

# Why I Was Late

*poems by*

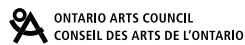
Charlie Petch

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Brick Books  
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## *Dear C3PO*

*To be accompanied by a ukulele & musical saw build on loop pedal, done to the tune of "You're Just Too Good To Be True" by Bob Crewe & Bob Gaudio.*

I always thought you were gay  
I imagined there was a  
little glorious hole  
somewhere in R2D2  
and when you made love  
he made those happy  
    *"hrrr hrrr brwing tup*  
    *whrrr hrr"*  
sounds

maybe he would turn his head  
all around to see you  
try to read joy  
in your manufactured face

I always thought you a top  
that R2D2 whispered love songs  
that didn't sound pre-programmed  
or desperate  
or othering

C3PO  
was your golden exterior  
made up of melted down wedding rings  
tossed into vats at the training schools  
the sheddings of those  
ready to die ?

these galaxy warriors  
who laughed at what made you feminine  
which sounds like hesitation  
which sounds like  
we are afraid  
to feel

how you must have keened  
every time your lover  
went to war  
became a plug in another machine  
(as unprotected as a jet wing)

your gold plated face  
never told us  
that behind the joke  
was a man in love  
with a soldier

I felt your tears my sweet  
though your face  
betrayed  
nothing

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=eL9-yWFASpM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eL9-yWFASpM)

## ***The Ballad of Owen Hart***

*Performed with a loop build on dulcimer and viola.*

Wrestling died on live TV  
my brother and I  
saw the cameras sway  
saw them fight not to look  
at your fallen beauty

Son of Stu  
brother of Jim, of Davey, of Brett  
cousin of Rowdy Roddy Piper  
your family trained generations  
of gentleman and lady wrestlers

but that all changed  
May 23rd, 1999  
when Owen  
you walked up 99 steps  
got strapped into an untested harness  
and were thrown to your death  
in the ring

Owen  
as you free fell 30 metres  
what thoughts were with you  
as the clip failed to catch  
as the crowd cheered your names

*“BLUE BLAZER”*

who said he could fly  
or

*“OWEN HART”*

who trusted he would

maybe  
as you rushed towards death  
you touched the small  
razor blade in your pants  
worried you'd land on it

maybe  
you said God's name

maybe  
you thought the mat  
would bounce your body back

did you curse Vince McMahon  
who turned your father's legacy  
into the mechanism  
of your death

Blue Blazer  
that morning  
you kissed  
your bed - headed children goodbye

liplocked your wife  
promised her  
you weren't going to do the stunt

how did you get  
from Martha's relieved embrace  
to falling to your death  
on

*"LIIIVE PAY PER VIEW?"*

was it because you knew  
that pure wrestling  
has no hero's reward?  
that pride and tradition  
won't put food on the table?  
that the Olympics only come  
every four years?  
but the wrestling franchise  
is on

*"EVERY NIGHT OF THE WEEK"*

and to win  
you cannot be Owen Hart  
who saves every dime for his family  
who comes from Canadian royalty

you have to put on costumes  
that make you feel foolish  
you have to be the Blue Blazer

*"YOU HAVE TO FLY"*

when kids wrestle now  
they use shattered fluorescent tubes  
folding tables  
metal chairs  
and ladders  
that lead nowhere

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=jFYqkLq3Nxs](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jFYqkLq3Nxs)



## *I'm So Good At Drag*

*To be performed with the ukulele, foot tambourine, thunder tube, musical saw, viola, basically anything that can make noise. I add these to the loop as the poem builds. Also features my "cool dad" dance moves.*

I'm so good at drag  
I got the doctor to put "female"  
on my birth certificate

I'm so good at drag  
my parents called me  
*"Ca-ther-inne"*

I'm so good at drag  
I got the job and over performed  
and still didn't get promoted  
but I did get sexually harassed  
and my ideas stolen

I'm so good at drag  
my boy band  
tried to pay me less  
than the other guys

I'm so good at drag  
I'm allowed to cry in public  
be excused from manual labour  
and can say things like  
*"I wish I could give birth"*  
and nobody laughs at me

