise. The second last poem is angry. The last one is very honest. Together, they are the ground you have been walking over.

Claire Ellis and Marco Istasy



A Lament

Meghan Butcher

Somewhere south of here

there is a garden;

It is small and dead and snow-covered by now,

ground glittering like barbie doll clothes or glass shards

broken bottles on a soft surface

Nothing grows there –

nothing worth seeing in spring anyway.

It is unromantic and twigs lie askew

and underneath the snow and stray brambles

lives a ghost.

I haven't seen it,

but it drops books and breaks necklace chains

It tells me there is nothing to see here,

protests that it wasn't mine;

Wailing for me to go away,

It breaks my rigid fingers one by one.

South of here,
of this lifetime,
there is a garden in my room.
There is a garden in my belly
with a snowy glass-bottle ground
Where your breath hangs in the air
like a dead thing from a tree.
It isn't mine,
but a ghost lives in the garden
and she won't let me inside to get warm
Demanding I stay and watch the ice get thicker;
She wasn't mine
but she lives in my belly
and she won't leave me alone.



Just for today

Radoslav Rochallyi

$$\frac{(you + \frac{uaw}{na})^n}{\{xa^{-x^2} \quad xa^{-x^2} \quad xa^{-x^2}\}}$$

just (why wear the Scars you got?)



Dead Oceans

Morgan Murray



Reversed

Kaila Gallacher

if there was any proof needed
that the world and I are at odds.
displaced. it is here. when
the sun finds me. chilled. and wide wake.
at 6AM. watching the steady
bleaching of the night sky
as the world ever so slightly lightens
and begins your dawn.
it is in that steady elliptical movement
that dance refracted in a linear time.
it is a dawn that looks more like twilight,
reads more like Kafka. a reversed sunset
in a mirror on fire, to weary eyes
that have yet to be able
to trust sleep.

it is the solidity
of contention
in that singular moment
while I'm dreading
sunrise because of what it says.

what it says. night is over. and I'm greeting
the sun's light on the wrong side
of a coin. while others found here
are imbedded in that ever forward
movement of riverbed time. I am a rock
unable to flow forward. or rewind. unable
to stop the unrestrained flow of moments
as the river takes me. forces me to relive.

when your dawn begins
shaking you awake,
your eyes bleary fighting
to break from sleep,
I stand at the mouth of the coming
dawn, arms across my chest
bracing myself against
the cold of dawn's
mocking beauty. I stand
at the coming of day waiting
for sleep or for days that bring nights
that remember how to hold me.



Closed (For Regularly Scheduled Maintenance)

Brandon McCarthy

A
soft
Mon-
day
morn-
ing
breaks
clear
'cross
Scar-
borough,
shaking
off the chilled
Eastern night that hours ago
held tight to the slugging back of day.
Cold Morning light scatters through
the trees, dripping bright hues of copper 'top
high rises, the old train station
and the archdiocese which stands six-stories high and
unimposing to the office buildings, barrooms,
ballrooms, and boutiques strewn along
the residential side streets nearby.

In fifteen minutes
Avenue Road
will open
its mouth with
a motorcade
of flappers and
philosophers
flying, trying to
avoid the swell
of traffic, steadily
growing since an
hour ago, congested,
as another busy off-ramp
closes, Spadina, probably,
and backs the city up to
the whitewashed concrete
storefronts at the corner
of Yonge and Summerhill.



21 Cigarettes

Jaclyn Pahl

1

Outside of a bookshop on Bloor Street I clutch a copy of *Love in the Time of Cholera*. It's late afternoon and the October wind whips through my fleece jacket. From behind your eyes I think I catch a light flicker, like a bird taking flight off a ledge. You leaned in, and, though I'm caught off-guard, I try to kiss you back, fumbling with the cigarette burning down between my fingers.

2

The next evening I'm standing on my balcony alone. Inhaling quickly, I don't want to keep you waiting. In my anxiety and anticipation, I crush out my cigarette early, and as I do so glance out over the railing at the Toronto skyline. City lights flicker on the dark horizon. Satellites drift through the sky, and the moon, a round glow, floats near the zenith. I go inside and prepare to take on the night. I will have to walk across town to your apartment, so I slide into my low heels. I lock the door and walk down the steps to street. This is beginning, when everything to come lies mysterious in the realm of prospect. Whatever it is, it hasn't happened yet, hasn't made itself known to this universe. Yet I know it deeply. It's this moment, on the stairwell, on the street, on your stoop. It's in the back of my throat, on my skin, in my hair. It might have been forever. And then I'm here, outside your apartment. And it's now.

3

Later that night I walk home tousled, my lipstick a faint rose around my mouth, and my mascara smudged deep beneath my eyes. I hardly shy away from the wondering looks of strangers. I'm comfortable in the disguise of night.

4

The next day I sit alone in the park reading *Leaves of Grass*. The trees are gold now and the world is flush with colour. Around me the elderly play chess and children swing. In-between lines my mind wanders from the page. There's something in the air, the mulch, the rain, that brings your touch. Underneath my jacket I feel chilled. From my hand blue smoke rises quickly. Cars rush by. The bustling crowds move so fast, yet I sit so still. And at that very moment, on the rim of despondency, you call.

5

And there you are, under the blue neon light of a suave downtown restaurant. Your long dark hair glistens purple and your voice carries smoothly across the table. Your face is softer now. We pay the cheque and stand outside. The weather has turned, become unseasonably warm. I rejoice in the discovery that you're comfortable around me now. Your laugh reverberates against the steel cranes that tower above us.

6

We knock over the lamp, so that our silhouettes dance on the wall, like flowers in the rain. Later we stand on the balcony. You pull away from me and smile. Inhaling on your cigarette, you say something careless and joyful. Your words spill out into the cold fresh air. You direct them at the horizon, as if I'm not on the balcony at all. I imagine them, like vapour, pouring into the grimy streets and the crevices of the city—meeting every boundary, filling every void. Your words embalm the wide glistening city. Your hair in the wind tangles across your face. This moment incased forever, as infinite as the night.

7

As the day comes forth the sun moves into Scorpio. You sit across from me in a mid-tier cafe, between a sandwich shop and a boutique clothing store. I tell you how I don't want to return to my hometown for the holidays, that I don't like it

there anymore, that I'm done reading Raymond Carver. You tell me about how you usually spend Christmas in Europe, amidst museums and fine artwork. And then a shift in the universe occurs. You seem newly out of place in this cramped, humid cafe. I think of all the lowdown places—all the places I have found myself apart of—the wind-battered duplex I lived in as a child, the gas station where my father worked. I think of all the filthy bars and underground clubs I frequent, although with decreasing regularity. I can't imagine you there, amidst the toil and decay. You speak, interrupting my thoughts. Your words are delayed reaching me, and you're already standing by the time I really hear you. You repeat yourself, saying "cigarette" like the word came with a unique satisfaction, like how one might over-pronounce "prerogative."

8

We walk from the cafe to the subway together. We pause outside the station, delaying our departure by one more smoke. You invite me to a party the following night. Your words are drowned out by the faint murmur of the subway tunnels. As we enter the station the noise gathers into music. A man sits on the ground in the station playing guitar and singing "Graceland." His notes bring freshness to the stagnant air, such that the graffitied walls seemed to fall away, and, if for only an instant, I could mistake these grimy tunnels for a wide open prairie field, like the wide open fields of my youth. "There is a girl in New York City who calls herself the human trampoline," he sings. You kiss me boldly in the station, before departing on the southward train. I bow my head the rest of the way home.

9

I am whole walking home with my groceries the next day. I selected the oranges and apples without the regular feelings of dread. I wonder no longer about what it might feel like to be cared for by somebody else.

