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THE UC REVIEW - SPRING 2021

**THE UNIVERSITY  
COLLEGE  
REVIEW**

is the biannual literary journal of University College at the University of Toronto. It is published with the generous support of the University College Literary and Athletic Society.

This spring edition of the *UC Review* was produced remotely in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. Its theme is "Ode." We invited our contributors to make this ancient art form their own.

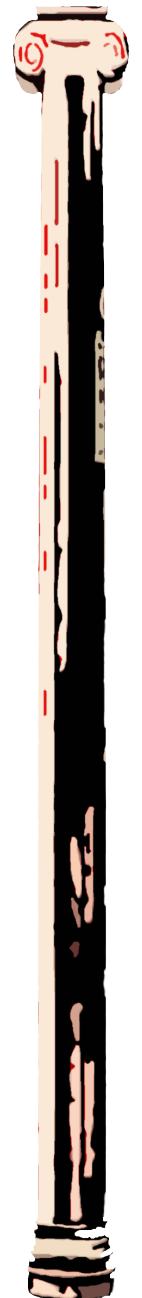
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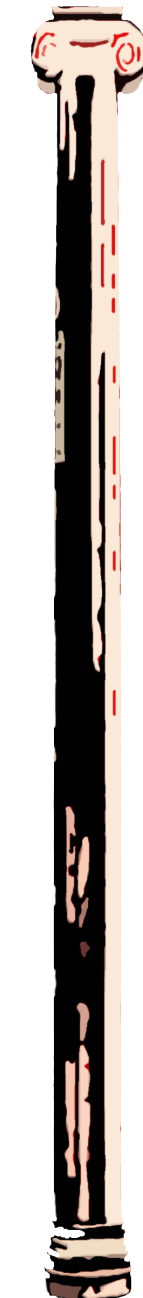
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"I am once more in the street and just at that time of day  
which the poets of the future will make much of.  
The violet hour of the pearly exhaust fumes  
(can't you hear them chanting?) like the inside  
of a fresh-water clamshell..."

- Colleen Thibaudeau (UC 1948)  
excerpted from *Four Women*



## ***A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF***

To the *UC Review* Community,

Welcome to the second edition of the *UC Review* to be published remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic. Our masthead is ever-grateful for our contributors and readers' dedication to the *Review* under such exceptional circumstances.

The ode first emerged as a style of Greek poetry set to music. It was originally a type of celebratory verse that focused on all that was great and powerful and wonderful. Later, the Romantics bent the thematic and structural boundaries of the ode. They addressed poems to urns and birds and the wind rather than Gods and heroes. The history of the ode teaches us that art has always evolved to articulate the present in a new language. As such, our "Ode" edition is a testament to the resilience and creativity of student and alumni artists during a period of great change and uncertainty. I am so proud to share it with you all.

Yours,  
Sana Mohtadi  
Editor-in-Chief, 2020-2021  
*The University College Literary Review*

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This Spring 2021 edition of the UC Review is an *ode* to the tenacity of our masthead.

Thank you, Senior Editors Lena and Ashley, for your vision and leadership. I am so lucky to have had you both by my side throughout the years.

To Associate Editors Maria, Allison, Violet, and Sylvia, thank you for your dedication to the editorial process and the insight you bring to each edition. Thank you, Adela, for rising to the new role of Art Director; we are so grateful for your commitment to making the Review a real work of art.

Thank you to Charlotte, our Promotions Coordinator, for your round-the-clock dedication. Thank you to Caleb, our Design Editor, for sharing your talents with us. We are in awe of the imagination and skill you've brought to each edition. To Hannah, our Digital Editor, thank you for making the Review accessible to U of T students around the world during the pandemic.

Thank you to Megan, our Chief Copy Editor, and her team for tirelessly editing this edition, and then editing it again (and again).

I look forward to the day we can all meet in person and flip through this journal together.

And again, thank you to our former Editors-in-Chief Tahmeed and Adina for fostering the literary community at UC and pushing the Review to new heights.

The Review is indebted to Coach House Press for their guidance throughout the printing process. I would like to extend a special thank you to John for lending his expertise to the Review once again.

I am thankful for the continued support of UC Lit, especially Liam, Daniella, Juliana, and Shreyansi.

And finally, thank you to our contributors and our readers.

**-SANA MONTADI**

# M A S T H E A D

**SANA  
MONTADI**

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SARABY  
SANDBLOM**

**DESIGN EDITOR**

**ASHLEY  
MAXOU**

**SENIOR  
EDITOR**

**CHARLOTTE  
KOCH**

**PROMOTIONS  
COORDINATOR**

**LENA  
SCHLOSS**

**SENIOR  
EDITOR**

**SYLVIA  
BILLINGSLEY**

**ASSOCIATE  
EDITOR**

**MEGAN  
BROHM**

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MACKINTOSH**

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JEON**

**ART  
DIRECTOR**

**ALLISON  
ZHAO**

**ASSOCIATE  
EDITOR**

**HANNAH  
NIE**

**DIGITAL  
EDITOR**

**MARIA  
VALDESPINO**

**ASSOCIATE  
EDITOR**

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**INDIA ROUNDS**

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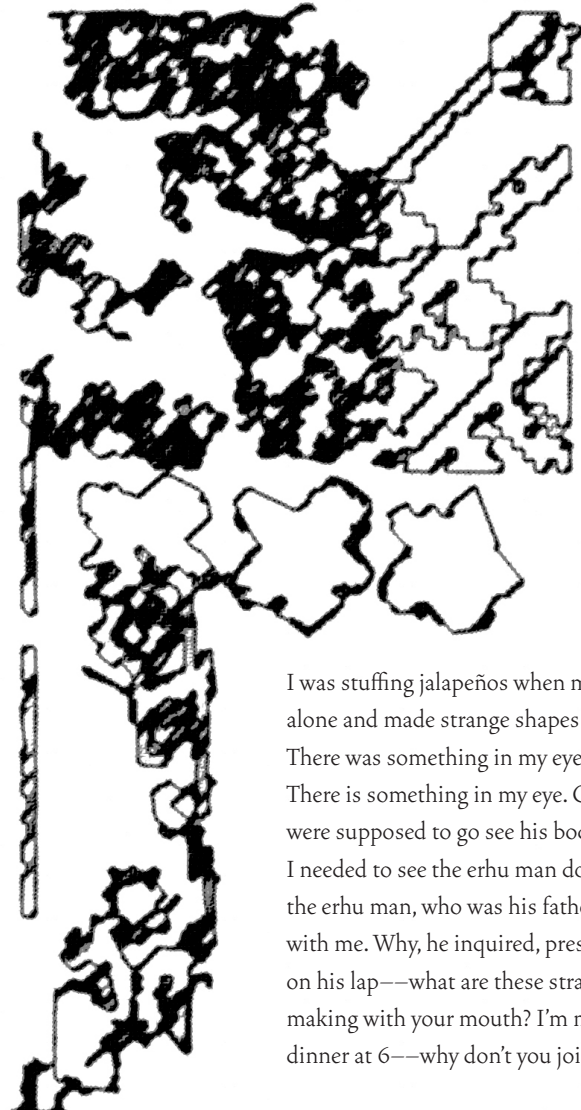


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# THE LITTLE STORIES

EUGENE KWONG



I was stuffing jalapeños when my mother came home alone and made strange shapes with her mouth. There was something in my eye. I rubbed my eye. There is something in my eye. On the morning we were supposed to go see his body in Needham, I said I needed to see the erhu man downtown. When I told the erhu man, who was his father, he refused to come with me. Why, he inquired, pressing the fiddle firmly on his lap—what are these strange shapes you're making with your mouth? I'm meeting him here for dinner at 6—why don't you join us?



