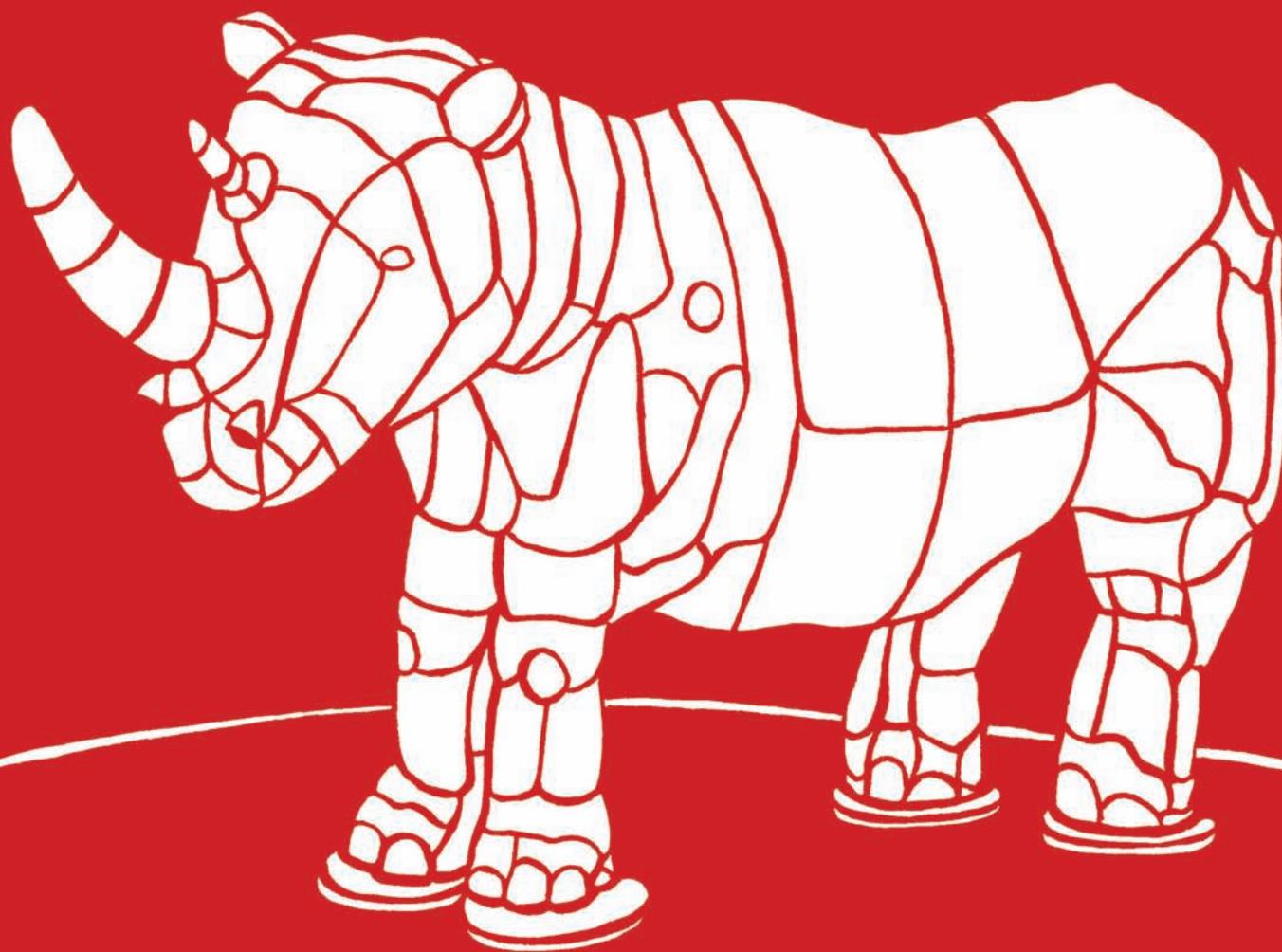


WORDSFEET ZINE

VOLUME 2, NOV. 2016



Welcome to WordsFestZine, an ‘instant’ publication born out of a partnership among Words, Poetry London, Western University, Fanshawe College, and Insomniac Press. Our goal was to capture the energy, dynamism, and diversity of *Words* by putting together a collection of reactions and responses to the festival while it was happening. Our call was simple: Visit the Festival. Write About It. Get Published. We asked festival goers and our esteemed writers to send us poems, twitterverse, creative non-fiction and fiction pieces. These are not works “recollected in tranquility;” — indeed, the ink may still be drying as you read this preface.

So how did we pull this off? With a team of tireless editors and producers working around the clock to edit, compile, design and, finally, print the zine within 24 hours of receiving the final submissions. Of course, none of this would have been possible without the participation of the public: this is London’s WordsFest; this is London’s WordsFestZine.

