“You rob me of my language, my history, my truth, replacing my thousand-year-old traditions with pseudo-culture, your empire franken society”

— Ola Nowosad, Franken
INTRODUCTION

Welcome to WordsFestZine, an ‘instant’ publication born out of a partnership among Words, Poetry London, Western University, Fanshawe College, and Insomniac Press. Our goal this year was to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the publication of Frankenstein. Our call was simple: we asked for works of prose, poetry, creative nonfiction, art and monstrous hybrids inspired by and in response to Mary Shelley’s classic work and its ongoing cultural legacy.

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.

In keeping with the Frankenstein theme of the Zine, and following the novel’s use of frame narratives, we have divided the WordsFestZine into 4 sections: “Frame 1,” “Frame 2,” “Frame 3,” and “Frame 4.” Each section contains poetry, prose, creative nonfiction and art work that responds to, retells, revises, extends and “frames” the novel, its legacy, and the celebration of literature that is WordsFest.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Cover artwork: Sean Kaiser (aka Lunch Thief)
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INSIDE THE CEO BRAIN

For Mary Shelley
By Joel Dailey

Times there are when the wind blows the flag in the wrong direction, Fido. Times when a sunny disposition leads to minor thumbing, and several toppled monuments later, to mainlining pure, uncut Narrative. Victims of prolonged use vow to liberate all pets from their pet shops, all snakes from their framed diplomas. Amid wholly unforeseen circumstances (inbound monster torso), drones drone on, fending off the Inevitable in whatever form (0.08% misleading). Americanists by day, by night fluid Imbibers, "Didja bring the New Apparatus?" Resources we can muster (Ibsen for absurd), but in order to achieve $ucce$$, functional and inspirational (roving mobs, torches held high in the woods), we require the New Apparatus and we require it Right The Fuck Now.

“Monstrous Eye” by Mary Mcdonald
FOR MARY AND HER MEN
By Penn Kemp
Do you remember the storms
on Lake Geneva, the challenge
set out by poets, and by you so
easily equalled in power and
longevity.

It was revolutionary then to
spend a weekend dreaming
Gothic. You chewed the era
coming into focus—new but
unrealized science in action.

Thinking monster—this idea
alive at the same time and
huge the way the past is
thrown by a trick of light

projected onto shadow
out of all proportion into
a future to be feared, unknown.

Then the thud of approaching
golem, his wet eye unable to
focus on anything as small
as you, his author, his maker.

SCRITCH-SQUISH
By Erica McKeen
I had a dream last night. the little attic hatch above
my bed was open, just slightly, just enough to see
pink insulation pressing out, all fluffy and scratching,
like pus pushing with blood from a wound. I reached
up and opened it the rest of the way and pulled
through, scritch-squish, I pushed through, and I could
see from the little bit of light from the little attic
window that a body lay across the support boards. I
turned it over. it was my husband. he was dead. his
eyes had been pulled from his head and his mouth
was too long at the corners, as if stretched, as if cut,
and his neck was lacerated and his toes were missing.
I could smell him rotting. I watched him, I watched
him, and then crawled out of the attic, scritch-squish,
and when I woke in the morning he was downstairs
making breakfast, sausages and eggs. I could smell
them frying, and I knew and I knew and I knew, that
I had woken, everything ok, nothing wrong, nothing
wrong.