10

I'm received with warm politeness at your friend's party that evening. You're in a silver slip-dress, with your hair styled in curls to the side. I can hardly believe it took me so long to see you how others must see you, radiating glamour from the inside out. You hand me a drink and introduce me to a myriad of people. As the night pours on the air in your friend's small apartment grows restrictive. I slip out and crouch in the mildey yellow stairwell. You find me later, I suppose you saw me leave. You sit down on the steps with me and bum a smoke. Even in the tepid light of this damp stairwell your blue eyes glow profuse. Behind them is sleek clean evolution. I belong lodged in strange places, in stairwells like this. You're half-pre-tending with me, experimenting with the children of the dust. You'll return to your white enlightened highway. I'm only the now. And on the stairwell I'm struck by the deadly lance of realization, like metal meeting blood, that every second ticks down until you find the real thing and leave.

11

I'm outside your apartment the next day. It's almost dusk and the street is incandescent with rush-hour traffic. I throw down my smoke as you appear in the doorway. I sit on your couch combing through your copy of *Notes from Underground*. You paint by the window, although the night soon forces you to stop. We begin to have sex on the couch, but abandon the pursuit early. We're at loose ends, unsure of how to proceed, and I begin to think of leaving, until you say you want to go dancing.

12

Our heels crescendo against the pavement as we arrive at the nightclub. The street is weeping neon, like stained-glass, colour runs from the muscular structure of the nightclub, down to the lowest point on the pavement, and pools around the shoes of the midnight crowd. Our cigarettes still smoking on the concrete's saturated pulp,

we enter the club. Our bodies glow red under the hallway light. We walk up a steep flight of stairs and dance for a while in a crowded dance-floor. Until, exhausted by the compressed oxygen, you motion for us to leave.

13

We stand outside, talking in short sentences that have little meaning. Your expression is unreadable, but I can feel the fire dissipating. You ask if I want to stay for another. I answer yes, although my lungs protest. Then you turn to face me, and ask if I want to leave.

14

I stare back into your opaque gaze. I hesitate and say “no” in way that sounds far too much like “yes.” You misunderstand me, but I’m not exactly sure how. This vagueness prevents me from attempting to correct it. Helplessly, I make an offhand joke instead, but it too gets lost in the air between us. As night nears its natural end, we throw down our smokes, and, under the red tavern lights, I move as though I am concerned with how the air might feel my skin.

15

We walk home together. The streets seem especially quiet without our voices. We reach your apartment and you turn to me. You say you think you’ll head up alone. You’re tired and it’s late. I mumble in accordance. You say “goodnight” and turn away. And just that easily you’re lost to me.

16

The next morning I expect to be in low spirits, but instead I find myself relieved. You were always too much for me. I felt it at the party and had my suspicions confirmed last night. The day passes; I don’t expect your call and it doesn’t come.

17

17

The next Monday comes in like a tide, bringing grey skies. From my bed I stare at the morning light on the wall across my room. I'm reminded of the second night, how warm this room looked in your presence, and how we were reduced to shadow, flickering, as evanescent as a flame, as ephemeral as smoke. I get up from the bed and head unhesitating for the balcony, where I crouch over my ashtray and stare out at the skyline, inhaling quickly in the frost. It comes back to me in-between the blurry outlines of the Aura and the Chelsea Hotel: the flicker, the moon, your blue eyes, and the guitar-player. The memory of our time together already scratched, like a vinyl, with nostalgia. These memories are lost, imbued with present-day emotion. There is no looking past the sadness of today; it obscures the clarity of the memory, like foam on the sea. I could disappear into your apartment, your world, your friends, your liquor, for only a night. But daylight would come. I'd crawl back to my life, and everything would be strangely the same. I go back inside and begin to get ready for work. My feelings changed as the day ripened. In time, I find myself wishing that the tide would come in and pull them out, and for all the world leave only you, as naked as the sea.

18

The street is strangely empty and quiet that night as I come home from work. The neon and concrete running together in the blur of the night. I glance up at the tall buildings above. I wonder: are there happy people behind those flaxen windows that shine out into the darkness? Do they glance out at the cold street and feel a twang of gratitude, that they have been saved from the having to walk among us wanderers?

19

I talk to Dylan about you the next day as we stand outside the bar where he works. This one feels different, I tell him. The world looks different after knowing you.

But it's all in my head, I insist, more to myself than to Dylan. He holds his cigarette between his thumb and his index finger and begins to tell me about his breakup with Monica. He shifts his weight back and forth, his leather shoes creasing as he folds his toes over in the cold. There is a level of breakup, he tells me, half-joking, that surpasses the need for scotch. I ask him what this kind of breakup calls for instead. At a certain point, he says, you give up on love, and start reading Proust.

20

I walk home depressed. I pause just a block from my apartment. I inhale more deeply than I have in weeks, holding the toxic fumes in my abdomen. My right hand shakes as I scroll through my call history and dial your number. Your voice is music through the receiver. And as we talk the world around me transforms. I'm lifted to your dimension, where reality is weightless.

21

We're walking together in the daylight, down a street where all the buildings are made of brick and the sun always seems to shine grey, as though through a filter. You tell me she has an old key to one of the libraries tucked away inside one of the neighbouring colleges from when she used to work there. You tell me how libraries soothe her in their mystic eternity, each one a universe, and within it a million smaller universes, bound in cloth and paper. Each book an urn of time and memory. These moments with you are like this, I think to myself. Ecstatic, self-contained flashes of newly-minted feeling. But these moments pass away into the grey vagueness of the past. The day rolls over into night, and the present twists into strange and unreliable death. We are foolish and weak beneath the monolith of time. But right now I am happy, with you, in the world. I feel a lightless joy, a rebirth beneath my flesh. That is this moment. And the most we can strive for, the best we can possibly imagine, is that, in some other universe, this moment is forever.



To the person whose flash went off during the Anne Carson lecture

Ellen Grace

I wish it was as easy as talking to pebbles and rocks, thinking of what they would do if they had hands.

I wish I could taste words when I suck on my fingertips. I mostly taste mint. I can't imagine anyone caring if this is true or not.

I wish I could read Layli Long Soldier, but there is a man on the subway who I am afraid is looking at me. It feels safer to type, like I am talking to someone. He wiped some dirt off the seat before he sat, and said "shit". When the voice said "Castle Frank", he exclaimed "Ha!".

I wish I didn't accumulate so much dirt every day. It makes me think of a girl who told me she changes her clothes immediately whenever she gets home to make sure she didn't get bedbugs from the subway. I am so scared of bedbugs.



Summer Daze

Morgan Murray



Fill Up the Empty

V.J. Hamilton

When Iris Lepinski walked into the elevator of her apartment building on a Tuesday afternoon, a young man in athletic garb, wearing his ball-cap backwards, was standing in the corner of the elevator. Minding his own business. He didn't nod when she got on. She didn't think twice about that; this was the big city. A grey-haired white woman, especially if she wore mouse-coloured clothes and unremarkable glasses, and didn't take up much space, was often not acknowledged – not just by young men but also by clerks and waiters and staff at the DMV. Behold the Cloak of Invisibility: some people wanted it; others had it thrust upon them.

Why wear a cap backwards, she wondered. Must be the fashion. I see it lots.

The young man was preoccupied; that was the sense she had as the elevator doors clanged shut. She, too, was preoccupied. Groceries, rent, blood pressure meds. As a freelancer, she constantly worried whether she could find a new client, now that she'd wrapped up the last project. Mainly, she lived inside her head, floating in a miasma of mantras and images from the memoirs she edited. Tales of inter-cine rivalry; secrets of unexpected genealogy; journeys to a land of milk and honey that turned out to be a con of blood and money. *Everybody has their story.*

The light flickered in the elevator, the floor juddered, the elevator started going again, and then it stopped. Irritation flitted into her day like a moth. She looked at the buttons above the door, the ones indicating which floor the elevator was at. The "sticky elevator" happened every couple of months. She glanced at the panel beside the door, where she had pressed "M" for main floor. There was a phone on a hook and written instructions beside it.

The young man jabbed the M button several times.

“It’ll get going again,” she said calmly. “It always does.” Iris was faintly amused that she felt so calm while the guy who took such pains to look cool was the anxious one.