We have divided the WordsFestZine into 4 sections: “Words of Celebration,” “Words of Reaction,” “Words Aloud,” and “Words Unbound.” The “Words of Celebration” section contains pieces celebrating the festival. “Words of Reaction” contains poems responding to the festival and the events and authors at it. The “Words Aloud” contains poems read at the open mic night. And the “Words Unbound” section contains the heterogeneous oddments and tidbits that collect around a major literary event.

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We would also like to thank Kathleen Fraser, of Western's English and Writing Studies, for facilitating student and faculty involvement in this project; Poetry London for staffing the festival Zine table; and the many energetic and dedicated WordsFestZine volunteers.

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Finally, to all of those who submitted their creative works for this Zine: thank you!

Cover artwork: Tom Benner's Rhino by Diana Tamblyn



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“
Words are always part of that next best thing
”
— *Marlene Laplante*

WORDS OF CELEBRATION

ODE FOR THE FEAST OF WORDS

By Penn Kemp

Our London Muses, amused, proclaim:
come join our Museum feast in joy
of joining, reading, weaving a way,
riding a wave, waving a welcome,
well, come in then. Here. Hear!
Attendance's high, attention is close.

Words are our vocation, invoking
the vocative, pro vocative, calling us,
calling on us, call sure, culture, meeting
our many cultures, collected. Whatever
the weather, we conjure, com pose
words worth envisioned, inclusive in
terms of the other, for all our sakes.

Describing the arc, friends collect and
meet new, gathering poets in harmony
with other authors. Rhythm rhymes us.
Creating community, fusion delights
this spacious collective, call elect if
held in the London community bowl.

The Graces are present, spirits high.
Lift the cup and dance, sing, speak, tell
the tale told, win, write welcome.
O may the best manifest

fest if all festivity
cheer and exult.
Hail and salute!
Here, here!

THE POWER OF WORDS

By Marlene Laplante

We need words to keep us human.
— Michael Ignatieff, 1985

Words can change the world
How powerful is that!
They can make the hardest man cry
Give hope to the most vulnerable
Words are a bridge to communicate
They help us through grief
Open a way of learning and understanding
No matter what new technology brings
Words are always part of that next best thing
They survive! They adapt!
Words touch and inspire
They can change opinion
Bring sight to the blind – sound to the deaf
Paired with music they become stronger
They show up in our memories
Comfort us in age
Words can change our lives

How powerful is that!

“ in a post-truth world,
we release words, pursuing
freedom, justice, peace ”
— *Ola Nowosad*

TO THE FESTIVAL

By Gomer Robinson

The ambient noise of the night surrounded me like a scratchy blanket of discomfort; disquiet conquered any rest. It had been a week where the virus invading my system had finally won out and left me down for the count for a few days. I was recovering, but the lethargy that lingered left me feeling the victim. A promising start to the day ahead this wasn't.

WordsFest London was in the morning, a gathering of local authors where I hoped to promote my novel, *Portrait of a Rivalry*, and network with fellow authors. It seemed a wondrous opportunity, but that sense of ennui dogged my awareness, dulled it, and left me almost apathetic.

Somehow, with more than a little inspiration from my wife and after a false start when I had forgotten something, we made the journey to the festival. As soon as we stepped in the door, a far different energy to that I was feeling pervaded like a warm breath of tropical air. We were greeted and shown to our table where almost immediately connections were made with other authors and would-be writers. The facilitators and helpers had everything organized and allowed us to embrace what we were there for: sharing our passions and experiences.

I learned quickly that it was a Newtonian event. For every encounter, there was an equal and opposite encounter. One learned and one taught. In one moment, one was having information shared with oneself, and one was sharing information the next. One found oneself inspired, and one found oneself inspiring.

I felt charged again with passion; the passion for words we all share.

HAIKU FOR WORDSFEST, 2016

By Ola Nowosad

“poetry is a universal force”
Shane Neilson

we are the word geeks,
the truth seekers, the poets,
hear our poems and weep

in a post-truth world,
we release words, pursuing
freedom, justice, peace

words matter, as do
trees and leaves and sun and moon,
we breathe their beauty

“Our alphabet excitement of mastered
Pens and cursive dreams”
— *Alex Busch*

WORDS POEM

By Alex Busch

The alphabet excitement of fumbled
Pens and cursive slant,
Knitted brows and little fists,
Tongues out in concentration.
How we rushed to school,
Velcro shoes and misbuttoned sweaters,
From a, b, c, d to artists bravely composing
dreams.
Now we rush to Words, now adults
Breathless to learn, to
Reignite the spark of language,
Fan the flames that smoulder,
Watch the phoenix fly,
On this designated weekend for
Our alphabet excitement of mastered
Pens and cursive dreams.