# CLOCKWORK NIGHTINGALE

ALLISON ZHAO

She comes bejeweled,  
I in heavy gold.



*Flourish, flourish,  
between palace windowsills.*

She holds me in her hope;  
the cage is sunlit, warm.

*Again, again,  
talk of how you love me.*

She withers by the spring,  
and the cogs catch in my throat.

*Empress, empress,  
I will sing you to sleep.*



# HAGIA

РАОМИЛА ЯАРОВАЯ

The early morning call to prayer jolts  
the world awake into hopefulness

Drawn out syllables calling to God  
just beyond the smell of fresh mist on dust

It flies over rooftops and into mouths  
of blasphemers who are hoping that if they repeat  
the right formula of syllables  
for the right amount of time  
they will coerce out of themselves devotion


It is said they used to pluck out  
the callers' eyes  
for the sake of virtue

But I know this is a lie

Hired prophets need no incentive  
to purge themselves of sin  
they climb the peaks of minarets piercing  
heaven and gouge out the last of the eyes  
that trespass by never seeing  
the face of God

Blood running down flushed cheeks  
and into mouths heavy  
with empty shells of commandments hatching into  
butterflies after catching the purifying glint of gold

Dripping down to the street below where  
just off the market coated in olive oil and cinnamon  
a dog chases a butterfly rising up  
in search of its creator





## BOOKSTORE

JAMES YUAN

And when, at last, I resolved to visit the venerable bookstore in the Village, three marvels appeared before me. One flew from a windowsill—blue, pink, and white—and blazed in its youth. One, bearing a whole, sun-bleached spectrum, rested staunchly beside it. And the third was the owner's weary smile as a passerby overturned the book display she had, that morning, set delicately up.



## THE BREAKFAST I HAD ON 14/08/2019

MAIA HARRIS

Currants at dawn  
Packed punch inside crushed jam jar  
Toast crackles and chew  
Current currants torrent the mouth in swaths  
Spit slashing clockwise, rounding enamel bases  
Current currents of currant hug the inner lane  
Slip and slide down the gurgle slope  
Seed stopping at top of mouth to cling, scrape, stuck  
Crumbs fall in confetti  
Slurp, and the glissade race was won  
By the rocking chair smile of a tender breakfast berry  
Squeezing the tip of my tongue.

## BITE THROUGH YOUR TONGUE

ALLISON ZHAO

your second death is in a courtroom;  
penciled into calendar pages, blown wide  
on headlines, splattered onto murals,  
crushed into asphalt, burned in effigies—  
may you have an elegy above the noise.

nobody asks if you want to hang  
from the tongue of a mob. you die  
on shaky camera, played on loop  
like a condemnation. you cannot be put to  
rest until someone else goes up in flames.

you are buried under bodies, cannibalized  
by the dying; your youth is wasted on them.  
you will be pulled apart, sold down the river,  
without enough time to bleed you dry  
before there is another you.

## ODE TO MINARI [CC]

LAURA KIM

00:00:00

Love is the lamp in the corner of the room,  
But the screen is brighter  
Than it was before—  
When it once marked us with peril.  
Now, for the first time,  
With the sky blue and their hats red,  
Finding water, farming land,  
The American Dream is broken for us  
On the screen, in the way we lived it.

1:08:22

The one-inch tall wall of words  
From the grandma on the screen  
*There's another one! So fat!*  
When I laugh, I learn,  
All audiences do as well, but most  
Feel more than the blow  
Of their breaths being  
Broken in intervals—  
They feel love in their throat  
Caught like a bug  
Swallowed like a cry.  
For the first time, I felt this too  
From a language I should know  
From a grandma like my own.  
I never knew you could feel more.

1:42:08

Produce packed tightly in a small shed  
That turns red, they lose  
A year's worth of work.  
As the barn ignites, the screen does too.  
Softly, the fire tickles my stomach.  
It is the more—the shared recognition  
Of us,  
When our laughs flowed in offbeat intervals  
But it started at once.  
Mom is 59 and dad is 62  
And for the first time,  
The leather couch creaked when we took up space.

1:43:06

The fire erases collective memory,  
Sheds the tales of our losses of our family's canon.  
The fire warms the extra round to my cheeks.

1:49:14

Finding root in our throats, I consumed the art.  
I erased our losses when I found it on the screen.  
Searching for a new source of water,  
They regrow their land.



## TO THE MAGICIAN

JAMES YUAN

Apollo, amaranthine-wreathèd artisan of artisans,  
Born of earth but naught-begotten; yet beheld and yet forgotten;  
Confident, thou christenst chaos; countenancing lunacy  
Divine, redeeming death's decay as teeming fountainhead of life;  
Earthly yet unearthly living, merciful yet unforgiving,  
Freely thou enfetterest in thy phantasmagoria;  
Great and grandly galvanizing—glamorously tantalizing,  
Hope and hardship, life and dying, heav'n and hell in thee alike;  
Institution thou unmakest; faith thy will disintegrateth;  
Justice in thee justly finds its blessing and its jinx beside;  
Karma worketh in thee keenly, light incarnadescent thinly  
Lighting 'pon thy lilybed and roses blooming—unassuming  
Matter such as my kin are, thy first material, thy quicksilver—  
Nature nurses thy ambition; yet thou plottest her sedition—  
Open-hearted hate thou bring'st: a peaceful sword, an ominous coin,  
Preparing priestly poison for thy people, priming sharp rejoinder,  
Quelling fury, sowing worry, ans'ring question, questioning answer,  
Ruler of the servant's realm—reagent just as regent over  
Serpent-cincture, sense unseeing, hissing wisdom prehistoric—  
Time and times and half a time thou overturn'st the shifting sands  
Up from their slothful resting place; thou seest through uncounted hands; and  
Verum, sine mendacio, thy veiled verity's a serum  
When 'tis wisdom that we seek; and while the stronger are made weaker—  
Xanthic high and black above, an amaranthine-white beneath us—  
Yawning caverns of deceit which loom, we magnify thee in the  
Zenith of our blazing sun, our Zohar done and not undone.