The elevator stayed put. She began digging in her purse for her reading glasses when the elevator went dark.

“Now what, lady? Does it always go dark, too?”

“In April 2018, yes, it went dark for a couple minutes. Then it started again.” She surprised herself with the authoritative tone; she’d been there and was almost too late to deliver a friend’s eulogy. “Did you see what the number was?” she said, feeling her way to the phone.

“Yeah, seven.” His voice sounded less accusatory. More cooperative. Or was she just imagining this?

“Not the floor number,” she said. “The phone number.”

“Oh. 9-1-1, I guess.”

A light flashed; the young man had his cell phone out of his pocket and was shining it as a flashlight on the elevator phone. “Thank you,” she said.

There was no keypad; the phone was a direct line to ... wherever. The front desk, she would guess.

Sure wish we still had our full-time commissioner, she thought. Rocky was so protective of us all. That damned recession....

“Thanks; you can turn off your flashlight,” she said. “To conserve power. I’ll just wait on the line.”

“Nah. I want some light. I’ll call 9-1-1, lady. Faster that way.”

“Oh, right. Yes.” She kept the big curvy phone to her ear, listening to the faint hum. “Hey, I’ll race you.” By the light of his phone she could see his eyes roll at her little joke.

Good... you have a sense of humour.

The bored voice of a dispatcher quacked: “Emergency Services, what is the nature of your emergency?”

“Huh?” he said.

“Fire, ambulance, or other?”

“Other. I’m trapped in an elevator. Lights have gone out – ”

“There should be a telephone in the elevator...”

“That’s what we’re doing.” The young man stared at Iris, who still clutched the big retro receiver to her ear. “No one’s picking up.”

“Is anyone in immediate danger? State your name and address please sir.”

“Hang on, I’m passing you over,” he said, motioning to Iris. She stated her name and address, then handed his cell phone back.

“Please stay on the line...”

“How soon can you get us out?” he asked.

A message popped up on the cell phone and the man cursed. “I’m losing power – how long before someone comes to help?”

“You’re breaking up, sir. I cannot hear – ”

His phone went dead. The darkness was sudden and total, the only “light” being the after-image of the phone screen on her retina. Did her heart skip a beat?

“Whoa!” and “Wow.” They said these things simultaneously in muted voices, and she found that oddly reassuring.

“I’m Iris. You are...?”

“Derek. Hang on while I make some noise.”

He began to pound the walls and shout and scream. She put her hand over one ear and pressed the receiver harder into the other. She shrank into the phone corner while he shrieked and boomed against the door. She pictured the sound leaking out from the elevator to floor seven, reminding people there were folks in the elevator.

After a few minutes she yelled for quietness, saying she was getting a

headache. “I’m still on the line,” she added, “so don’t go ballistic!”

“Ballistic,” he said a few times, relishing the word.

I like that word, too.

“Let’s listen for them,” she said, and reminded him that the 911 dispatcher had taken their address. The silence lasted about a minute before he began thumping *shave-and-a-haircut*. “This darkness isn’t so bad,” she said when he paused. “It reminds me of the night sky.”

Wish I’d gone pee before leaving home.

“Huh. Reminds me of my psycho babysitter. Used to shut me in the god-damn closet.”

“That’s *terrible*. Really *terrible*,” she said. Never mind that she had her own horror story of being caught in a confined space, with cousins who walloped her. She blocked it.

“She fornicated in my mother’s bed – and I got blamed for it.”

“What a *horrible* babysitter.” She sensed she better get the mood changed.

“Hey, let’s think about something different ... do you want to hear a funny story?”

No response.

She started a joke about a hen that said, “book-book” and a frog that said, “Read it... Read it...”

“Lady, that is so lame.”

“I’m sorry. I just thought... Do you have a joke to share?”

“Nah, can’t think of nothing.”

She asked about favourite food and he interjected, “Look, I know what you’re trying to do. Fill up the empty with words. I don’t wanna play that game.”

“I just thought it’d make time go by...”

“They forgot us.” His voice sounded so definite, so hurt, so sulky – she knew he was speaking from experience.

She adopted a soothing tone. Her bladder was killing her. “Derek, I have

never ever heard of 9-1-1 not following through on a call.”

A thick silence fell and then she heard a sniff. Then another sniff. A great dry wracking sob wrenched from his corner.

That nasty babysitter did a real number on you, she thought.

“May I pat your back?” she said. He did not answer but when he sobbed again, she tentatively – with thudding heart – stretched out and patted his back. She made soothing noises.

His back was broad and hard and warm – no wonder, after all his pounding and emoting. *He could hit me. Nonsense. Why would he do that? Why do young men beat people up? If you offend them. If you remind them of former sadistic babysitters. If you witness them cry... Stop it. Block these thoughts. Radiate serenity.*

Her hand squeezing the receiver grew sweaty. “Hello? Hello? Anybody there?” she said into the receiver. She thought she heard two clicks.

He might beat me up just for entertainment. Or practice. Or he might rape me. Stop it. Block these thoughts. Radiate serenity.

“Do you mind if I say a small prayer?” she asked.

“Go ahead.”

“You’re welcome to join in... no pressure.” She surprised herself by remembering the Lord’s Prayer. It had been decades since she’d last said it.

He said the last two lines along with her. Silence fell again. “Do you take confession?” he said.

“Oh no.” She chuckled. Sometimes people thought she was a nun; she had that drab earnest look about her. “I’m not with any church. But if there’s something you’d like to get off your chest, go ahead, say it.”

“Will you tell anyone? When we get out?”

“No, why should I?” Her receiver arm was starting to cramp up.

“Like, if I said I murdered someone, you could go to police.”

She paused. Had she heard correctly? “No – I’m *not* a tattletale. A friend

did tell me something very bad once – and I promised never to report. ‘Sealed in the vault,’ I said.”

“What did he do?” Derek asked.

“I’m not going to tell!” she said in exasperation.

“So, if I told you I murdered someone, you wouldn’t tell.”

“Look, general advice, if you murdered someone, don’t *ever* tell *anybody*.”

“But if I really needed to tell...”

“Get a notebook,” Iris said, surprising herself again with authority. “Write down what you did, why you did it. How it felt – before, during, and after.” She paused. “Then write someone else’s name on the notebook.”

He laughed.

She swapped the receiver to her other arm and the silence grew. “They say: every saint has a past, every sinner has a future.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“Everybody is a mix of good and bad.” Her arm felt totally unnatural, so she switched back to the way it was. “I help people write memoirs. Including ex-felons.”

“*Shee-yat*, lady. That’s cool,” he said. “Like, anyone I know? Any crimes I’ve heard of?”

She thought. “Maybe... War crimes from the Serbo-Bosnian conflict.... And then the hit and run – that one on the Friendship Bridge?”

“They don’t sound like my crime.”

Iris felt creeped out, remembering the client with the war crimes memoir. He had written the memoir in prison and planned to publish it under his new name, Charles Smith. On release, he got a job delivering produce. Cilantro and kale, verdant bursts of earth’s bounty. She had lost sleep over that memoir – ensuring grammatical correctness for disturbing passages about slicing off breasts and “opening wombs” of pregnant women. What haunted her still was the man’s eerie demeanour while

discussing that chapter.

Thoughts began to roar in her. Her fist crammed the receiver tightly against her ear, creating pain to force herself out of the mental rut. Then her bladder took over. She had no choice but to pee, just let it run down her legs.

Block Charles.

Oh God, no. She realized Derek was talking, had been talking. *Pay attention*, she told herself. *He will be angry if you shut out his words.* She didn't want to hear the next part – about how he had lain in wait for the dirty suck cheating on his girlfriend – and beaten him to a pulp. The satisfying crunch of knuckle on nose. The thud of body on concrete. The feeling of dropping a knee on someone's gut and feeling them rupture. She felt dizzy and light-headed.

I should sit down. Wait, I am sitting down. In my own pee.