“ Peeled city layers
Only to find that its heart
Is on the outside. ”
— Jennifer Zhang

WORDS OF REACTION

ANISHINAABE WELCOME CEREMONY

By Marsha Lemon

I wanted to wear my jingle dress but Auntie said not this time. A welcome ceremony is about the guests, not about me. Still, I love my jingle dress, the way it tinkles with every little movement.

Auntie says this gathering is very special. Storytellers are coming to our traditional lands from far away. A sharing of knowledge has always been part of our culture. We honor them with this ceremony; they know that while they are on the land of the Chippewas of the Thames First Nation, they are safe.

The drummers and singers are ready. I'm excited to stand with the women who will dance. People are filling the room that looks over the forks of the Askunessippi. It will soon be time. I stand up tall, anxious to begin.

“Good evening, I'm Janice Zolf and I'd like to welcome you to London...”

I look down at my feet dressed in my best buckskin moccasins. I can see both them and the floor beneath. Slowly they begin to disappear. I turn to our chief holding the Eagle feathers. He's waiting for someone to acknowledge us. He, too, is fading. Soon all

our people have disappeared and there are only the strangers left. The evening has begun.

CHARLIE AND THE CULTURE FACTORY

By Charlie Bucket

He would inhabit the wooden bench
And stare for hours at the tape-measured maps
if he knew.

But instead he was hungry. Inhibited?

Biting into stolen chocolates was his only wish,
And stealing was his form of buying,
Stolen experience and satisfaction.
Golden tickets and museum visits.

Pinned to the sidewalk by three giants.
Screaming, more for attention
Than for help. Knowing that he's condemned
For stealing a bar of chocolate.

HAIKUS FROM THE MUSEUM

By Jennifer Zhang

London. Friday night.
Divinity is a game.
Your turn. Roll the dice

“ hold overs, left overs
held lovers, vowels asking
sometimes y
the i is silent ”

— Tom Cull

Peeled city layers
Only to find that its heart
Is on the outside.

Motherhood is vague...
What do we owe to children
When the blood bond breaks?

Laptops and coffee.
Poets, aren't we? But
Students, foremost, first

Words dance on our tongues
Find their way into our brains:
Spoken dopamine.

POEM FOR A DOG

By Calum Cunningham

(after Andre Alexis after François Caradec)

My helpful alerts so that my people know
another dog is passing outside
or some uniformed stranger is pushing papers
through our door
or a little rodent is darting about teasingly on
my grass
are met with their sharp barks of “Quiet!” “Quiet!”
and I declare a more confusing response
could not be possible.

CROWSFEST

By Tom Cull

crows in the logo—
shadows on the snow
they plot a course home
fly frozen west
from w to s
holding stolen i's and e's
nesting in my head with these
making words weirds

while on couches below
bespoke worders hold micro-
phones, hold forth,
hold overs, left overs
held lovers, vowels asking
sometimes y
the i is silent

SAVED

By Danielle Sequeira

The dim lights, comfortable seats, and
musty smell of books made me giddy with
excitement. My heart ached as I listened to her
speak. I longed for my tattered, old notepad
and favourite pen. I saw the characters come to

“This celebration of the written word did more than just inspire me as an artist. It saved me.”

— *Danielle Sequeira*

life—emerging from a book I didn’t know, written by an author I was yet to meet, and set in a time period I knew nothing about.

I had always escaped into books as a child, but as I grew older, I decided to create my own fantasy lands. Writing came easily to me. As soon as an idea stood out in my chaotic mind, my fingers flew across the keys; I was unable to stop myself from inventing a new world. However, with the unique stresses and pressures of school, I lost my spark, my interest, and my heart. I was drowned out by the constant bustle and noise of university life.

Yet, as I sat in the poorly lit room, listening to this author speak, I closed my eyes and allowed my mind to clear. For the first time in weeks, I felt a rush as ideas and characters created themselves in my mind. Her brilliant word choices and refreshing writing style brought electricity to my fingers and passion to my heart again. Words and ideas bombarded my mind, as my fingers tapped my sides impatiently, waiting to be reunited with my laptop. Waiting to write again.

This celebration of the written word did more than just inspire me as an artist. It saved me.

WRIT

By Heather Uksik

Let the letters be
And let them flow
Do not regret the sadness
Nor applaud the righteous rage
Some would edit our reality
Erase
The burden of our grief
Excise
The nuances of love
Intact
The words excite
Ripen and expand
The horizons of our life
Hold fast the written mind

IN PRAISE OF CANCON

By Kayla Vanstone

During WordsFest today at Museum London, I had the privilege of sitting in on a talk with Andre Alexis and Kevin Hardcastle. Both writers did readings of their work, and I was compelled to buy at least one book from the pop-up store on the main level. Unfortunately for Mr. Hardcastle, I went with *The Hidden Keys*, by Mr. Alexis, as I’d already been taken with his previous novel, *Fifteen Dogs*.