## SOLITUDE

CELESTE BROWNING

Streetlights always  
Stand out to me  
After a drink or two.

The Pinot Grigio  
Coaxes me to  
Stop in the road

And stare.  
Swaying  
I see light clearly.

“Blurred eyesight  
breeds  
Better insight”  
The wine whispers.

Gurgling  
Within my belly  
It lies to me.

I hold the lamppost  
With a warm hand  
Leaning

Looking upward.  
Is it always this  
Bright?

Eyes squinting  
I watch.  
Streetlight and

Skyscraper and  
Solitude  
Blend into one.



## ***SLOWING TIME WITH ÔNG BÀ NGỌAI***

ALBERT HOANG

## ***AN AUTUMN AFTERNOON***

Autumn arrived with a subdued sigh, but my orchid-coloured dreams did not cease. In the afternoon I wake up with rosy fingers, the cold already seasoning my skin. Maybe if this keeps up radishes will twist out, a harvest of moon-white and forest-green. There is a pleasure in letting the days slip by. But I try to remain resilient, like a honeysuckle growing through a crack in a concrete wall.

## ***EARLY SUMMER***

I woke up one June afternoon to find a downpour of golden blossoms right outside my window. The amaltas tree had bloomed for the first time in a decade, the year I chose to come back. سياتلام. I taste the row of consonants on my tongue: harsh and bitter, so unlike the bunches of sunlight petals. I watch from my open window and wonder if I can ever forgive you. The petals fall, turn puddles into whirlpools. The sun returns to a closed bud.

## ***LATE SPRING***

My umbrella, too thin for these April showers and their tsunamis of flowers, turns inside out from the force of the wind. It's poppy-red in colour, like the front of my diary, like my earlobes in this spring chill. I hold in my breath, remind myself to be brave even if these pathways are not mine. My neighbourhood exists above time; daily routines, minimal leftover scarring. It's only me, I think, whose lungs sprout pale-pink in this stifling atmosphere. I'll try to say ten pretty words to them.

SANA MOHSIN

# MARIE'S FATHER

SIENA KUNANEK

Marie's father worked on the windmill for two months before he died. We sipped lemonade on the lawn as he boarded up the sides a greyish white. When it came time to do the detailing, Marie's brother yelled at us to "please go inside and let the old man work." I thought it wasn't fair that Marie's brother got to hold the bottom of the ladder while I was stuck inside with Marie and her mother and the other women. But I listened, and until he died, I stood at the upstairs window watching Marie's father work on his windmill without saying a word.

For fun, I begin to watch the construction of the windmill through the distorted lens of the red bird feeder that hangs in front of the window. If I squint my eyes, Marie's father bulges into a rounded shape. If I hunch my shoulders and lower my gaze, the man is squeezed and his head becomes massive. Move my head to the left and his hand with the hammer dominates my vision. I continue to hunch and straighten, tilt my head to the left and then the right, squint and cross my eyes, playing with the red world in front of me.

Six days after the women were moved inside, Marie's mother makes lemonade once more. All of the women agreed that if we couldn't be on the lawn, "at least a glass of lemonade would help to pass the time." I sip my lemonade and watch a hummingbird sip her own sweet syrup from the red bird feeder. Marie's brother decides to throw out the scraps of metal and wood from his father's project. The women sip, the hummingbird buzzes, Marie's brother lugs metal, and Marie's father works on his windmill.

"He's reaching too high, that stupid man," said Marie's mother.

My straw makes a slurping noise as I suck air around the ice cubes at the bottom of my glass. Someone hits my head and I turn around to give them a scowl, and in the back of the crowd I find Marie's mother with a twisted face. She screams and drops her glass on the ground. I turn to face the window as the women bustle by me, gasping, cursing. Someone cuts their foot on the glass but keeps running. They run down the stairs calling for Marie's brother. I watch their bodies scramble and tumble, clawing at the air, moving like a flock of birds towards the windmill. I watch them check his head, check his pulse, help him sit up. Someone brings him a lemonade. I watch Marie's brother return, pausing and observing the scene then breaking into a sprint. I watch all of this through the red lens of the birdfeeder.

When she sees her husband fall off of the ladder, Marie's mother can feel the whole house rumble. She swears the foundation is cracking, boards are splintering, fabric is tearing. She hears thuds on the floorboards above her head. She realizes its footsteps. Turning, she waits for her children as she listens to them tumble down the stairs. Her husband has just built the addition to the house: an upstairs with four more bedrooms, blue carpeting and her favourite: a window that stretches taller than their maple tree. She imagines that for the rest of her life she will stand by the window, watching the maple tree grow taller than their two-story home -- a thought that makes her smile because she cannot imagine anything being taller than their two-story home.

Marie and her siblings shove their way into the cluttered kitchen. Three crawl under the table to their seats, two bounce in their chairs waiting for dinner, one grabs a dinner roll from the counter, and one pulls the chair



out from under another. But as their father stocks into the kitchen, all is silent. In the stillness, Marie's mother can place her black pot on the hot plate. Her husband remains standing by the kitchen door. Marie's mother makes her way to him, asking, "aren't you going to have a seat?"

He replies, "I just need to place this final nail."

Marie's mother hears herself before she realizes she is talking. "Reaching too high, stupid man," and her husband slips through the floorboards.

A ladder clangs. Marie's mother's children wait patiently for their parents to sit down at the table as their house rumbles around them and Marie's mother is running out to the windmill with a glass of lemonade to find her greying husband on the ground thirty years later.

The next day, Marie's father walks back up the ladder. The women walk back up the stairs, back to the window with the red bird feeder. Marie's brother does not leave the base of the ladder, "gripping it," says one of the women, "for dear life." Marie's mother does not make lemonade. Throughout the day, I see her shake her head as if to remove water from her ears and sometimes she even covers them with her hands. We all take our positions, watching, waiting, holding on.

Marie's father begins to attach the blades. To construct the blades, he uses cedar planks he had gathered from a decaying barn on a property just south of Sudbury. On the day he picked them up his wife made him two grilled cheese sandwiches with salami and mustard. She packed them in tin foil because he hates the way bags contaminate his bread, the bitter plastics soaking into the crust and then the cheese.

The grey sky hung low as those final days progressed. I imagined it was reaching towards the windmill. The sky wanted to own the machine the way we wished we could have owned Marie's father.

On the last day of his life, they had to carry Marie's father down the stairs. The week before, the women and Marie's brother had decided the ladder was forbidden.