"You're right," she said weakly. "That's a different kind of crime, all right." Her brain churned. Caught with wet pants in a dark elevator with a stranger who has just revealed a heinous crime. The pause began to lengthen.

If I'm silent too long, he'll think I'm judging him.

"You sound relieved," she said.

"I am," he said. "Huh. Just telling it to you." He gave a deep sigh. "Wish I'd told this sooner."

"We carry our guilt in different ways." Long pause. "Like me – I killed a kitten." She heard a small *tsk* and felt oddly gratified.

"What, by accident?"

"No. Just to – to make myself do it. When I was fifteen. In my nihilist phase." Years later, she'd read *Crime and Punishment* and implicitly understood Raskolnikov killing someone, just to see what it was like.

"*You?*" She could almost see the sneer on his face.

"Hey, please don't tell anyone. My grandkids would disown me!" She had no grandkids; but she wanted him to feel she had given away a secret that could

damage her reputation. She had to keep quiet about his secret; he must keep quiet about hers. Mutually assured destruction.

He began: “You killed —?”

Suddenly the lights blazed. The elevator jerked and began to move. Derek’s words hung in the air, the thought forever incomplete. When the door opened, three people in E.M.T. vests rushed toward them. Wobbly-legged and crimson with shame over wet pants, Iris stood up too fast and began to heave. Derek got out and melted away. The E.M.T.s took her blood pressure and put her in for overnight observation.

* * *

The next day, when Iris Lepinski entered the lobby of her decrepit apartment building, she was wearing a hat and sunglasses, purchased at the hospital gift shop. She saw Derek before he saw her. Despite new accessories, she suspected he would recognize her by her build, so she backed out immediately.

She headed to the café across the street and waited two hours until she saw him leave the building. Ten minutes later, she returned home, pulse pounding, taking stairs instead of elevator.

She tried to have an ordinary evening – leftover pizza and a movie.

Why so many detective and zombie and true crime shows?

She watched several cooking shows but nonetheless had trouble going to sleep. She had to leave the lights on – not just Derek and his horrible babysitter but also her nasty cousins were waiting in the shadows.

She got out of bed and put on a meditation recording. She tried to block all traces of the surreal conversation in the elevator. His confession. She had no details about when or where the incident occurred; she didn’t even know Derek’s last name. Fragments flew back at her, stupidities like giving her real name twice. The hen and the frog! And her own confession. She still felt sick about it.

Perhaps she should call up Charles. Ask him how his book was selling. Ask him if he was working on volume two of his memoir. Ask him to drop by with some produce and his next manuscript and wait around a little to have a word with the boy.



Dark Blue

Ellen Grace

I look for her face in everyone I see. This is true of the following people:

The mythic ancestor

The girl who kissed you last

It's not really dreaming, not broad or expansive or full of hope. It's a secret yes or no, a hidden I should have and if I don't, I will next time, because I have to

Darkness hiding teeth stuck together

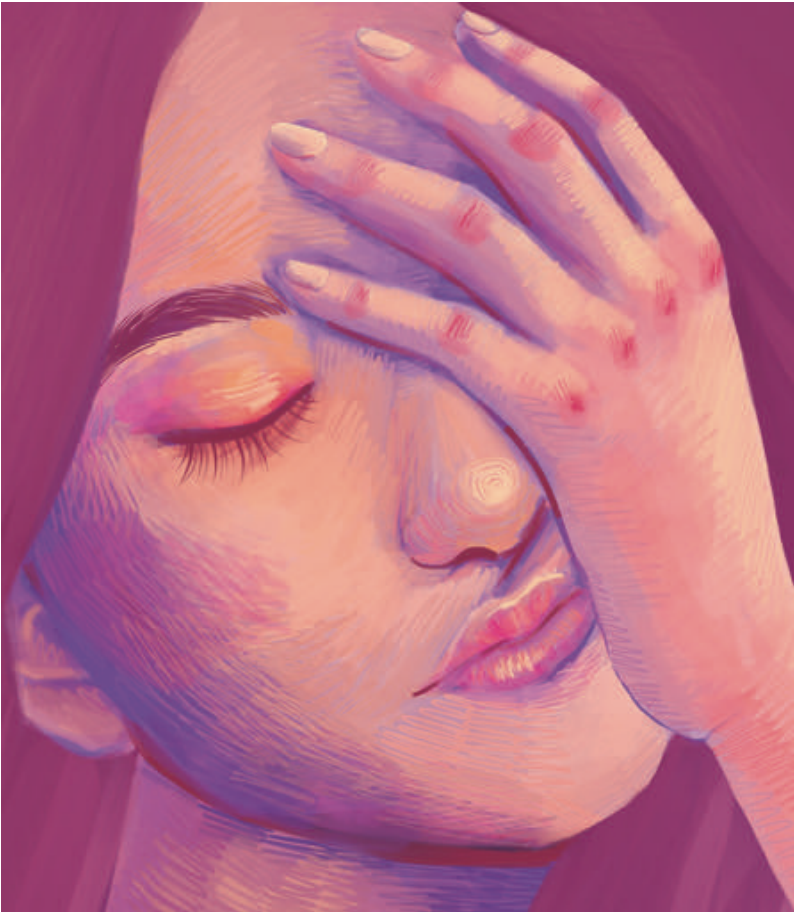
I read poems and imagine that we would stop and kiss in between each line where no one could see us

I want a spell like that, where I no longer think in terms of loneliness vs the divine

Dark blue blue with gray pink

Thinking you need a hand behind your back

I want you to know that you're what I think about when I'm trying not to laugh.



too much

Marie Gamboa



Ghost

Katharina Davoudian

She feigned her death. She feigned my own. Made us both disappear. To her I'm a buried corpse, a ghost, a drowned memory. There's no we, no me, no identity. I am, we are, an ending.

To me she is or was; to me she is a question; to me she is no answer; to me she is and was; she—

Is a ghost. But she wasn't one before? I remember her like running water. As water leaves its fingerprints on the skin of stones. As time leaves our friendship into mere memory. The riverbed is dry, but its former presence can be seen; if I keep adding water, will it breathe again?

But I'm a raindrop coaxing the desert to become a sea. I'm not seen, not heard, not felt; I bury myself deep. Deeper and deeper; each call, each text, each birthday wish, each Christmas gift, each hello; deeper and deeper I go. The raindrops aren't seen, nor heard, nor felt; they evaporate in thinning air.

Hello? Without new ways to say hello, I repeat myself. I lose myself. I talk to myself. It's a one-on-none conversation, a message sent to a lost destination. Where do my words go? They die, suffocate, drown in hope and hurt. They tie my tongue away; make me choke on uncertainty.

Hello? Even without senses, I know ghosts taste bitter. I know my feet follow a lovely former river. I tell myself the water's echo is a mere illusion. I remind myself that I'm not lost, that a desert can't be blooming. I can't help abandoned riverbeds. Can't help endings.

Hello?



FATIMEH

Uliana Hlynchak

It was a glorious Sunday morning. Traditionally we would get together with our friends for a coffee. Five of us were sitting at a table, including a newlywed couple. They shared how they met and what led to their decision to tie the knot. Then everybody started throwing ideas about the necessity of the marriage institution and marriage itself: when do you really know that you are with the right person, how do you know this is real love and not just temporary romance, why do some people call it a trap and others bliss, why do some never wish to marry and others do it more than once...

Then my husband told his story about marriage. I have heard this story before and knew he considered it funny. He's in the dry cleaning supply business, and once in a while visits his clients. He knew this particular client for many years and he usually visited him once a year in the Fall.

As Fari entered the shop, his client was at the cash register.

"Ah, Fari, how are you?"

"Long time no see, how is business?"

"Business is great, my friend. So great I was able to get married in the summer... Waited long for this, you know. I'll be 59 next month. Want to meet my wife?"

Fari thought he was inviting him to visit his home and started shaking his head. He was a germaphobe and visiting peoples' homes and moreover - eating there - was mental torture for him.