“ The words excite
Ripen and expand ”
— Heather Uksik

I waited there for a moment, and then stood in the line that had begun to form in front of Mr. Alexis, where he was signing copies of his novels (some purchased new, as I had done with *The Hidden Keys*, or brought along, like I'd done with *Fifteen Dogs*). Something old, something new. Mr. Alexis kindly signed both novels, and then I excitedly went off to text everyone that I now had signed copies of books by the Andre Alexis. Blinks and stares until I mentioned *Fifteen Dogs*. Even my mother has read that book.

One of the things I found most interesting about the talk with Andre Alexis and Kevin Hardcastle, led by Joel Burton, was the exploration of things Canadian. A lot of the time Canadian writers don't get much recognition. Emma Donoghue, whom I saw speak later in the day, happens to be the exception. But Canadian stories and poems can have such impact on those who recognize the references in them and that familiar way of life. Where Mr. Alexis discussed Ontario and Toronto, Mr. Hardcastle delved into some more rural places in Canada, and the reading he did today reflected that.

It's unfortunate that we as Canadians are exposed to so much American media but fail to take in as much of its Canadian counterpart. It's unfortunate that the Canadian arts don't have the powerhouse funding that Hollywood

is able to procure, just through sheer size. But some of the stories we do have to tell are among the most profound I know.

The reason I went to WordsFest today was *Fifteen Dogs*. Having recently graduated from my undergrad in English at Western, I struggled to find something meaningful to read that wasn't from the previous century. *Fifteen Dogs*, however, spoke to me deeply. It was unique and beautiful and painful, and when all the writers I saw today did their readings, I was blown away by the originality and thought-provoking themes of the work they had to present, even the work they'd already published. Further still, I was blown away by the fact that many Canadians, myself included, did not know these books existed, did not know these stories were available to read.

Even in Canadian bookstores, Canadian writers don't get the exposure they deserve. Maybe that goes without saying, but I'm grateful that I was exposed to these stories during WordsFest, and I hope to continue to experience days like this, along with new Canadian art, in the years to come.

“Scattered leaves become letters and we string them together like pearls to wear around our neck...”

— Morgan McAuley

(S)TOPERBATION IN THE BOOK FAIR

By Susan Bonk Plumridge

wondering if I
can write ideas myself
and be a writer

but fear looks wistful
aching for permission to claim
such title for me

but I can put words
on paper – “I’m a writer”
so say that again

WORDS FESTIVAL POETRY

By Anne Cookson

The books are laid on the table with an invitation for me to read them.

I pick each one up to discover what the author is telling me about their treasure of talents, the mystery of adventure and suspense, romance, history, and poetry in the selection of good books.

I love to get into the story – who are the characters? What are they experiencing – where are they going? I thumb through pages, rise with excitement to grasp what the plot is

all about. Of course I could read the inside cover to get an idea of the story, but also I want to feel what the characters are expressing between the pages.

Who are they seeing? Sometimes the story is historical fiction; other times it’s a biography or poetry.

NAMES

By Morgan McAuley

“How’d you get that name?”

“My parents gave it to me.”

“I know, but why?”

No one had ever asked me this question before. Standing in the spiral of tables commemorating London writers’ life works, I see nothing but letters and words: the DNA of a name. What really makes up a name? How can a parent choose one word to summarize an entire life that is waiting to be lived – how can an author choose one word to summarize an entire novel that is waiting to be read? We learn to adopt our names like stray pets. We let them define us through butchered pronunciation during kindergarten attendance, racist assumptions about our nationality and our native language, categorizations of gendered stereotypes, and consistent confusion between stressed and unstressed syllables. Like iambs,

“ this elation
this writer’s high,
dulled by
what now? ”
— Courtney Ward-Zbeetnoff

our life becomes strung together with the push-pull of our pulse as we stumble through diction and driver’s tests and dentist checkups and danger zones. Scattered leaves become letters and we string them together like pearls to wear around our neck in a sign that says, “This is who I am: I am who this is.”

The books sit on their stands, waiting to be read, waiting to be understood. The authors hover like parents, boasting about their kids, bragging about their names. I stand and watch, in the weight of my name.

this release of ecstasy
this elation
this writer’s high, dulled by
what now?