"The man can barely move his legs," Marie's brother yelled.

"But he was working on the windmill just yesterday," said Marie. No one listened to her. Marie's brother knew best, or, at least he learned his lesson.

I heard the old man had yelled at them, Marie's brother and her mother, as they carried him like a child. It must have been embarrassing. I am trying to remember a time when he carried me as a child. He was so big back then and his hair was as black and as thick as a horse's tail. Even as the hairs on his tan body began to silver, his hair stayed black. Until it wasn't. Until he was just a thin man with a grey body, a grey head of hair and a grey windmill.

I stand alone on the lawn by a pile of scrap metal and rotting cedar planks. In the grey sky, the birds stare at me as I cross and roll my eyes trying to distort my vision, praying for the red. They leave me there, alone. I become smaller and smaller as they take off on their search for another windmill.

# Wish You Were Here

ALBERT HOANG



# A LETTER TO MY DAUGHTER ON PRESERVATION

ISABEL CARLIN

If I could, I would put you in a glass cage and nobody would ever look at you.  
Every day your doctor comes into my room and exclaims at the size of the palm  
leaves  
growing out of your belly and he says: That kid should be studied.  
I would put you on display and nobody would ever study you.

If I could, I would put you in a river-stream and nobody would ever catch you.  
Isn't it strange—you tell me—that sea creatures should be so colourful if they are  
supposed to be avoiding capture—and I reply: They don't know how to protect  
themselves.  
I would put you in the water and nobody would ever fish you out.

If I could, I would put you in the dirt and nobody would ever dig you up.  
Two nights ago a tomato vine curled out of the ground and strayed too close to  
a splintering trellis and now it's stuck there, curling around the wood like a  
nursing infant.  
I would put you six feet under and nobody would ever resurrect you.

# DELAWARE ST.

GRACE HA

Know when people need you.  
Know to listen, know to kneel in your humility  
know patience, know light, the other's light,  
shivering in shades, flashing in silence,  
behind the fabric, the skin of the cheeks, open hands.

Know the unknowable.  
Know to know unbridled faith, colour of sky  
know miracles, believe in goodness self-perpetuating  
because goodness deserves to be good, deserves to be  
enough to keep light, dancing air, the other, so beloved.

# REINVENTING THE WHEEL

Anyone will tell you  
The first rule of skateboarding is that  
You have to commit to the trick

BROOKE COLINS

Learn to throw yourself into the concrete  
Accept the possibility of your jawbone on  
sandpaper  
Bite the board like a turkey sandwich

Grin and bare it,  
Skin your kneecap and wear it  
With the pride of someone who has  
Popped and shoved  
And sweat and  
Reinvented the wheel

You will never make it into the air if you spend the  
whole time  
Focusing on the moment when you will come down  
again  
Pretend that every time you push  
You are on stage  
A mechanism of the ballet

Tuck your ponytail in  
The concrete jungle doesn't cater to little girls  
You are in the kingdom of animals

Hide your grin when  
Toby tells you that you push like a guy,  
You have pride in being good enough  
To be one of the boys

You are only a god if you are miraculous  
If you have given up on the rest of the day

The trick only sticks if you land it first try  
Lift your bloody elbow like a trophy  
Then go home when your temper snaps the wood  
in two



# SCAB

CHARLOTTE KOCH

# Ogygia

RION LEVY


It's autumn. I sit on the steps hidden by bushes, guarded by a "no bikes" sign. Ahead of me lies the pathway, more steps, and a door to nowhere. Nowhere to me, at least. I'm planted on the stair second from the top, my left arm supporting my torso against the first, and my legs floating below. In my hand, a pencil, well-chewed and picked from my failed career as a child artist. Words were inscribed on it but have since blended into nicks at the black paint. How I still have it, I haven't had time to question. Below me, guarded by the forearm extending from my support beam, a book, specifications are not important. I'll be on a new one tomorrow and yesterday's is already dusty. What is important is that I'm not able to focus on it. The sky is too purple, and I know it's about to turn blue. I can sense it changing when my eyes linger on the page, but the transformation stops when I look at it. Maybe I can extend daylight if I maintain eye contact; a game I know it doesn't like to lose.

For a second, my eyes shift. Through the brush, I see someone. He sits on a bench beside the path. Maybe he wants to be brought from his reading, waiting for that distraction to put his failed attempt for work in the hands of someone other than himself. He wears white. That's a good thing for fall in Canada. Nightfall is young but you do not yet blend into the snow. Wearing white in Canada's fall, you shine. What a bother to clean, though. Is that why you sit on a bench? To preserve the magnificence of your sweater? What a noble excuse to hide away from everyone; everyone except for me. Although, you probably won't know I ever was here. The shrubbery is too impressive, and you don't seem to be looking. That's okay, I'll leave you be.

I turn my eyes back to my page, running across each line. I don't register the words. A sound. The roar of the city has just hit my ears. Oh, how I have missed you. The streets surrounding this island never stop moving. Engines sputter, start, spew the rhythm of the masterpiece. A siren, two or three more in the background, are melodies out of sync. Above me, a plane begins its descent for Pearson International. A man, perhaps a child, on a bright orange bike zips past on the path with cogs that sound like they're being paid overtime. A dog, loose on her leash, chases a shadow and catches herself with a zip. A light, on a post ahead of me before the stair starts with her low buzz, contributing to the whole mess. Adolescents, caught behind buildings, bellowing and braying like horses unaware or, perhaps, simply uncaring for the work they have awaiting them. This is my Calypso and she sings to me.

She beckons me, begging I abandon my Bruce Book and board the subway. Museum Station is not even a corner away, you see? Should I? Where will you take me, Calypso? If I walk down these steps, away from the man in the white sweater, past the theatre, and to the left? When I descend to the trains below, which train is mine? If I go south, will I go to the pier? I could walk along the shore and look back up at the stars of the city and guess how many will be dead by morning. Will I get off at Queen? It's a bit of a hike but soon I'd float in with the queers. I'll start the night off walking down some stairs and finish the week in a lofty studio apartment with too many windows and only a mattress on the floor. If I were to go farther, I could wind up back home. That is, the home I had for a year when mommy wept, and daddy whored while big, strong men tore the house to shreds to make it a home for my dear brother and I. The home we left for another far, far away from daddy the whore. A home that was never really a home but a building, filled full and barren as far as feelings go.

I could go north. If I transferred to the eastbound train, I'd make it to the Valley, where the underground rides high in



the sky over nothing except for an old brick factory no one has purchased a damn thing from since 1907. I'll buy a brick, yes, now I have a reason to go North and East, quite a good reason. When granny grew up, that far away Valley was her backyard, her haven, where she had her very first triumphs and her very last moments free from the world. She missed the old brick factory forming bricks that would face the sun by just a sneeze. It's really too bad because abandoned brick shacks are no place for free family members.