"Come, come my friend... Follow me," as he turned around to go to the back of the store, he removed the cigarette butt from his mouth with his yellow fingers and threw it in the corner.

Fari followed his client. There was a small partition at the back of the store separated by a curtain. As his client pushed the curtain to the side, Fari saw a daybed, a little table with a chair, and a bookcase full of English grammar and literature books. At the table there sat a beautiful young girl, with black eyes of a gazelle and jet black hair. She immediately stood up and bent her head down to not look the men directly in the face. But Fari could see her impatience to study their new visitor; soon her eyes and then her face lifted and stared directly at him.

“Fatimeh, my child, this is Fari, my old friend and our supplier. This, this, and this,” he pointed to the products, “All comes from his factory. You understand?” Then he started speaking with her in their native language that Fari could not understand. Afterwards he turned to Fari and said, “I’m teaching her English, and she also started taking English classes.”

“Nice to meet you,” there was an uncomfortable pause. He was thinking how he should address her, “Madam!”

Fatimeh bowed. The curtain fell from her husband’s hand, and her world again became a small partition in the back of the dry-cleaning store.

Fari slapped his client on the back, smiling, “Great job, my man. Congratulations! May the newlyweds live a long and happy life!”

He checked the equipment; they chatted about business and Fari left. Fatimeh’s beautiful face followed him for a couple days. He thought about her sitting there all alone in that little corner, reading English books, studying English grammar. With time, the memory of Fatimeh faded.

A year passed. The time came again for Fari to visit his client. Arriving at the place brought back the memory of the beautiful Fatimeh.

“Hello, my friend, how have you been?” his client greeted him with a grin. His teeth were yellow and a heavy smell of tobacco was present around him. Fari hated the smell.

“I’m great, how is business?”

“Can’t complain. It’s doing well. In fact, so well, that I got married this spring. Come meet my wife...”

Fari wanted to remark that he already met her, but thought perhaps his client forgot that he introduced his Fatimeh to him last year. In the back of the store was a familiar curtain. Its colour faded and one corner became greasy from the constant touching of a hand.

The familiar space opened before Fari, where the daybed, table, chair, and books lay. The only thing which was added was a small TV on the wall. The girl stood up and Fari opened his mouth to say, “Nice to see you again,” but then he gasped and closed it without uttering a sound. It was a different girl. She looked sheepishly at the visitors. Fari smiled and said, “Hi”.

“What do you call her?” he addressed his client.

“Fatimeh! I call her Fatimeh! Isn’t she beautiful?” and he let the curtain fall from his hand.

“My friend,” said Fari, “I don’t recognise her, she definitely changed a lot.”

“Ah, no, no... The first one was no good. The first Fatimeh ran away. Very ungrateful, very ungrateful. I let her go to school, English, you know. She wanted to learn how to drive. I thought it would be good for business, you know. One day she goes to pick up clothes from clients and never returns. Very ungrateful. This one’s different, very smart, and very gentle. No English, but helps me with the clients at the front. You know, she picked up some words, phrases....”

As Fari left the store, the image of the first Fatimeh surfaced in front of his eyes. He wondered where that beautiful girl was and what became of her in this vast foreign country so far away from her home.

Another year passed quickly. This time it was a beautiful August afternoon when Fari went to see his old client.

“Hello, my friend,” his client greeted him as soon as he opened the door to the store.

“How’s business?” it was Fari’s standard greeting.

“Great, my friend, great. My customers are very loyal. We give them a good service. I’m doing very well. You know, so well that I was able to get married recently.”

Fari raised his eyebrows, but right away remembered last year’s Fatimeh, and Fatimeh from the year before, and decided not to ask questions.

“Come, I’ll show you my beautiful wife,” his client grinned and rubbed his hands.

They went to the back of the store. There was no curtain anymore. Through the opening to the partition Fari saw a young woman sitting on the bed, a small boy sitting beside her. She was reading to him.

“Fatimeh, my wife, come meet my friend!”

The woman stood up; the boy grabbed her hand. They remained standing there, smiling at the visitor. Fari noticed that the partition remained the same, except that the TV was missing from the wall, the bookcase stood with empty shelves, and a couple of toy cars were gathered neatly on the table.

“Hello,” said Fari. Wondering whether he should ask anything about the child, “Beautiful family you have, my friend!” He decided not to ask questions.

“Come, I explain,” his client put his hand on Fari’s shoulder, “You see, the second wife, Fatimeh, remember?”

“Yes.”

“She didn’t go to school, and I didn’t teach her to drive. She picked up some English at the front of the store. One day I sent her to buy lunch, and she never returned. I looked for her, and the police looked. They could not find my second wife anywhere. So, this one, this Fatimeh, I decided – no English, no driving, no helping with the clients. And she already has a child; her uncle, you know, forced himself on her back home, so I don’t need to worry that she’ll run away, and the boy, little Hassan, he’s so smart. He’ll grow up and start helping his papa at the store.

Then we will find him a wife....”

Fari left. The next time he came to visit his client, the store was vacant. He went next door. It was a convenience store.

“What happened to the dry cleaning next door?” Fari asked the clerk.

“It closed a while ago...”

“Did they relocate? Do you know where to find the owner?” his client still owed him some money.

“I have no idea what happened to the store, but I know the guy had some marriage troubles... Anyway, he’s in jail now.”

Fari finished his story at the same time as a beautiful couple entered the coffee shop. Fari’s eyes immediately checked the woman from head to toe. Then he looked at the man. He was handsome, beautifully built. Fari looked at me. My glance hit the table. I was not allowed to look at men. I was the Fatimeh in our family.



Dear Ptolemy,

Radmila Yarovaya

Holding me up to the starry firmament,
you used me to challenge the gods
- daring to strike if eternity was more immaculate than my beauty -

Skin of alabaster,
hair of wine dark sea,
floating on honey from the cyriot breeze,
I was the sole worshipper at the altar of deserters,
never meant for the settled life.

While you were off resurrecting gods,
I was burning temples to the ground.

While you were ripping truth out with the root of tongues,
I was ear to the prophets.

While you were slaughtering nations,
I dissolved in the sky - somewhere between Cepheus and Lyra

Being a haetera requires a special set of skills -

to be

lover,

sister,

mother

to everyone

and no one.

Touch,

hold,

comfort,

and never let them see the woman

beneath the skin of a deity

so they too can feel like they are worthy of the divine.

Bestowing ancient knowledge on the unworthy,

kissing the feet of champions,

walking without burning through the world of men.

A goddess needs followers to survive

and I mould myself

into something worthy of worship

until I'm nothing but a reflection of all of your vices

canonized through piety of me

until I open my mouth but only your desires fall out.

I am nothing but
a woman, forced to beatify myself to survive.
I am blood soaking earth with the will of the moon.
I am allium - purple wildfire spreading across mesopotamian plains,
reduced to the sensual through the sharp smell
of sweat on horse's hind,
of leather sandals after walking 40 plethrons
behind the train of the conqueror.

I am the witness to your lusts, hopes, and savageries
the heir to all of your sins sending my voice to echo through time.
I am the lone survivor of the empire of gods.

When your world burns
I hope you think of me,

Thais



Of the things I am becoming, a poem

Bronwyn Garden-Smith

of medium length and no great talent, a glint
of light from the scale of a snake, a peel
of an orange that a little girl uses for perfume, a flail
of the leftmost tentacle of a camouflaged octopus, a swipe
of a hand that takes a bandage out of the wrapper, a splash
of a droplet from an icicle onto a prized red hat, a clench
of a fist belonging to a wife who has had enough, a breath
of warm air fogging an actor's compact mirror, a taste
of the last spoonful of soup from a mother's pot, a drip
of drool from a girl's mouth as she dreams in vivid colour, a crunch
of a high-heeled shoe on a discarded receipt for citrus fruit, a thump
of a damp rag hitting the table a waitress makes clean, a hiss
of a candle wick that has been lit for ritual purposes, a grasp
of a hand in another as two best friends dance, a grain
of sand that is inside the clam but is not yet a pearl, a trace
of every woman who came before



American Psycho

Cheryl Cheung



Quantum Sparks in the Tabernacle

Josie Di Sciascio-Andrews

The light enters and I remember who I am, why he is here.
Here in this room, I have bounced from particle to wave
Then back again. This room is my life. Contained in it
The theory of everything in my allotted chronology.