PROCESS

By Courtney Ward-Zbeetnoff

“the only elation occurs during writing” —
André Alexis

thoughts transform
to black marks slashing pages
pen follows paper
paper reconciles letters
letters greet words
words reunite sentences
sentences embrace stories
stories speak to readers
creased cover, pursed lips, folded brow

“We knew in our breaking bones that
we would not be confined;”
— *Danielle Bryl-Dam*

WORDS ALOUD

UNTITLED

By Danielle Bryl-Dam

We blind our eyes with the sparks of fireflies,
Embers, fireworks, and burning last goodbyes.
We whisper our wishes to darkened skies
Delirious, bewildered
Mournful truths and shimmering lies.
What does it take for the truth to die?
The glamour cascades from bitter tongues
And glows within the grass beneath our feet;
why
Is the consuming hunger of the aspirational
flaming skies
Warming the brittle cold within our bones
rather than consuming us? The leaden axe of
growing up and growing old cries
Through the wind as it bites into our mottled
flesh; hacks us bit from bit while the embers
above crackle and whine.
They told us to stay; they demanded we try
To abandon our hopes and shy
From the fantastical sparks that breeze by in
worn city streets
And stuffy office desks. We knew in our
breaking bones that we would not be
confined;
We stretched skeletal wings through the blood

of split-skinned backs and readied to fly
Knowing full well that by our own fire we
would surely die.

WHAT WE LOST

By Nicole Feuti

You know that place inside your heart,
That place where everything you love is sewn
Sewn into it so much that it becomes the reason
for your heartbeat,
The threads, tightening and compressing
Giving you a purpose to life and a cause for
everything you do?

Yes, I'm talking about that place.
That place, and a little to the right.

They're neighbours, Everything You Love and
Everything You Lost.
Except Everything You Lost tends to hurt a
little
bit more.

We became acquainted yet again as I was
walking down the stairs,
Not even making it halfway before Everything
You Lost suddenly hit me
On the inside of my chest.

“ Yes, I’m talking about that place.
That place, and a little to the right. ”

— Nicole Feutl

He decided to make himself known—

The tantrum he was throwing made my heart
pulse faster
And my mind become foggy with shock;

And as I stood on that middle step I could hear
him scream inside my head
“You do not need this anymore.
You’re done. Done
playing.

The jersey you carry in your hands
will never see another season again.”

He takes care to pronounce everything I lost:

Games and tournaments;
Teammates.
My extended family.
The one I was chosen for and not born into.
The one I worked my ass off for in the heat, the
cold, the rain and snow.
The one who saw me an hour after I got out of
bed,
Still not fully awake,
No makeup on,
Dying to catch my breath or throwing up on the
sideline.

My family. My teammates.

Everything I Lost.

I manage to turn around and walk back up the
stairs. “Memories,” he whispers, kneading my
heart
like dough.

“Inside jokes. Special relationships. Friends.”
I think something burst, those pinpricks I’m
feeling have to be his needle trying to mend the
seam.

I try to breathe the pain away.

“You’re too old. You’re 18. You’re finished.
These are the last few seasons you have left.
And soon, they too will be gone.”

Time is flying by way too fast, days like
dominoes crashing into the next;
I want to add more to the end but realize I have
truly run out.
I only have a few more left to go until they, too,
fall over.

And what will happen to me then? What do I
do?

I’ve had this constant routine and mindset for
as

long as I can remember
What do I do if it’s taken from me?

“ It stares down my ambition and
devours what is left of me. ”

— *Cassy Player*

I've tried to do as much as I could, so that as soon as one season ends I can move right on into another, sometimes overlapping them because I just can't seem to let one of them go. Now I'm to let them all leave me? I don't think I will ever be the same.

Everything I Lost will never let me forget

I can see the thread he's using to sew my heart together again from the fraying of my team sweaters

I guess he needs more from some than others because lies left holes in a few of them.

Funny.

They're all close to the chest.

NAKED

By Cassy Player

I am bare naked; I lie here sprawled across the floor.

The world is laughing next to me.
I am laughing, internally, at the world.

I cannot help myself.

I am bare naked; I lie here sprawled across the floor.

Growing roots in this spot,
making it my nook.

Wishing I had left well enough alone.

Making my bed isn't something I want to do.
Now I have to as I

watch
yellow spiders penetrate my veins.
Cementing the relationship after a trip down the very first time.

I am bare naked; I lie here sprawled across the floor.

I believe the blurry-faces.
Hallucinations dance across my vision and pull me back with sticky fingers.

Dust clouds wander into my lungs.
Words slip through my nose,
dance to my ears,
chant me back to a life made to live fabulous.

This world is bare naked, lying on the floor next to me.

It stares down my ambition and
devours what is left of me.