If I rode past the eastbound, I could take the line as far as it goes, get off at the last stop and check my list off. I'd walk back home. Watch the city as she rouses from the sleep she's drifting off into. I'd walk your pit, Calypso. Each corridor has her own theme, you see? I would hear the men up way too late, pestering the wait-staff for another glass even though they've been switched to a sober one three pleas ago. I would hear the last woman home, driving twice as fast as she should, knowing the love of her life is sitting all alone, angry, abandoned, wondering what in the hell she did to deserve such an overworked lover who hits every red light and never gets a moment for her. Maybe I'd hear the children running wild, wondering how in the hell they had managed to escape out of their twelfth-storey windows, howling to the moon like wolves crying bloody murder knowing that, to achieve this miracle again, that's the action they'll need to take. Or maybe I'll just hear the wind, the most perverse howl of this city.

Instead, I notice the sky is now blue, navy blue. Where did my purple go? Oh well, the sky needs her sleep too. Calypso, are you still there? No, you've left with just a sea of white noise in your wake, no more songs tonight.

I stand up, climb the last stair, dance around the far bush, so as not to startle you in the white sweater. You don't notice me and I hardly notice you. Everything feels silent. I parade past the façade of the castle building with the circles of children playing dress-up, no longer living


under the iron rule of mother and father. They chatter but I don't hear them. I cross the path that cuts what would otherwise be a fantastic soccer field in half and scale the three steps to the front door, slide my key over the lock, glide through the hall, and up the first storey stairs, turn left, and through the first door on the right beyond the kitchen. My door falls shut behind me.

I down a glass of air temperature water, strip, and breathe. I feel tranquil, at ease. My book lies slightly open, with its poor spine broken on the far side of my desk cursing me. I brush my teeth in the dark, careful not to make eye contact with the face in the mirror and open my blinds while my hand covers me for modesty. No one can see me, but my window panes nonetheless deserve to be spared. I pull back my duvet and listen calmly for the living room songs that never come, as no one ever does. You see, in the city you are invisible. You are no different than a light post, flickering on when needed, and off, out of existence otherwise.

—

I wake on the dawn of a forgotten birthday. I rouse from the delusion that they mean anything other than the passage of a constructed time agreed upon by some white men in a black tie sipping gin or coffee or some other kind of bullshit in the someplace, someday, somewhere that mattered to them. Waking up this morning is full of the same regret as any other day, only worse. I spend most of it on my feet. If I keep moving, mingling with the city, homogenizing, I'll be left here.

Queen's Park's Southern tip offers a promising view of the city until you realize all the gorgeous skyscrapers are just hospitals, just hotels, just hostels. Once that kicks in, you won't care. By Dundas, I've had enough of University Ave. and make a turn towards nowhere. Enough shuffles along the checkerboard will land



you at this one unsuspecting street. After dark, a man lingers here, smoking tea and waiting for someone named Charles or Charlie or Chuck who never has the guts to show his face. If he did, the alley would be lonely and sad and have no ring to it. Some artist or vandal, how different are they anyway, left his mark on the left wall behind a blue shop with a For Sale sign, stuck in the shopping days of 1950s America, Canada. He's a massive clock bigger than Ben who doesn't tick or move but seems to know when it is better than your Grandfather ever cared to.

Just beyond this little clock that never existed, and the shadows that the dial obviously never left, we reach a fountain of fantasy that exists in reality, backed by an edifice of a building that actuality exists and windows that actually see but walls that are lying about falling down as a curtain might from a faulty rod behind the theatre-stage. This fantasy, on this isle of green, is left to the dogs. The people in the building behind the façade have watched their doorstep mauled by the poets without ever recognizing that there was anything other than them before. They are infinite.

When you continue past the array of houses, first-storey shops, gentrification, and litter, you reach the last client of the brickworks in the Valley off the Northbound, off the Eastbound. The surnames haunt this place, never forgetting that they built the streets with their money, men, and mead; never leaving it be.

Instead, I go South more still, down to the docks with the dogs and the Bog. Monsters roam here, which Canto are we at Calypso? Board their little boat and sail over Lethe to the town that never was, never will be, for anyone but the cats who were born here, won't leave here. They come running and purring at the queers saying that I don't belong here but grab a glass anyway, just don't miss the four-sale exhibits no one ever placed anywhere. I see them. They take my soul.

A long walk leads me back to the city just this time, Calypso can't cross the water. I missed the birds. They sing their

sad songs at me, letting me know they missed me too but won't get too close because they know I will just leave them again. My home is in the city with my goddess and my mind. I've only come here to search for my sanity, have you seen it?

And so I leave. Floating off the end of the world like Columbus and Kerouac. So long, forgotten birthdays, bedtimes, and birdsongs.

—

In a daydream, I conjure my grandfather, the one who built a church and never left his name to anything. He died before I was born, too stubborn to continue living, not wanting to be a mind, trapped in a soul, trapped in a shell, trapped in a bed with people holding his hand and weeping pleas for more tomorrows. He sits with me and shakes his head at where his legacy is going. Where are we going? Am I lost?

Often, I wonder how you felt when you stood on that land for the first time, looking toward the water, wondering what it would be like once you erected a home, a family, and memories. I dream of that moment of my own; the moment when I stand on the edge of the rest of reality and feel the wealth of possibilities that exist. Why do I only get one chance at time?

Suddenly, I feel the swell of why I have come to the city. Here, I haunt bookstores, neglect common words, breathe the ideas of the senses, question why the greats were so caught up with lust and roses, seek the further reality, high-five the trees that are lonely too, and accept the Universe as I read the poetry that holds death at bay. The most melancholy of truths come to me in dreams. Let me roll back to sleep.

In the city, I can be forgotten for all I do is breathe the whispers of eternity and sigh a howl of relief.



## LILAC

BETTINA OGHINAN

## CASSIOPEIA

РАОМИЛА ЯАРОВАЯ

Lying in clouds of grass  
in the midnight womb of the universe  
we worshipped the ruined queen  
cursed to rule the heavens,  
a loyal witness to births,  
false prophets,  
and judgment days

Shedding the essence of ourselves,  
dissolving into a multitude of tomorrows  
until there was no difference or point in  
me,  
you,  
us

Cutting knuckles on teeth,  
veins on cardboard,  
foreheads on marble floors,  
bleeding through the moist August earth  
combining with the bloodstream of the world,  
with all of the us before now,  
reaching for the stars of  
Alexander, Hafez, Jean,  
until the distance between us feels  
less like a verdict  
and more like destiny

How comforting it is to lie here holding on to eternity  
knowing that you are looking at the same stars  
and thinking of anything but me

If the universe is impervious to time,  
then what is to it the mere span of the skies between us,  
between what were supposed to become

Catching glimpses of memories of ourselves  
in the afterlight of dying stars  
as we fall out of ourselves and into infinity  
two dreamers, bleeding into their dreams



# MY FATHER, THE SHAPESHIFTERS, AND I

SYLVIA BILLINGSLEY

Like most, I spend my youth hunting for monsters.