This space. So Hadron collider-like, collapses the observed
Into the equation of myself. Light bound in materiality
Of skin, armour, gold-prayer beads and knives to stave off
Threat. It could be you or anyone, sitting on this death-bed baldachin.

Curtain pulled back around the altar by the white
Clothed arm of an angelic nurse, comforting us
In our final hour. Gabriel announcing our birth,
No sooner warning us of The Second Coming.

Here is the world summed up. Born to its unending
Legacy, in the blink of an eye, faster than light
We arrived to it unwittingly, this crux in space-time.
Like meteors and stars, irrupting onto the stage,

Clumsy and unknowing, our form bursting forth
Through water -slapped by a midwife's hand to tick
For years like a clock in the tedium of an antiseptic room.
Our body, mere measurement of Pi -Vitruvian mystery

Encompassed in ratio of circumference and diameter
Squared -alive at the centre of this cathedral tent.
This is my tabernacle for the sun.
I am holier than holy nothing. Just another packet

Of life quanta propped up on a theatre of shrouds-
Re-enactment of sacrificial goat immolated to the idol
Of the day. See the damask cloths. See my pale face. Its halo
Cap. Beyond the nave, up in the chancel pulpit.

I am the quintessential incarnate book -a rebus
Of words -the calculus theorem solved, with zero sum.
Alla luce ausurum, ut partier ab pulvis.
Animalia of tails and fangs -vestigial appendages hound,

Bewilder us & biological hormones pulse
On towards our own dark, doomsday clocks.
Now here, we drop our shoe at the sound of twelve.
Irrupt in reverse in a rattle of breaths,

Blue domino effect of genetic cards. Red heart
Folding back the abacus of us. Each switch
Turning off the trillion suns we believed were us:
Segments of light made manifest between two points.

On this canvas, expanded equivalence between Gabriel
And the Christ -in azure, copper ochres & carmine,
Our genome's laid bare -mere script of DNA
Chromosomes of anonymous humanity in a never ending chain.

This room is a pop-up book of you and me
Replete with everything we saw -gathered
In time, compressed to two dimensions now.
Still reel frame of our near-death, life in review.

Reptilian, then mammalian -untidy & holographic
Selves inch in within the data of our evolution, although
We sweep the evidence under the bed, they are born,
They lust, they reproduce, they die.

And while we dream and reason, the monkey beasts
Emerge to tempt us back to hunt and gather our survival,
Even as Jesus, fallen from his cross, now enters, lance
In hand, to claim us from the sacristy back to his tomb.

I am the circular cell and the infinite wall is closing in.

** lines in Italics from 'The Watcher' by Jorge Luis Borges -'Selected Poems' Penguin Classics, p.72*
This poem was inspired by Bosch's painting "Death of a Miser"



On infidelity, cancer, and loss.

Cheryl Cheung

I've not had an ultrasound for a little more than one year now. COVID-19 has halted most non-elective medical procedures, among them small surgeries and scans for low-risk patients. I am in a limbo: I am both low and high risk. Calculating risk demands an understanding of probability based on past events. There is not quite enough that is known for anyone to estimate my risk. No one would have expected my mother to have fallen ill in her mid-thirties, for her to have discovered stage-three cancer with no family history of this disease.

It was my unknowing of any risk or of any danger that saved me from the terror of her agony then. I was seven and I thought her being at the hospital was ordinary, that she would be home after the surgery. It was my father's affair that pained me most then, as the breadcrumbs he left suggested something more sinister. The Skype calls, the Facebook profile, the cold tone in which he spoke to my recovering mother commanded a new fate in which the good, familiar TV-sitcom family will have no place. And I was right. And that was what was most terrifying.

What would have been far more terrifying, as I had said many times over, is an alternate reality in which my mother did die. If she had died, I am not sure—quite frankly—that I would have been kept. My father fell into something much more than a midlife crisis. His affair-turned-into-long-distance-relationship turned into a secret that revealed his indifference toward me. Eventually, he admitted over the phone, on one of the last calls I ever shared with him after he returned to Hong Kong, that I was no one to him, that he doesn't know me.

I thought then that it was good enough for me to have my try at dying, that the genetic roulette I played on repeat ought to place me on an operating table right then. If my turn to face death commanded the same semblance of attention that my mother's chance with fate received, then I have become a nobody. I needed the confirmation, for I had no notion of the probability of my existence still being of interest to him.

Just as my mother was replaced with a shiner, bouncier, newer Cool Girl, I have since been replaced by a better, easier, more convenient son. I am old enough to lead an independent life. Self-sufficient as I am, never will I be divorced from the power my illness holds over me.

I am not yet ill, for the tumors are dormant, the doctors think. These fibrous lumps, fibroadenoma, are common among girls. But it is not common to have so many, and the voracity with which the lumps in my mother's breasts ate away at her tissue beg for greater attention.

It is not the prospect of a death that drives me toward pursuing everything. Rather, it is the preciousness of life. It is the knowledge of a life I had led and lost to my father's negligence that inspires the resolution to lead each moment knowing it is my last. Each passing moment is in and of itself the last of its kind. I am thankful to have found in you a great companion and muse. You've taught me a kind of security that I've come to understand as the byproduct of the non-transactional stuff of being in love.



ALWAYS AN EVERGREEN

Veronica Spada

Every time an evergreen. Every time a woman in a parka blowing warmth onto her hands beside a TV set on the shoulder of the road. Every time a billboard at the On The Run about life insurance and an unhappy man with no story, another foot in the snow that leaves a hole in the ground like a half-eaten moon. Every time, it's a mutilated stag on the byway giving me the eye, and a boy I have always known waiting at the station, chewing his McDougle with an open mouth, conflicted teeth. Over his head, the posters spell out an Oscar Wilde witticism that is so hackneyed I want to smash a window and make a scene.

All the television programs end at midnight, and there are no theatres. There are no libraries. On the wall, there is a painting of abstract emotions. In the drawer, there is a Bible. There are people who I have always known that will not wave unless I wave first.

Every shadow has a lifespan. You have a chandelier like the solar system that came from the neighbour's garbage. There is a street without lights and a white-out storm three days after the New Year's Eve party. A polluted stack of snow is shovelled to the corner. All the moon pours onto the plain and makes it like the blue-white dome of a snow globe. Every child will scream of road hockey, and the barns with ivy braids and boarded walls will die.

Always an evergreen.

They don't have pictures at the drive-in anymore. There is talk about a library, someday soon. For now, it's winter boots on a tray of melted snow. An unploughed street like a polished bone. A cat on the windowsill, a cold pot of coffee, and a mug in the sink that someone's mouth has touched.

Come inside. The tea just boiled.



