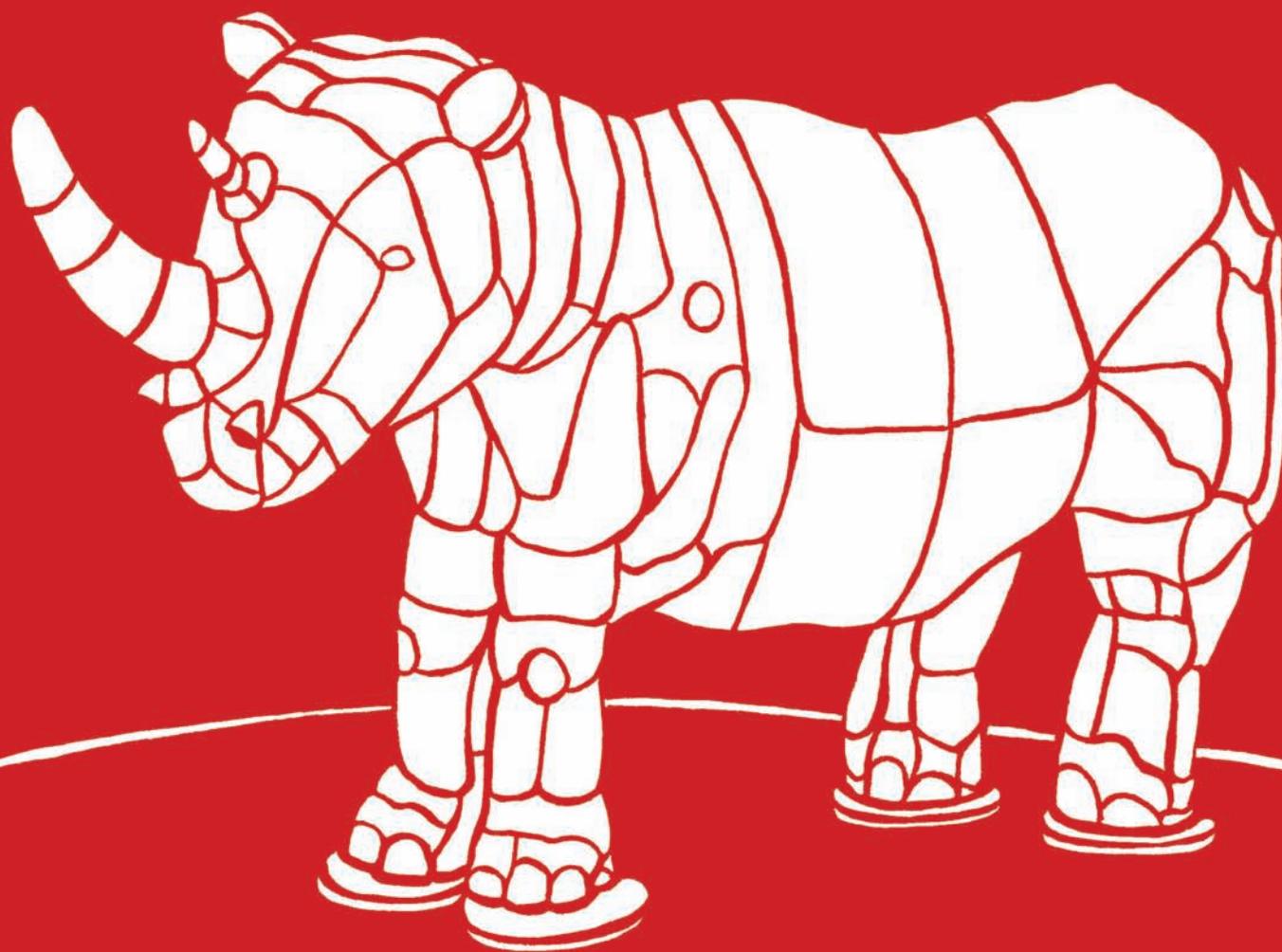


# WORDSFEET ZINE

VOLUME 2, NOV. 2016



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

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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.”

[Linares (Mexico) 21 & 22 octobre mmmxvi]

## CONTRIBUTOR BIOS:

**Emily Gayle Aitken**, a London, Ontario native, has just returned to her home town following a decades-long Torontonion odyssey practicing corporate and non-profit communications.

**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.

**Anne Cookson** loves writing.

**Tom Cull** lives and writes in London, Ontario.

**Calum Cunningham** has a Wheaten terrier who spends a lot of time with him, but who loves Calum's wife more than anyone or anything.

**Nicole Feutl** is a student at Western University who loves art, athletics, and apple pie.

**Penn Kemp's** latest book, *Barbaric Cultural Practice*, is out from [www.quattrobooks.ca](http://www.quattrobooks.ca) and the two anthologies of women's writing that she edited are available from [www.poets.ca/feministcaucus](http://www.poets.ca/feministcaucus).

**Marlene Laplante** has been writing poetry for almost ten years.

**Marsha Lemon** is a long time Londoner who went away and then came back.

**Morgan McAuley** is a writer, Western student, and Calgarian.

**Ola Nowosad** is a writer, teacher and member of Poetry London.

**Han Oung** is a 22-year-old student at UWO majoring in Medical Science.

**Cassy Player** is a second-year student at Western studying Creative Writing and English.

**Susan Bonk Plumridge** is a writer who writes poetry on her blog at [plumbonkers.blogspot.ca](http://plumbonkers.blogspot.ca).

**Tristan Ramos** is the son of a poet and filled in his father's footsteps.

**Gomer Robinson** is a self-styled self-taught scholar of the arts and voice of my own imagination...a storyteller.

**Danielle Sequeira** feels like she has stumbled down the rabbit hole once again.

**Heather Uksik** is a longtime Londoner who enjoys reading, writing and 'Space Invaders.'

**Kayla Vanstone** is a young fiction writer and marketing professional.

**Courtney Ward-Zbeetnoff** is a student at Western.

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

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



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