“Our world is enchanted,” my father recounts, warming a pot of hot chocolate on the stove. He creaks open the iron door, rakes the coals, and adjusts the flue. Cocooned in a fraying wool blanket, I smile to myself. This is not the first time I have heard these words, nor will it be the last, but I don’t mind. I love the way Papa speaks. His soft words float and dangle in the air like garden spiders. If I reach out, I feel that I could catch one in my palm. I stick my hand out, but instead of a spider, I grasp a ceramic mug of molten chocolate.

“This should be cool enough now.” He turns to pour another cup for himself.

August thunder rumbles above our heads. Gone are the days of pink freckled faces and fingers sticky with berries. Cupping my mug with two hands, I scrunch up my face, puff out my cheeks, and blow.

Papa chuckles. “You can drink it now, silly. I promise.”

I take a cautious sip of the sweet, dark elixir, and a wave of warmth radiates through me. Papa pulls a wooden chair from the kitchen table, one eye on his full mug. He sits quietly for a moment, the ridges in his forehead deepening, and then begins again.

“Yes,” he repeats, “there is magic in our world.”

Outside, the birches rattle their bones and wail. Bewitched by the breeze, they cast a menagerie of monstrous shadows upon the cabin walls. I shiver in my blanket.

“Grown-ups may tell you differently, but this is because they have forgotten how strange and wonderful life can be. The *secret*—” He sips his chocolate. “The secret is to remember that the world is no more exciting when you are a child than it is when you are old. Old folks may tire of bats, fireflies, or snowfall, but none of these things are any less curious than dragons or elves.”

Together we sit, basking in the warmth and wonder, until dusk slips into evening. When my eyelids begin to droop, Papa lifts me in his arms and carries me into my room. Trying hard not to peek, I pretend to be asleep as he tucks me into bed. I only smile a little when he kisses my forehead. Under the soft weight of my blanket, the crooked shadows and howling wind fade into a gentle nothingness. That night I dream of fantastic things: crocodiles crocheting, june-bugs dancing in the wind, and plump porcupines polishing off pastries.

One morning, I wander onto our porch and a tiny cloud of fog appears when I yawn. I romp around the grass, laughing and shrieking at my weathermaking, until I am interrupted by honking overhead. Looking up, I watch as a flock of geese flaps and screeches through the clouds above. Has the time come? The leading goose squawks down at me, confirming my hope. Autumn has arrived. This is the season when the monsters roam. I race to the cabin to tell Papa. He is already in the doorway, smiling, clutching my hat and gloves.

I sit on the old cedar bench. Papa pulls my wool hat over my ears, and buttons my jacket. Humming under my breath, I scuff my boots back and forth along the porch, my toes floating above the wood. He smiles, takes my hand, and leads us into the monsters’ realm. As the tall, graying grasses ripple and sway around us, he breathes in the autumn landscape, his strides slow and deliberate. I bounce along beside him, tugging at his sleeve.

Just as we reach the edge of the meadow, he whispers my name.

“I’ve found an old friend of ours. Do you want to see him?”

He crouches down and I leap into his outstretched arms. As he raises me above his shoulders, I scan the sea of grasses until my eyes land on a small mound of earth, where a little patch of white is bumbling about.

"Can you see him?"

"Yes," I whisper, breaking out in a grin. Our first monster.

Several yards away, a persnickety old badger is snuffing his way into the dirt. Perched atop my shoulder lookout, I can only hear the wind rustling my hair, but I imagine the squat, striped fellow grumbling to himself as his black nose quivers and his stubby claws rake at the ground.

"I reckon this is the cub we saw following its mother around last spring!" Papa exclaims. "He must be on a quest for nightcrawlers! Poor thing. Doesn't he know that they're already headed off to bed for the winter?"

We enter the woods, the tall grass melting into a bark archway. Around us, the sugar maples shed their summer dress, dusting the ground with ginger and scarlet. Crunching their scattered leaves beneath my boots, I keep my eyes on the ground for any hidden beasts or treasures. I almost stomp right past one, but Papa is more observant. He stops me and points to an oak tree on his left, a lopsided fungus staircase climbing upwards around the trunk. I follow its spiral up the trunk as it disappears into the branches above.

Onward we trek. As the sun climbs higher in the sky, more monsters begin to reveal themselves, slithering and springing from the rocks and trees in forms remarkable and strange. At the base of a tree root, a diligent cohort of ants marches down an invisible path, each bearing a bit of leaf or a drop of sap on its back. Atop a shrub leaf, a dainty yellow snail persists towards a particularly tasty-looking bit of vegetation. Our most exciting discovery is a slumbering stone giant, nestled in the damp earth and blanketed with moss. Papa and I nudge him over in his sleep to reveal a hobgoblin's treasure trove. Centipedes, worms, and daddy long-legs scatter to and fro like dandelion seeds in the wind. A startled spotted salamander blinks up at our looming ogreish faces in drowsy confusion.

"Oh! Pardon us, Mr. Salamander. We didn't mean to disturb you."

The slippery black sprite gives us one long, indignant stare. Then he skedaddles into the underbrush.

At last, we reach a galloping white stream. Sleek and slippery, it carries gifts to the bank downstream: tiny acorn hats, wandering twigs, no-

longer-tadpoles-but-not-quite-frogs. I skip to the edge of the water to pick up a stone, debating whether I will be able to skim it along the surface of the running water. Turning the reddish stone over in my hand, I notice the faint outline of a face I almost recognize, as if I had spoken with her once in a dream. I keep a small collection of stones like this, etched with ancient runes, on my windowsill. At night, they murmur quiet, protective charms as I drift off to sleep. I pocket the talisman and bend down to scavenge the bank for a more suitable skimming rock.

Papa gasps. A soft "oh no" falls from his lips.

I turn to see him standing frozen, brow furrowed and gray eyes cloudy, staring at the ground. Then he bends down and, wrapping his hands in his cloak, scoops up a small mound of something speckled with brown, and lightly breathing, from the cold stiff dirt.

"What's that, Papa?"

Papa is quiet. Someone has snipped a delicate silk thread, and I watch his voice drift off, spiders in the breeze. "It's a barred owl. A yearling, I think. She doesn't look old enough..." his voice trails off.

The birdsong and cicada hums are swallowed. All I hear is the current crashing against the rocks. I step forward slowly, my heart pounding in my head.