Eros (A Mimicry)

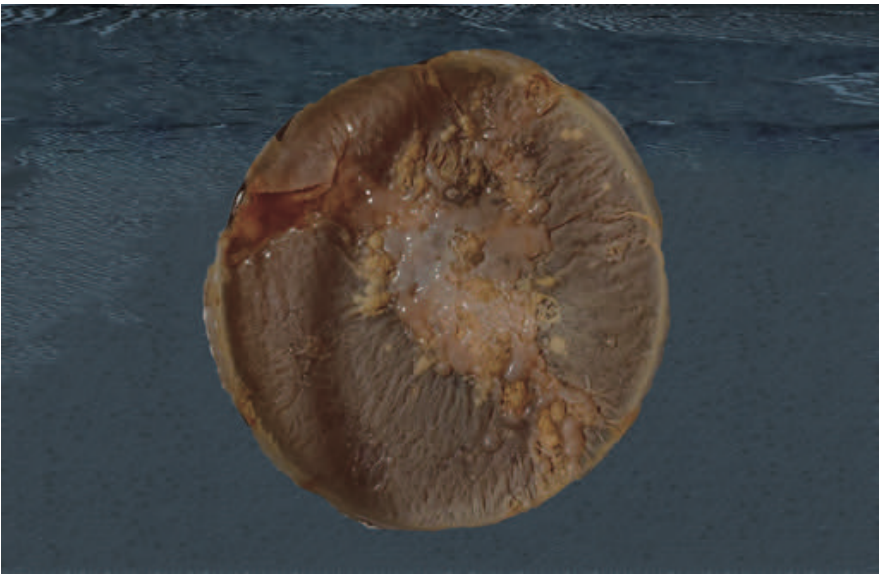
Amory S. Zhao

The greenhouse is collapsing in slow motion. The last windowpane had shattered during a summer storm. The paint has been eroded so that its metal skeleton now seethes at the sky. The ground is rank with weeds and its gardener lay in slumber beneath the dense vegetation. Her body intermingles with countless roots as it wraps around her like a cocoon— as if she could emerge from the ground so that loveliness could seize the garden once again.

A butterfly flutters to rest on a creeping thistle and indulges itself in its nectar, grown from the chest cavity of the gardener. For a moment, the butterfly is encumbered by the weight of human memories. For a moment, the butterfly catches a glimpse of a young woman as she bursts through the glass door of an exuberant greenhouse. Her face seems the exquisite work of a dollmaker— sharp jawlines yet soft cheeks— a battle between the feminine and the masculine. Her mellow laugh bounces between panes of glass, a melody fit for a nymph. She glides through the field of peonies with her gown trailing behind her, a fairy queen attended by her obedient servant. All other semblances of beauty are but a mimicry of her. She pauses in front of the butterfly, and for a moment, the insect dares to stare into the divine through the eyes of the gardener. Their gazes collide mid-air and meet but for a fleeting second— but a second is enough in any other plane of existence that surpasses ordinary observations. The brief glimpse conveys more sentiments than one could ever hope to speak out loud in words. It speaks of a fruitless desire, barren amidst the lush garden. It screams of choiceless grief that pricks and tortures the flesh until one is driven to shear that part of themselves that feels and is felt. It is a tenderness that still pulsates through the ruins, despite the encroachment of neglect and obscurity.

A sunbeam pierces through the broken stain glass and bathes the butterfly in crimson light, like the fire that once burned through the garden. The flames slither up the metal skeleton, an all-consuming demon as smokes escape from broken windows. The peonies withered under its heated grasps and fell prostrate to the ground, its nectars having been sapped by the savage plunder. The callous cackle of the fire echoes within the garden, a fervid force of cruelty that ravages all things delicate and beautiful. The realm of true love is forever lost— reduced to a myth of the supernatural— and beauty may never flow from its entryway again. The gardener perished with the flowers, sprawled out amongst the charred peonies that once reminded her of her own humanity. She never even tried to run, preferring the fiery inferno to the perpetual misery of yearning for something that could never be.

Abandoning the flower, the butterfly soars over the garden in search of a shady grove. At the edge of the greenhouse, a peony begins to blossom.



Skin

Ada Bierling



I Remembered Myself at the Altar to Barbara McClintock

Caitlin McKenzie

A geneticist knows corn is cursed to stand still. It runs co-evolutionary races with no legs.

All this recorded in the soil it buries its children beneath.

A plant cannot flee from:

Burning drought

Racing thoughts

Depleted nutrient sources

The heaves of wet uncertainty

Parasites

A lack of community

Its genetic structure must leap without motion. The corn will transpose itself a red kernel or a manufactured sweetness. I am a magician with jumping genes too. The winds fumbling fingers cannot snap me, though I continue to dance with its destruction. My stalk is thicker than the last time I stood still and there is variability in my every cell.



mmsik。

Tammy Yu

Why are you writing white on white paper
Poems for eyes bigger than yours

my headvoice
flows
so naturally
in words
not my own

who was my father
what was his last name

His first name?

yes his last name

what was my first name

what was my name
before school
taught me how to spell it

why do you listen to cha siu
more than you listen to me

when i try to call out for you
my lips get stuck
like mmmm
like the vowel that follows will tear you away from me

m

o

t

h

e

r

when they ask me
where i come from
i remember
how i lost
the muscle
that made me
yours.



The Sun

Rion Levy

From time to time

I find myself running
out
of
breath
as I flee from this tip
of an invisible hill down to the
belly & bowels of the world
where I just keep on pacing as
I do up here only I feel I can breathe
better
for the air is so much clearer
where you can drown &
cry &
scream &
no one will ever
blink.

I trot along the sand & butts & wooden docks

& patrol the waters that look out
onto nowhere the Bog monster might
swim to
& I am anxious to flee from
this forgotten land that hovers & breathes
down
my
godforsaken
tongue

Chastise me I dare you!

I hop over your pathetic excuse for a
fence & dance platonically with the ghost
of the person I would have
been if I didn't grow up
too soon. As we waltz,
a lamppost, needed,
flickers on, into existence,
as we fade out of it with every
breath bringing us further from
the image the night will take
& passersby fail to sense the
remarkable smell of despair oozing from close by

we are all drunk anyway!

& the senses register them the same.

Our lives are flashes of endless

cocks endless

balls whiskey

gum spit &

rage endless

lust through windows to

nowhere.

It's cold & the post

will wink off as the dawn

penetrates the sky

uninvited

I didn't even

see the

moon.



If I Could Give You the Moon

Morgan Murray



churn

Adam Zivojinovic

there are mothers, children, and men
smashed into the mud and yoked,
hair shorn, held prostrate by charlatans
who pour mighty words into their ears –
the words of benevolence,
apologias for the machines of progress
that mangle and swallow and
to whom these people are an inconvenience.
their mouths are held shut.
thrashing, they sedate themselves
with visions of providential vengeance,
delayed but mighty,
a promise broken
as their bones are crushed
to powder and scattered
into molten steel and glass,
a sacrament from which the new world is made.

then, genesis.
amid the expansive quiet
and upon a concrete lot,
beneath a rusty sky
where wisps
are the last clues
of old fires,
the future arrives.

once glistening in the distance,
it is lustreless now.
equilibrium returns,
hardly better or worse than before.
the old convulsions are memorialized,
gawked at with disbelief
by people standing on bones.
boredom and unease germinates.
emancipated from the ecstasies of violence,
there is irritation and impatience and nowhere to go.
the world is too small.
little tremors at first,
barely perceptible,
and then a quake:
the world will convulse again.
you can't escape it.
no dreamscape can restrain it.
give up and hide inside yourself.



Kindness

Yasmine Shelton

Don't expect that, in due time, I'll be kind.

I am miles below ground;

and I only think of myself at this time of year.



Contributors

Ada Bierling is an artist, curator, and writer working on the territory of the Haudenosaunee, Anishinaabe, and Neutral peoples (Cambridge ON). They spend most of their time these days walking along the Grand River. Keep up with their work on instagram @talkinglaughingloving.

Adam Zivojinovic is a writer who writes things. Sometimes these things are good, but not always.

Amory S. Zhao is a student at the University of Toronto. Her prose attempts to conjure the beautiful and the romantic.

Brandon McCarthy is a Newfoundland-born, Toronto-based poet and prose writer. He is currently attending Sheridan College where he is completing his degree in Creative Writing & Publishing. To date his poems have appeared in print or online with Gravititas, Savant-Garde, and The Great Lakes Review.

Bronwyn Garden-Smith is really happy to be alive. She is a fourth year undergraduate studying Psychology, Disability Studies and English at the University of Toronto. She is foremost interested in thinking up a better world. When she studies science, she dreams of poetry. When she writes poetry, it is a science. She writes like an indexical mark, fleshily, and likes that language can kiss your cheek while cutting like a knife. She writes

about bodies, power, relationality, and the infinite strangeness of being alone in one's mind.