(No I don't want to give birth, I was just trying to make a point)

I'm so good at drag  
that some of my cis male partners  
thought they we were having  
straight sex the whole time

I'm so good at drag  
that Ru Paul doesn't  
want me on his  
fucking show

I'm so good at drag  
that some of you  
don't understand  
what this poem is about

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=REqYqGixuKg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=REqYqGixuKg)

## ***The Saddest Country Song You Ever Wrote***

*Performed with gentle finger picking on ukulele.*

On the way to your memorial

I threw away the pieces of wall  
you hit instead of me

the crowbar I kept under the bed  
was in the trunk  
and I was breathing louder  
than you would have liked

we were a love poem once

on the way to your memorial  
we stopped to get food  
they didn't have the bbq chips you liked  
is this how I would make you angry again

your memorial  
was held at the dream home  
you spoke of on our aimless country drives  
I'm told these hermit hills  
sapped your depression  
the heart attack  
that made you a cruel stranger  
did not have weight here

you worked the land like it would save your soul  
put my letters, cards and love poems in a folder  
for your sisters to find  
kept my picture in your music room  
our wedding songs on playlists

told everyone you loved me  
that I never deserved your anger  
found their forgiveness for the years  
spent furrowed furious

I only ever wanted you to be happy  
and here, you were  
you were

so now I suckle ice cream like an abandoned child  
let our dog on the couch so I'm never alone  
dream about falling asleep on the subway  
instead of going to shows  
without the force of your hatred and love  
I am walking on Mars

Matty my honey  
my first true love poem  
this is the saddest country song  
you ever wrote

[Start at 22mins, from a full set at Words Aloud]  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=jj9SABkNmm4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jj9SABkNmm4)

## *How Did You Get To Be So Strong? Potential Answers*

Public transportation.  
I just stopped showering.

I am my own problem.

El Caminos are my favourite car.  
Pro wrestling and pop tarts,  
molestation.  
I knew Snuffleupagus existed and  
told no one on Sesame Street.

White Jesus looks like  
every guy who's raped me.  
I eat meat and love animals.

White supremacy helped me  
afford therapy.  
Doesn't survival,  
really just mean  
alive?

My ex-husband's death  
made me a Widex,  
which sounds like Windex.  
I can find ways to laugh about this.  
Thanks fuck I can laugh about this.

Didn't Bambi make a career out of grief?  
I just have good comeback lines.

As a child I preferred band aids  
to looking at my own skin.  
I love the smell of gasoline.  
My breasts don't belong to me,  
so in a way,  
some of it didn't happen.

I breathe easiest in emergencies.  
My first best friend is psychotic.  
Wolves only turn on the weakest.  
I want to be seen as a man.  
Isn't this how to be a man?

My brain is actually a maze of  
safety deposit boxes.

I've been taught  
the terrible art  
of how to walk tall  
on stolen land.

I am surrounded by people  
who need to be stronger than me.

Because artists save me every day.  
Because my art saves me.  
Because the stage is never  
the only open palm  
that holds me up.

## *Transilience*

Trans is waiting for your name to get called,  
while the teams go ahead  
and play the game on top of you.

Genderfluid is the shiny new car  
that your parents think is a wreck  
and will never let out of the driveway.

Non-Binary is rehearsing how to exit the bathroom stall  
in a way that will get you past the four men surrounding it,  
but not incite their violence.

Gender non-conforming is running up to cis people, asking  
*“Is this how you felt in your skin this whole time?”*  
while they stare at your high five until your arm withers.

Transmasculine is walking well behind women  
so they don't get worried, while evading men  
who follow you too closely.

Fluidity is taking out the pin  
from the - *“how can I help you?”* grenade  
and hearing the answer click on retail floors.

Coming out is revisiting the library in your brain,  
and closing so many books that had remained open  
waiting for answers.