Papa looks up and sees my worried eyes and fidgeting hands. He stands up, cradling the shivering bird in his arms. "Let's take her back to the cabin. I don't know if there's anything we can do at this point, but we can try."

I nod, my heartbeat slowing. Papa can fix anything. Once I fell over laughing in a chair, and one of the legs snapped off. I thought he would be angry, but when he saw I had not hurt myself, Papa laughed too. The next day, the chair was back at the table, good as new.

Back we go, scrambling over logs and ducking below branches. With every step, I hear my breaths, sharp and rhythmic, through my nose and mouth. I do not breathe like the owl was breathing. I have never seen anything breathe like that. Shaky and frail, gasping for air like there are thorns in her throat. Papa stays beside me, but his gaze rests on the soft bundle in his arms. I can hear him mumbling to the bird, and I recognize a bit of a lullaby he used to sing to me.

“Lavender’s blue, dilly dilly, lavender’s green...”

A soft, broken trill rises from Papa’s arms. I glance sideways in curiosity, but when I catch a glimpse of the feathers, my heart leaps into my throat. I look down and keep my eyes glued on my boots. *What dark sorcery has hexed this path?* I beseech the woods. *It wasn’t nearly this long before.*

As we hurry, the trees grow more familiar and the shadows fade. At last, we reach the entrance to the meadow. The wind-whipped tall grass ushers us anxiously toward our destination. There it is! There’s the cabin!

The wind picks me up, and I race back up the dirt path toward the wooden porch, my face lighting up. Everything will be alright. The bird will be just fine in Papa’s hands. Jumping onto the porch, I rush towards the door. I’ll grab my blanket for the owl, and an apple crate. She’ll be swooping through the forest again in no time!

“We’ve lost her.”

I turn around, clutching the door handle. I’m confused. The bird doesn’t seem to be gone. I wave Papa towards me, but he doesn’t follow. He just stands there on the path.

“I’m so sorry, darling. She’s stopped breathing. Let’s go find somewhere nice to lay her down.”

Out of all of the monsters we have discovered, I have never been this scared to look at one. We have made our solemn procession through the meadow to a small patch of grass that is sheltered from the wind. Papa kneels down to unfurl the bundle, and for the first time, I get a good glimpse of the owl. I frown. It doesn’t look like an owl at all. It just looks wrong. Owls are supposed to perch at the tops of trees, looming in the shadows, haunting the forests at night. The thing in the dirt is far too small to be an owl. I have never seen a creature so fragile. Its flat face stiff and contorted, its speckled wings bent and sprawled in the dust, its talons limp and unthreatening.

Confused, angry heat surges through me, rising in my face and spilling from my eyes. Papa crouches down and wraps me in his arms. Somehow, this makes me feel worse. I gulp and hiccup. My shoulders shake. Neither of us speak a word. Then he pulls back and places a hand on my shoulder.

“Did I ever tell you how monsters shapeshift?” Papa doesn’t

smile, but there is a faint glimmer in his eye.

I shake my head, burying my eyes in my sleeve.

“The monsters we find, the creatures we meet, they never truly go away. This young owl, the badger in the grass, even that snail on the forest shrub—all life possesses the power to shapeshift. In this way, the Earth is able to preserve its magic.”

Skeptical, I lift my head up to glare at my father. How can there be magic if an owl can die? And besides, the thing on the ground isn’t shapeshifting. It’s just lying there, motionless.

“Magic takes time,” Papa continues. “But it never fails. Before you know it, this owl will shapeshift into something wonderful. Soon, she might open into a small toadstool umbrella, offering shelter to a field mouse caught in a sudden downpour. Or maybe she will dissipate in a gust of wind, speeding down the canopy, laughing and leaping from treetop to treetop. After enough transformations—who knows? Maybe she’ll become an owl again, or something entirely new! Something we’ve never seen before.”

I stare at the owl, and somehow she seems less frightening now. No longer in pain, almost as if she is sleeping. I wipe my nose on my sleeve, and Papa hands me his checkered linen handkerchief from his cloak pocket. “Every creature, every form that the shapeshifters take on, has its own little life in its own little part of this strange world that we all share. And when a life is over, it doesn’t disappear. It becomes something new.”

The two of us stand there, the wind sweeping through the grasses around us.

“Thank you for guarding the forest, little owl. You did everything you needed to do.”

I feel a weight in the pocket of my jacket, and remember the stone. Fishing it out, I admire its red coat and peculiar design. Then I crouch down and place it beside the owl’s head. Papa smiles, and leans over to listen as I whisper in his ear. He nods, and stands to guard the owl as I run back to the cabin. Soon I am hurrying back with my collection of stones spilling from my folded arms and rattling in my pockets. Kneeling, I place each stone, one by one, in a fairy ring around the owl. Then Papa takes my hand, I rise from the ground, and the two of us stroll back home for supper.



Winter has passed. The ground has thawed, and my jacket is beginning to feel a little snug around my wrists. For the first time since that autumn outing, I wander through the meadow in search of that small patch of grass. As I amble forward, muddying my boots, I stop to gather a small bundle of snow glories. Then I head for the grave. In the freshly sprouting grass, wild and unruly, it is nearly impossible to find. Maybe the stones have gotten up and rolled away. Maybe the owl never existed at all. I shake my head and am about to turn back when a reddish glint catches my eye, several feet away, in the grass.

There it is. I step forward, and sure enough, my collection of stones lies winking at me in the mud. They no longer encircle the body of an owl; she has gone. But now, sprouting up from the dirt rock circle, a timid young patch of milkweed flutters in the breeze. Fuzzy bees bumble about in the cool morning drawn in by the first sweet nectar of the year. A large monarch comes to rest on a pink tuft, warming its wings in the sun. I sit down in the grass, the wind on my face, to watch this hidden world unfold. I don't get up until I hear Papa calling my name.



FIN.



## CONTRIBUTORS

SYLVIA BILLINGSLEY – UNIVERSITY COLLEGE – SECOND YEAR – BIODIVERSITY AND CONSERVATION BIOLOGY & ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES & CREATIVE EXPRESSION AND SOCIETY

Sylvia hails from Boston, but her home lies wherever the pavement ends.

CELESTE BROWNING – VICTORIA COLLEGE – FOURTH YEAR – ENGLISH & SPANISH & SEMIOTICS

Celeste is a Victoria College student who is most passionate about reading and writing poetry. She is graduating with a degree in English Literature and continuing her studies in English at the University of British Columbia next fall.

ISABEL CARLIN – UNIVERSITY COLLEGE – ALUMNI – INDIGENOUS STUDIES & HISTORY & FRENCH STUDIES

Isabel is a poet and researcher living on stolen Coast Salish territories, with a great love for anti-imperialism, the Great Lakes, and ghosts.