BODY PARTS
By Tammy Gilbert
“Shoulda done this when we were younger.”
I can only grunt in response.
The Cornish coast has proved us unfit; if only we
could be replaced with those two others, the ones
from forty years ago. Our bodies have changed, been
broken, split; they grind and crack. We are grotesque.
Every other step up from the beach is taken with
my new knee; when the old knee takes its turn, I have
to grab Ed’s arm, just in the crook where his hand
enters his jacket pocket. Me inside of him, I heave.
His feet are huge in his walking boots. A man with
such big feet, it hardly matters if he takes a wrong
step: he makes his very own causeway.
“Can you slow down a bit?”
I’ve used my angry voice, which has mostly
replaced my old one over the years.
At the top is the small churchyard we’ve come to
see. The bodies are so worn by wind and rain that
many of the dead are nameless. It wouldn’t be so
bad, I think, becoming anonymous in this place.
I take my camera out and zoom in on bone-white
stone and patchy moss.
“You can’t read the inscriptions,” I say.
“You’d have to dig ’em up, for the DNA.”
Ed is all about the DNA nowadays, since they
found Richard III in the car park.
I take some shots with the sea in the background;
he looks at his watch and his heavy feet stamp to and
fro.
“I’m gonna sit down.”
He walks to the step of the church, groaning as he
lowers himself onto it, then leaning his head on the
carved arch, he closes his eyes. We’ve been homebodies,
sutured together on the living room sofa for years.
We’re only just noticing the rot.
I want to get a shot of a Celtic cross before we
leave, to make it look like a fist shaking at the sky. I
aim upwards and focus, but stepping back on the
lumpy ground, I fall. At my age, the shock alone
could kill me, but luckily my fleshy bottom takes
most of the impact and my camera lands softly in
some long grass.
Ed is right behind me so quickly. He forms his arms into my arms, his head into my head; he pulls my torso against his; he animates me upright, then turns me slowly. He steps back and touches my temples on either side.

“You gonna live?”

“I will.”

He brings me my camera and moves my arm up to place it in my grip. His fingers stay on mine.

We look at each other, two people introduced. Ed’s hair is thin but long and the wind twists it about like mad snakes. I point the camera at him and he smiles, his lips a joyous gash. I click away and forget all about what we were or have become; I will invent us exactly as we want to be.

THE TORMENT OF FRANKENSTEIN
By Lincoln McCardle
The man could not stop thinking about Frankenstein
It was just so monstrous and complex
Clear and obviously emitting the shine

That morning, the man was shocked by the sign
He found himself feeling rather constructive
The man couldn’t stop thinking about Frankenstein

Later, the man was spooked by a creeping vine
He thought the situation had become rather accumulative
But he could never forget the Frankenstein

Mary tried to distract him with wine
Said his mind had become too cluttered and dative
The man couldn’t stop thinking about Frankenstein

The man looked deep into the mine
The monster was becoming too quantitative
But he could never forget Frankenstein

The man soaked like a gothic brine
His faculty of reason becoming dangerously meditative
The gloom and mystery and the grotesque
And he would never forget Frankenstein

SKIN
By Samantha Zangrilli
I slip into skins not my own.

My legs pricked with goosebumps.
Snakeskin lines my shaven limbs.

My neck, breasts, and stomach drip with perspiration.
Coarse brown feathers drape my slender frame.

My feet shades of purple.
Rigid black leather cuts circulation.

I slip into skins not my own.

I stride down the extensively long runway.

Vast darkness.
White, glistening eyes
Huffing of breath

Crowd both sides of my path.

Unknown clapping smacks together, roaring for the polar bear
dancing behind.

MONSTER
By CJC Elwood
A boiling aromatic cesspool of misery with blood dripping a death creeps up inside a shell, breathing your deception. You are a meat grinder strangling until breathless; mercilessly mangling intestines and hemorrhaging a heart, you leave the lifeless lying on the ground awaiting their molecular structures’ decomposition beyond this earthly hell.
GENE THERAPY
By Claudia Coutu Radmore
such therapy now helps blind mice see and us to hold
on to the sounds that linger long after it’s over you’re
a saint she said but you can be helped as can any
demons that trounce or bite back; study your cytoge-
netics as the glowing green blob of Hanny’s Voorwerp
gives birth to new stars try germline genes to help
those who prefer an existential life or for dogs deter-
mined to honour trees in the traditional way even the
snake that habitually crosses the double line on Aus-
tralian highways but encourage persons who invest
in the spirit of the hive to preserve the solemn inves-
tigation of useless things like the study of ghosts
before breakfast in the rue moufftard; consider genes
that encourage meditation on the mottling of mountain
slope shadow or brown sounds but don’t spend time
on the treatment of people who swallow rubik’s cubes
or worry about the dental formulae for sheep; there is
no point in being frightened of new ideas when there
are enough old ones to worry about but it is less
essential to teach female squirrels not to mate with
whoever shows up than to utilize FOXP2 to assess
how the shape of words and sentences changes the
shape of thought — grow me a gene so I’ll wait for
you forever or at least for a reasonable amount of
time a sequence of nucleotides to ensure that my
little boat will carry me to your dream