CASTILLA

By Tristan Ramos

Immortals howl as I growl at their aural fowls
They prowl through my neural portals, my aura
throws the towel
It drowns on my dorsal flow, a horror show,
then it lounges
On Castilla whose oral prose and torturous
bones cloud me
That lullaby thrills me with her chloroform
nose
I won't die until her dormant form closes
Her current storm blows me to an orbit scorned
with coves that
Are adored not ignored like a morning torn
with woes

I enter her
I see myself
Then I fall to her feet

Residing in the base of her spine divides me
Fly up to her mind or playfully dive
As piss I'm thinking, then I climb up prying
Arriving at her underlings her sea of lions
I fumble those fiends as they hear the rumble
They funnel from my hands in a dancing
cuddle
It's sudden her heart feels befuddled I'm
muddled
Under it, the air darts off in couples
Now hundreds, their noise, hearing my voice
Piercing her throat, searing the joints
Fearing me the most, it's so clear that it points
To her brain faintly lit I'm poised to probe it

And taint it with my toys then I'll destroy it
and clone it
Glowing in my image exploding with moaning
I'll pillage this wreckage and fill it with potions
Castilla you're a vestige and no one has noticed
Chorus:
The sun breathes into me
I die, and see everything
I want all the treasures
She has them, but she's nothing
Castilla, Dehumanizing
Castilla, Demonizing
But she's just an entity
That can't feel anything

My indigo soul glows after seeing the weeds
weep
"The evening's foe" my speech was slow as the
crow dove to eat their seeds
Then he feeds me what I'd sewed so that I
implode
Castilla approaches and I spill all her potions
That she's been poaching but she acts so aloof
So I float to the roof, to see lavender hues
Her boat planking on a moat spews
Plasma, fruit, and Adam's apples that go mute
So I banish her from glue to damage her
famished
In a panic she frantically escorts me to her
lavish
Catalysts, I court them, then they deport me to
averageness
I demand a tryst I can afford and distort to Castilla's
Image of the grandiose that glamor knows
They can't even cope, so she fishes a message
she's cloned, "Envision your own
diminutive
Owners; they didn't give what you owe"
You're all vestiges of what you don't notice

“Immortals howl as I growl at their aural fowls
They prowl through my neural portals”

— *Tristan Ramos*

The sun breathes into me
I love and want everything
But I'm far from the treasures
She's lost them, she's nothing
Castilla, the living
Castilla, the omnipotent
Now I'm stuck in the stones
Etched and beheaded

Reality traps you in its vessel of banality
Edward Albee's great fallacies will haunt you
tragically
His gravity sparks many farces and adores
These fantasies taunt you when you flaunt
them adamantly
Respond and your travesties will grow tenfold,
your wants
Will haunt your reveled, cold clots, now you're
gaunt
An automaton that won't stomp when you
don't know you're spotted
Now rebel against spells of robots that yawn,
“No! A pawn that tills our crops from Manila to
Prague”
Castilla you're gone, minimalists have plotted
To relive you in acrylic then laud while
applauding it
I spotted it and scoffed, “just an idealist's
fraudulent
Syllabus,” now my mind fills with pus and
crusts

Until Castilla's dove gets to crushing those
slugs now
Immortals howl as I growl at their aural fowls
They prowl through my portals and my aura
throws the towel

“

Your story is not my story.
Mine is the journey
I have been taking ...

”

— *Emily Gayle Aitken*

WORDS UNBOUND

ONE BOOK'S HERO'S JOURNEY

By Emily Gayle Aitken

Your story is not my story.
Mine is the journey
I have been taking,
I was taking,
I will be taking.

My story is how I adapt to my new
surroundings and circumstances.
How I use carbon artifacts as tools to achieve
my best right path.
The keyboard I am typing on.
The chair I am sitting on.
The items I have left behind.
My Dad's tools,
My Mom's kitchen implements.

Unpacking one of the final moving boxes,
I found a school music book with my Aunt's
childish scrawl of name and address.
They drove 100s of miles through the dustbowl
of the depression Midwest
To my Grandfather's new job half-way across
the country.
To start over on the shores of Lake Huron in a
small Ontario town.

The book was worn and had been designed to
teach children to sing.

For 10 years it stayed in a box in my basement.

Before that, for countless years, it collected
dust in my parents' garage.
I have no idea how or when it went from my
Aunt to my Mom.

Moving house is a time to shake up the stuff
we acquire,
The stuff designed to help us eat,
Build shelter, get places,
Earn a living and solve higher Maslow's needs.

Some stuff helps us present an image to the
world.

The diamond rings on my fingers left by my
Grandmother look shiny.

They can also be pawned to buy food when
clients don't pay their bills.

My Aunt's music book let me hear her voice
and see her face.

A couple of days ago, I gave the book to my
Cousin.

It let me give something of value to remind her
we share common roots.