BROOKE COLLINS – VICTORIA COLLEGE – SECOND YEAR – ENGLISH & CINEMA STUDIES & CREATIVE EXPRESSION AND SOCIETY

Brooke Collins is an undergraduate student from Sarnia, Ontario studying at the University of Toronto. She loves poetry, bookstores, and driving country roads.

MAIA HARRIS – VICTORIA COLLEGE – FOURTH YEAR – LITERATURE AND CRITICAL THEORY & PEACE, CONFLICT AND JUSTICE STUDIES & POLITICAL SCIENCE

Maia has just finished her final year at the University of Toronto and is now headed towards a year of blessed nullity and restlessly avoiding LinkedIn. She has recently learned to juggle, and she is just okay at it.

## ALBERT HOANG – UNIVERSITY COLLEGE – ALUMNI – HISTORY & CINEMA STUDIES & POLITICAL SCIENCE

Albert is a portrait, editorial and fashion photographer based in Toronto whose work revolves around exploring tenderness, romance, and melodrama. His days at UC were some of the most formative years of his life. In another life, you'd find him editing photos while listening to a great indie playlist in cozy coffee cafés.

## LAURA KIM – VICTORIA COLLEGE – THIRD YEAR – ENGLISH & CINEMA STUDIES & CREATIVE EXPRESSION AND SOCIETY

Laura Kim is a third-year student at the University of Toronto pursuing a double major in English and Cinema Studies with a minor in Creative Expression and Society. Often you can find her catching up on readings, bingeing sitcoms, taking part on campus (as part of the English Student's Union and as an editor for Goose Fiction), and turning rants into poems in her Notes app.

## CHARLOTTE KOCH – UNIVERSITY COLLEGE – THIRD YEAR – HISTORY OF ART & FRENCH STUDIES & PHILOSOPHY

Charlotte Koch paints like an art school dropout. She depicts eventful moments in her life like when there was a scab in her nose. Her influences include tik tok ceramic artists, #girlboss culture, catholic guilt, people who gatekeep Clairo, and internalized misogyny. If you'd like to contact her, you can find her on depop. ;)

## SIENA KUNANEC – VICTORIA COLLEGE – SECOND YEAR – ART HISTORY & LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES & CREATIVE EXPRESSIONS AND SOCIETY

Siena Kunanec is from Scarborough, Ontario. Siena is in her second year at Vic doing a double major in Art History and Latin American Studies with a minor in Creative Expressions and Society. Siena finds inspiration for writing in her the news, family, community, and her dreams journal. She hopes her work inspires conversation.

## YUI JIT (EUGENE) KWONG – VICTORIA COLLEGE – THIRD YEAR – LITERATURE AND CRITICAL THEORY & NEAR AND MIDDLE EASTERN CIVILIZATIONS

Eugene Kwong has trouble putting stuff into words, but sometimes he manages. And sometimes he even likes it enough to send it to journals. His major influences include Louise Glück, Li-Young Lee, Ilya Kaminsky, and Forough Farrokhzad.

## RION LEVY – VICTORIA COLLEGE – FIRST YEAR – LITERATURE AND CRITICAL THEORY & SPANISH & MATERIAL CULTURE AND SEMIOTICS

Rion is a little too curious a little too much of the time and is probably wondering why that is.

## GRACE MA – TRINITY COLLEGE – FOURTH YEAR – ENGLISH & ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCE

Grace is walking, and contemplating, and jotting down a little word on the skin of her hand.

## SANA MOHSIN – ST. MICHAEL'S COLLEGE – FOURTH YEAR – ECONOMICS AND ENGLISH

Sana Mohsin is currently finishing her degree. She like nature imagery and tea, and napping during rainstorms

## BETTINA OGHINAN – APPLIED SCIENCE AND ENGINEERING – FOURTH YEAR – MECHANICAL ENGINEERING

Bettina Oghinan is a first-year mechanical engineering student, amateur artist, Christian, and an avid reader. As someone who loves teaching, she recently grabbed the opportunity to teach at the engineering academy run by UTEA in hopes of encouraging incoming 1st years.

RADMILA YAROVAYA – TRINITY COLLEGE – THIRD YEAR  
– ETHICS, SOCIETY AND LAW & ENGLISH & CREATIVE  
EXPRESSIONS AND SOCIETY

Radmila Yarovaya is a third year student of Trinity College who is still plagued by youthful maximalism and deeply interested in 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*. When not writing poetry, Mila can be found fencing and exasperatingly writing about the state of world affairs and the dusk of democratic institutions. You can read her other existentialist ramblings in *The Trinity Review*, *Acta Victoriana*, *The Strand*, *The Varsity*, *The Emissary*, and *The Salterrae*

JAMES YUAN – VICTORIA COLLEGE – THIRD YEAR –  
PSYCHOLOGY & LATIN

James Yuan is a third year student at Victoria College. He is indebted to Louise Glück and to T. S. Eliot for his thoughts.

ALLISON ZHAO – VICTORIA COLLEGE – SECOND YEAR –  
ENGLISH & PUBLIC POLICY

Allison Zhao is currently considering a pseudonym.

*SLOWING TIME WITH ÔNG BÀ NGOẠI*

ALBERT HOANG – SHOT WITH OLYMPUS SP ON 35MM FILM.

These are my ông bà ngoại (grandparents) in 2019 holding a portrait of their younger selves. This is the last time that I would see them before they left for Vietnam forever; my bà ngoại passed away a few months later, and my ông ngoại will never return to Canada. My ông ngoại used to serve in the army and spends most of that afternoon talking about it and how, if not for the army, he would have been the Prime Minister of Vietnam. Bà ngoại hears this, shakes her head, and calls him a fool. She still lets him pull her closer for the photo. Ông ngoại smooths down his hair - some last minute grooming - and while bà ngoại has stopped dyeing her hair black, she still flashes her freshly painted hot pink nails. They both wait for the click of the shutter. All I can think of, before I press the button, is how I hope to have a companionship like this one day.

*WISH YOU WERE HERE*

ALBERT HOANG – DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHY

I took these landscapes when I was travelling solo across Europe after my undergrad. It was a strange experiencing feeling simultaneously in awe at the beautiful environments and new places while also feeling a little lonely and missing a past love.

*SCAB*

CHARLOTTE KOCH

Watercolor paint, marker, and white gel pen on watercolor paper. 5 x 6.5 in.

*LILAC*

BETTINA OGHINAN

Painted with gouache, the piece was inspired by IU's song of a similar name; the title symbolizing a farewell and meaning "memories of youth". After a bitter winter comes a radiant spring, leaving behind the past and looking forward with hope to what the future brings. Modelling this thought is my little sister, smiling in delight at the fresh blooms of spring.

**BOOK DESIGN AND GRAPHICS  
BY CALEB SARABY SANDBLOM**