Trans is whispering to your child self,

*“I’m so sorry I didn’t listen to you  
let’s give you the life you deserve.”*

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=IomsO839dtw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IomsO839dtw)



## ***How To Tell If A Poem Is Trans Or Not***

*(A helpful guide for slam poetry judges)*

Look directly at the crotch  
gently wave away all  
thoughts about how  
you never cared about crotches of poems  
before this poet

consider the subject

is it about love, loss,  
surgery, hesitation,  
breath, death threats  
surgery, surgery?

does it rhyme?

look at the crotch again

don't look up to see the poet looking  
at you looking at their crotch  
there's no need to involve them  
in this ruptured universe

grasp for any gendered word  
is tree bark about being a man?  
are they saying anything about blood  
or ribcages? ribcages are a trans thing now?

stare at its chest  
they're saying  
something something  
    *"inclusion"* now  
or was that  
    *"foregone conclusion"*

wait, don't you have to score the poem?  
how can you score it if you don't know

oh why did they write about a jack pine  
it's all so unfamiliar just words like an apogee  
with no point of gender reference

they look trans  
why aren't they talking about that then?  
talk about that then

times almost up  
their crotch is telling you nothing  
do you score them like a cis person?

maybe they're straight, dear lord  
did you get it all wrong?  
how low a score can you give them  
if they might not be trans?

they warned you about slam  
now here you are

crotchmerized

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=c5kXsMDeRg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c5kXsMDeRg)

## **Wookie Love**

*To be accompanied by a "A Place To Sleep", a tango recorded with The Silver Hearts during my tenure.*

Chewbacca  
you are my favourite  
of all of the wookies

since I saw you in the first movie  
which is actually the fourth movie  
you have ruined me for all of humanity

Chewie

there is never enough chest hair to satisfy me  
never enough back hair to warm the cockles of my star warring  
heart  
the smell of sweat and hair is sadly not husky musky enough  
to fully fill my  
little tusk

but I try I try  
*"just back from the gym?  
bring that hairy ass in"*

the love cries of my partners have never equaled  
the parallel universe of what comes out of your small-toothed  
mouth  
why are you not more saber toothed?  
light, saber-toothed platitudes of love from you

would be like  
sweet baths of sound  
guttural bubblings  
of glorious ghastrly sex

would you make me wear a mohair onesie  
so that you could accept me as your own?  
would you have me stop manscaping my landscape  
so that there is somewhere soft for you to land?

Chewbacca, would you only chew my bacca  
if the hair was long enough to be tangled with yours?

I want to twist and turn and grind you until we become  
dreadlocked

(I'd take them out later though, because I'm white)

I want my skin to be patterned in scraped lines of the lineage you  
left to be with me  
for our kitchen to smell of victory sage and the rubbed salts of  
galaxy seas

we could live our lives  
as naked apes

(although I would still wear a sports bro, or binder  
because it really feels weird not to have one on)

maybe we could both wear sports bros or binders  
and dance to space music created for us  
by the human John Williams

I didn't think our love  
could outlast my crush on  
Han Solo  
but when I'm with my  
han(d)s solo  
it is your Wookiee cry  
that blushes my neck  
your feet (that must smell of freedom)  
I want resting in my backs of my calves

it is you Wookiee man  
    your ammo belt  
    crashed to my floor  
    your tendrils caught in my  
    over-flossed teeth  
that pull out my belief  
that the language we seek  
need never include the  
oppressive learning of English

Wookiee I cry out  
    “WAAHHARRRRHHH”  
in hopes someday, you might cruise  
your Millennium Falcon my way

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=UFkI52\\_AqB0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UFkI52_AqB0)

## ***My First Lisper Hero***

*Performed with ukulele fingerpicking*

We called you champ.