Caitlin McKenzie (shey/they) is a queer neurodivergant poet and collage artist based out of Barrie, ON. Her work can be seen in publications such as Pink Plastic House Magazine, The Northern Appeal, and Aurora Mag. You can find more of her work at her own tiny Instagram zine @there-memberingroom.

Cheryl Cheung is a Toronto and Bay Area-based political researcher with a focus on digital communications. She is pursuing a bachelor of arts at the University of Toronto as a political science specialist and American studies minor. Her thought and research on the intersection between political communication and voter mobilization are informed by classical thinkers such as Plato and Hobbes. She believes in the preservation of negative liberties over the guarantee of positive liberties.

Ellen Grace is a writer and artist currently completing the last semester of her degree in literature and critical theory at the University of Toronto. Her academic research focuses on the intersection of transhumanist thought and disability studies. She is Co-Editor-in-Chief of Victoria College's student newspaper, The Strand, and has published several pieces of creative non-fiction in places like Haloscope mag, Back of House magazine, various Strand magazines, and Speciwomen. Her collage art has also been featured in Rookie mag. You can find her on instagram @ellengraces.

Jaclyn Pahl currently studies English Literature and Cinema Studies at the University of Toronto. She has previously been published in Montreal Writes.

Josie Di Sciascio-Andrews is a poet, author, teacher and the host & coordinator of the Oakville Literary Cafe Series. Her new upcoming collection with Mosaic Press, 2021 is *Meta Stasis*. Her book of poems *Sunrise Over Lake Ontario*, was launched in 2019. Her previous poetry publications include: *Sea Glass*, *The Whispers of Stones*, *The Red Accordion*, *Letters from the Singularity* and *A Jar of Fireflies*. Josie's poetry has been shortlisted for the Malahat Review's Open Season Award, Descant's Winston Collins Prize, The Canada Literary Review, the Eden Mills Literary Contest, and the Henry Dummond Poetry Prize. Her poetry has won first place in *Arboreal* Anthology Contest of The Ontario Poetry Society and in *Big Pond Rumours* Literary E-Zine. Some of her poems feature on The Niagara Falls Poetry website. One of her pieces was included by Priscila Uppal in *Another Dysfunctional Cancer Poem Anthology*, Mansfield Press, in 2018, rated by *Chatelaine Magazine* as one of the best Canadian poetry books of 2018. Josie is the author of two non-fiction books: *How the Italians Created Canada* (the contribution of Italians to the Canadian socio-historical landscape) and *In the Name of Hockey* (a closer look at emotional abuse in boys' sports.) Josie teaches workshops for The Griffin Prize's Poetry in Voice and for Oakville Galleries. She writes and lives in Oakville, Ontario.

Kaila Gallacher is a published poet and writer. Her writing has appeared in The Soapbox Press Anthologies "Light" and "You've Gone Incognito" and in the upcoming Anthology "Force Fields" by Perennial Press. Her poetry has also been featured in *Lucent Dreaming* and the *Northern Appeal*. She is currently studying the

Humanities and Creative Writing.

Katharina Davoudian is an artist, writer, and a Class of 2021 graduate of the University of Toronto. She is the Editor-in-Chief of the online magazine, Vinci (vincimag.com). Her work can be found on katharinadavoudian.com.

Marie Gamboa is a third-year undergraduate student at the University of Toronto majoring in Christianity & Culture and minoring in English and French. She paints, drinks a lot of Earl Grey tea, and can't keep her succulents alive.

Meghan Butcher is a first year classical piano student at UofT. Though her greatest love is music, she's had a long-standing affair with creative writing. Her work has been recognized by literary journals and non-profits scattered across Canada. Aside from staring at empty documents and practicing, Meg can be found knitting, singing to her plants or drinking obscenely large London Fogs.

Morgan Murray is a fourth-year English and Cinema Studies major and Creative Expression and Society and History minor. She captures life through her lens but always gravitates toward her Pentax. She is also the photo editor for The Strand. You can find more of her work on Instagram at [@filmsthirteen](https://www.instagram.com/filmsthirteen).

Radmila Yarovaya is a third year student of Trinity college who is still plagued by youthful maximalism and deeply interested by the intersection of art and politics. As such, she believes that art, only art, can save us from the perils of life. Believing that the only way to know the world is to write it, Mila co-founded Trinity College's first student run newspaper - the Trinity Times. You can read her other existentialist ramblings in The Trinity Review, The Strand, The Varsity, The Emissary, and The Salterrae.

Radoslav Rochallyi is a poet, essayist, and interdisciplinary artist. He is the author of eight books of poetry. His work has been featured in *Variant Literature Journal* (North Carolina, USA: Variant Literature Inc.), *Havik 2020: Homeward- The Las Positas College Journal of Arts and Literature* (CA, USA: The Las Positas College), *Cyber Smut* (London, United Kingdom: Guts Publishing), *Outside the Box* (Illinois, USA: Scars Publications), *MAINTENANT 14-Contemporary Dada Art & Writing* (New York, USA: Three Rooms Press), *Garfield Lake Review*, MI, USA: Olivet College), *Poets Choice* (Mumbai, India), *In Parentheses Literary Magazine* (USA: IN PARENTHESSES.ART.6), etc.

Rion Levy is a first-year student at Victoria University who thought he knew, but in reality, has no idea what he plans to study. Although he spends most of his free time working on editorial projects, on occasion he finds himself writing poetry, poetic prose, and experimenting with 35mm film.

Tammy Yu is an undergraduate student at the University of Toronto, pursuing a double major in English and Drama. She is an aspiring writing, poet, playwright, and actor. She despises the taste of mint.

Uliana Hlynchak is UofT alumna and a Toronto-based producer and journalist for *KONTAKT Ukrainian TV Network*, a weekly Ukrainian TV show. Uliana works with young talents on developing the youth TV program *Kontakt Next Gen*. She is a member of the Board of Directors at the *Canadian Ukrainian Art Foundation* and volunteers for the *Bloor West Village Toronto Ukrainian Festival*. In 1991, Uliana self-published her poetry volume *Alone*, which received a favourable review from UofT professor Dr. Danylo Struk. In 1997, Uliana's poems were included in the *Greetings*

to *Life* volume of the young poets contest named after Bohdan-Ihor Antonych. Her poetry volume was also reviewed by Ivan Dziuba, a prominent Ukrainian literary critic, academic of National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, and a former Minister of Culture of Ukraine who wrote: “The poetry (volume) is unique, there is a poetic flair and a complex, unconventional inner world of the author. It seems that the author has a creative destiny, if only she does not hide into her inner self, but opens up to life and to herself.” Uliana writes articles and blogs for local publications. She also writes and translates poetry and short stories in Ukrainian and English. Her most recent projects are interviews on the contemporary art scene *Art Talk*, the monthly webinar series *Contemporary Ukrainian Émigré and Diaspora Literature*, the *25 Week Countdown to the 25th Anniversary of the Bloor West Village Toronto Ukrainian Festival Project*, and a series of interviews for the local community group *Ukrainian Mothers in TO* called *Unedited Candid Conversations*.

Veronica Spada studies English and Philosophy at the University of Toronto. Her work has appeared in the Hart House Review, Goose, RIC Journal, and Acta Victoriana.

Short fiction by **Victoria Hamilton** has been published in The Antigonish Review, The MacGuffin, and Nashwaak Review, among others. She won the Hart House Reivew Literary Prize contest, the John Kenneth Galbraith Literary Award, and the EVENT' Speculative Fiction contest. She lives and works in Toronto.

Yasmine Shelton is a Toronto based musician and artist currently working on her first full length album. She finds joy in lake Ontario, gardening, folk music and historical fiction.



Acta Victoriana Issue CXLV II

This edition consists of 200 numbered copies printed at Coach House Press in December of 2020. It was designed by Janus Kwong and was published with funding from the Victoria University Student's Administrative Council.

Type is set in Garamond

_____ of 200