“

Writing formulas methodically, Or writing words in a formula?

”

— *Han Oung*

Now she can share something of her Mom's.
A part of the foundational family story,
The trip from Brandon to Goderich in the early
'30s.
The book has been freed to continue its
journey,
with her Daughter and maybe her
Granddaughter.
Amazingly touching five generations!

DILEMMA

By Han Oung

A paper
An essay

Writing formulas methodically,
Or writing words in a formula?

These things compete,
Co-operate,
Contrast,
And conflict.

This is my hypothesis,
No,
This is my art.

Studies, statistics, and evidence,
Or

Poems, stories, and images?

Neither are seen together;
Until now, that is.

WHITE RABBIT

By Danielle Sequeira

I chase him across the page;
He stops ever so often to check his watch.
“Oh dear!” he cries in shock, “I’m late, late,
late.”

My pen dances across the page to chase the
white rabbit.

I rush to fill the lines,
Fill in the spaces and catch his fluffy little tail.
As ink stains the pathway,
I greet Cheshire cats through the hole punches
And smoking caterpillars in the scratched out
words.
My pen meets the red margin,
Cowering away from the Queen of Hearts.

I see the rabbit slow and the line come to an
end;
I pull out another page and I’m down the rabbit
hole once again.

“
Their fearful faces were as pastel as scars.
”
— *George Elliott Clarke*

JUDITH 7

By George Elliott Clarke

1: The next day, Holofernes ordered his
forces—
regular and auxiliary—
to march on Bethulia.

2: Like bittersweet vultures,
sweetly gliding, bitterly stalking,
the Assyrian troops swept over desert and
prairie.

3: This caravan of mass assassins numbered
170,000 infantry,
12,000 cavalry
(horsemen and charioteers),
plus thousands of mules
and baggage and supply carts.

4: Hundreds of thousands of feet and hooves
mussed desert sand and crushed prairie grass.
Lizards slithered for shelter under stones;
spiders sank into holes or cringed in their webs;
vultures hunkered down under clouds,
awaiting fresh, human meat,
soon, soon....
Dust swirled in a khaki hurricane.

5: The Israelites trembled with Terror at
beholding
the fierce armada approaching
to behead, castrate, rape, breed, plunder, and
torch.

6: Their sleep was demented by scenarios
involving
home invasions, Zombies, striding cobras,
cyanide-injecting-fanged lions,
jackals ejaculating Assyrian sperm
and lapping up Israelite blood.

7: The Hebrews lamented, crying,
“These ghouls will strip us to bare bone;
they’ll feast on flesh and flour,
slurp up blood and gulp down wine.
Our mountains will collapse into valleys
and our cities will be dismal cemeteries.
Death could be as blissful as orgasms,
compared to living as Assyria’s slaves,
enduring Depravity.”

8: Alarmed by the trooping, tramping foe—
the human locusts—
the Israelites manned watchtowers,
lit torches, staffed their artillery
(batteries of arrows),
and organized perennial watch,
peering as far as possible into shadows,
this that could shelter soldiers.

9: They were as mechanical about their
defense
as are addicts at intaking caffeine at dawn.
Their fearful faces were as pastel as scars.

10: Holofernes’ scouts reconnoitered the
springs

“Chalked diagrams completed Holofernes' blackboards just as birdsong—of doves—completed sunrise.”

— *George Elliott Clarke*

that slaked Israel's throats
and cleansed Israel's bowels
and flowered Israel's desert.

11: They advised Holofernes that,
rather than wage battle, literally uphill,
against an enemy occupying heights,
easily directing their arrows downslope,
it'd be best to seize the water supply,
and force the Israelites to creep downhill
to fill their tankards
and refresh their canisters,
lest they dry up from thirst.

12: “Why act like deaf-and-dumb ships,
struggling through tempests,
when, via Intelligence,
we can turn Hebrew Luxury—
plumbing, fountains, and faucets—
into Vexation?”

13: Instantly, Holofernes dispatched 5,000
soldiers
to garrison Israel's unprotected springs,
expecting Hebrew Desperation (for moisture)
to turn to Despair
and Despair to turn to Defeat.

14: Holofernes schemed:
“Their Confusion will be their labyrinth,
but will open into Assyria's avenue of
Triumph.”

15: The Assyrian general mused that

Israelite wives and babes,
thinned to skeletons by drought—
by famishment for water—
would strew their streets,
long before his sword need fall upon them.

16: Chalked diagrams completed Holofernes'
blackboards
just as birdsong—of doves—completed sunrise.

17: To further terrify the Israelites,
Holofernes spread out his army and supply
columns
to occupy every vista unto the horizon.
He wanted his enemy to tremble as they
thirsted,
to shake so much they'd spill each other's piss
as they quaffed it as if it were wine,
and then come crawling to him, disgraced,
weeping,
or die agonizingly.