Mike Tyson

when you and I open up our mouths  
they turn into bull's eyes  
and we are silent in our defense  
because words can be landmines

the first time I saw you  
unabashed unapologetic on the  
microphone

you became my first lisper hero

I imagined us in my playground  
bullies fleeing our earthquake footsteps

I tried to duck and dance like a butterfly Ali  
you were no one's punching bag  
launched iron fists to the tune of 38 arrests  
before you hit age thirteen.

the boxing world plucked you from reform school  
maybe you felt saved  
I know how education can seem like the enemy  
and for a boy targeted for his

high-pitched lispy voice  
you probably felt relieved that the teacher  
would never call on you again.

your lisp never got better  
your voice never dropped  
you put up your dukes  
gave up on language  
and let your dreams narrow

before your mom died  
she gave you to  
your boxing coach  
Cus D'Amato  
who polished you up like a  
custom auto  
but never could install any breaks

there were no bells in the bedrooms you strode into  
no towels to be thrown in front of your thundering ways

raised to be a wild animal  
you look calmest wrestling with your bengal tiger  
even your friends say you belong in a cage

but Mike  
you're as used to betrayal as getting punched in the gut  
I mean the man who could have protected you  
left  
when you were just two years old



there are no “s” sounds in “dad”  
you could have said it everyday  
without the worry of retribution

instead you shout it into barrel chests  
it bounces back with the blank stares of men  
who love you  
for your fists  
and the bags of money they bring

maybe what you needed  
was a male embrace  
not to be cut short by a bell

now in the wake of Holyfield’s spat out ear  
your empire crumbles  
your 4-year-old daughter dies  
your other children look at you in fear  
and your beloved tiger  
paces behind some stranger’s bars

the television calls you a monster  
speaks of your failures  
your crimes  
your legacy of violence

Mike  
I like your new heavyweight fight  
the one called Sobriety  
as your daughter’s easy laughter  
makes you champion

the father who's there  
the father who came back

I've written so many endings  
to your poem, Mike  
some were too kind  
others damned you  
but you grew  
in love and recovery

some humans are capable of so much  
when we give them a chance  
to get up off the mat

## ***Buried Treasure***

*If you are currently eating, I'd recommend you stop until you're done this poem. Performed with a sexy dulcimer.*

For a second I glance  
at that spot  
by your blushing earlobe  
my treasure glinting

I force my attention  
back  
don't let on  
don't stare

will my mouth  
travel down your chest?  
suck your nipples hot  
blow them cold  
linger at arced pelvis  
and then tongue you like a  
weathered stallion at a salt lick?

will I taste us  
before I ask  
with cum-tangy breath  
for you to

*“turn over”*

you gaze at my fetish-glazed eyes  
fear fluttering flaccid state

*“why?”*

you ask  
my attempts at being casual,  
laughable

*“you um... have  
some bacne you can't get to  
let me help you.”*

you turn over  
and the poetry of your blemishes  
open soft-cover sweetly

there it is

a story of trapped dirt, oil  
and capped  
worms buried in pores  
a revolution  
waiting to be freed  
by my trim fingertips

when you're not around  
I think about those three aged blackheads  
by your ear  
imagine long lingering dunking baths  
heated lavender cloths  
ambient music playing

trip hop tales of our  
estheticia

oh, do not think I'm the only one  
we find each other at garden parties  
strawberry socials  
and at the bottom of wine bottles

loosened by liquor  
we speak freely  
of acne vulgaris  
closed comedos  
open comedos  
papules  
and refilling sebules

we are at your spas  
we're staring at the back of your sweaty neck right now  
we go to school for twenty years to call ourselves  
dermatologists  
but we are lovers  
freedom fighters

we can identify our lover's bodies  
by the scars that we leave

*"yes officer, it's them, I'm sure of it"*

we'll say with tears brimming  
knowing we can never press  
those pores again.

let us heal you  
don't make us live in shame  
our passions spent downloading  
"Biggest Zit Pop Ever"  
"Cysts of Cyprus"  
"Infected Boils of Istanbul"

and so dear reader  
when you finally relent  
and let me at your back  
know that the nuggets that  
I extract, and then present to you  
with all the affection of a  
murderous cat  
is me showing you

the pus  
real love  
is made of

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=sEkfQqnJVLI](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sEkfQqnJVLI)