18: Metaphorically speaking,
the glove was not thrown down,
as it were,
but thrown up—
like a kite.

19: Now, quailing before the Assyrian offense,
dreading Holofernes' obvious intent, his lust,
to sack, fuck, rob, wrack, ruin, and slay,
all Israel was moved to cry out to God.

20: All escape, all exits, were blocked.

“ the glove was not thrown down,
as it were,
but thrown up—
like a kite.

— *George Elliott Clarke*

”

Inside a month, all wells, all tubs, all cisterns,
were bone-dry—
except where too-avid mouths had left blood
where their tongues and lips had scoured
and scraped wood or stone,
seeking any morsel of moisture.

21: The people bawled to God for Relief—
or rain.

22: Mamas fainted on stoops;
babes' lips tugged at dead dug; men cut a wrist and milked their own blood;
oldsters and cripples slit their own throats
to nurse their offspring;
corpses got flung down hillsides
to keep Corruption from contaminating
inmates of de facto concentration camps.

23: News events? Always vent maggots.
The Commune comes apart
as newspaper pages are parted.

24: Suddenly, every Israelite blames Uzziah
for the dire situation, the mounting deaths,
now that “Courage” equals Catastrophe.

25: The masses moaned,
“Why didn't we make peace with
Nebuchadnezzar
and worship that bastard's turds,
if we'd had to?”

26: “Trusting you, Uzziah, we're now
perishing
with curses in our throats,
not water, not wine,
and our dead babes and dames and sires
are tossed ignobly off cliffs
for vultures to tear and nibble on.

27: “Each death, each teardrop, you preach,
represents
the silent pleading of blueprints to be executed,
of poems to be read aloud,
of Assyrians to be exterminated,
of Israel to be salvationed.

28: “Ha! Really?
All we have is news that's as topical as
wounds.
The chunky, clunky doomsday headlines
proliferate and proliferate!

29: “Turned-up collars under turned-up noses
and upturned eyes—
such are clerics,
expecting God's justification.

30: “The only solution—finally—is Surrender.
Now. Imperatively!
Better to be booty and slaves
than be corpses!”

“ I'll accept the life-size axe-blow
of my belly's hand-made guillotine. ”

— *George Elliott Clarke*

31: The Israelite survivors lamented and
complained
so loudly that, miles away,
Holofernes rejoiced.
He waltzed with his shadow and clapped for
mescal
with a juicy, sodden grub at the base
of the bottle,
and he gobbled up the insect
as he slobbered down the cacti-infused alcohol.

32: Uzziah balked at the protests.
He rebuked the doom-prophesying Hebrews,
demanding,
“Have Courage, but first Faith, comrades!
Persevere another dozen days
until 40 have gone by,
and I affirm that God will deliver us
from Nebuchadnezzar
as He did save us from Pharaoh.”

33: Uzziah thought to himself,
“The problem with scripture—
the difficult shining of black ink—
is it merely shuffles along,
never outpacing the rumbling lungs
of Defeatists....”

34: “They take the black gag upon their eyes,
to make Tyranny velvet-soft
and invisible,
so that no one notices its depredations—
until War Crimes trials are held.

35: “I know that metaphysical sawdust
is strewn over
fang-bites and pockmarks,
where blades nick or arrows graze.”

36: Again, Uzziah addressed the mob:
“If Salvation is not ours by Day 40
of this siege,
I will surrender our souls to Holofernes,
sign over our Civilization to him,
hand him our children to be slaves,
our wives to be his whores,
our goods to be his property,
and the Tabernacle to be his tavern.
And I will cast myself upon my sword.
I'll accept the life-size axe-blow
of my belly's hand-made guillotine.”

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Danielle Bryl-Dam likes her coffee how she likes herself: dark, bitter, and too hot for you. She is studying English and Creative Writing at Western University.

Charlie Bucket recently discovered the trickster, courtesy of Don.

Alex Busch is a first-year Western student and a writing enthusiast!

George Elliott Clarke, Toronto's fourth poet laureate, is also an acclaimed playwright and novelist. His many honours include the Governor General's Award for Poetry for his collection *Execution Poems*, the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Achievement Award, and the prestigious Trudeau Fellow Prize. His poetry collection *Whylah Falls* was a Canada Reads selection. His essay collection *Odysseys Home: Mapping African Canadian Literature*, based on extensive excavations of archives and texts, identifies African-Canadian literature's distinguishing characteristics, and argues for its relevance to both African Diasporic Black and Canadian Studies.

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Caution, **Jennifer Zhang** may write poetry when caffeinated.

Words are always part of that next best thing
– *Marlene Laplante*



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