CHILLED MOLECULES THEIR STORAGE SKILLS
By Claudia Coutu Radmore
what the body feels being every bit as significant as
what the mind thinks and inextricably intertwined
nevertheless since time is an illusion and lunchtime
doubly so when you start by saying it was the day my
grandmother exploded it’s not beyond belief that the
milky way harbours celestial objects that accelerate
particles of at least a million billion electron volts
and though predictably some may be jumping over
the moon other cows are natural pessimists just check
the baboon spider atlas it’s effortless thinking; what
the body feels every bit as significant savour the
leafy shade of life boulevard take time to watch mind
surfers floating carelessly along two feet above the
waves register the possibility of exploding air forming
seas on alien planets oh that it may rain diamonds but
be aware that with some six to nine metres of dis-
placement the mainland is long overdue for a gigantic
quake still when you know chilled molecules can
store your whole life’s experience in a half inch cube
do you need to prove who you are the air between us
poignantly turbid as we create each other through re-
lationships what the body feels so significant and in-
extricably intertwined with what the mind thinks like
what are birds for what is flying for what is lying for
what is dying for still those skilled storage bits the
door inside the heart of gold thanks you for making
a simple door very happy

MAKER AS POET CONFRONTS CREATURE AS WORK
By Camille Intson
“Did I request thee Maker, from my clay / To mould
me Man, did I solicit thee / From darkness to
promote me?” — Paradise Lost (Title page of
Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein, 1818 edition)

Birthing my work is like
exhuming words, like bodies, from language’s crypt.

Here they rot now,
A vapid stitch and sew of dead phrases
Like severed limbs, cold and hollow in their vanity.

One spark and they twitch,
baptized with poetic sensibility and brought into
some euphoric half-life,
if only to later sprawl between pins like spiders
milked for venom
at the moment of their being.

The corpse enacts its violence on the letter.
We are taxidermists of language, violating word
with intent.

We recoil at work’s first sign of life.
And work evades us, evades us,
Into the mountains, into the blinding snow,
A spectre of our desire, a monster of minds.
Once I suppose words rose,  
seeped through wounds left through the ages,  
brought us closer to some nameable God,  
filled us with light, our spaces with sound and matter.

They penetrated us, blushed,  
Collapsed post-use in ecstatic firework at my feet and in my hair.

They hang now  
An abortive gulf  
A mocking emblem of our imperfect being  
Born into impermanency  
And I do not know what to make of this mistrust of language.

I do not believe in Gods, but  
I believe in the shells of life and limb left carefully behind by the words of the great dead poets,  
Many of whom believed with great heartiness in the Death of the artist at the moment of his work.

I have never known what to make of this.

For I have known my work as haunted.  
As orphan, to an extent, as fatherless, as queer and monstrous,  
And searching, searching, for another of its kind,  
For place or companionship or the ghost of its mother.

Who now, ashamed at its deformity,  
Claims not authorship, nor parenthood,  
But instead vanishes behind the creator’s mask,  
Into death, into non-being, beyond the phrase.

Now the child is left raw,  
Vengeful in its fruitless fury,  
Saying “Maker, Maker,  
Did you will this for me?”

(Ok not afraid, my child, of speech,  
for in your mother’s death is your vehement life.)

WE ARE GODS  
By Alexandra Dane

“Imaginations are ill things,” Frank whispered into his microphone. The audience leaned forward to grasp his secret with their hearts. “An imagination is a life unlived. “You,” he said, pointing to a brassy blonde woman with hunched shoulders in the front row. “What is it you imagine?” “I —,” she looked around, eyes wide, hoping for the answer from someone close, but chins fell down and away, crossed knees angled to the opposite corners of the room, and eyes found anywhere else to look. The woman swallowed. “I don’t know.” “You don’t know,” he mused and paced the stage, hands clasped behind his back. “We’ll get back to that soon but you must have imagined something or you would not need us.” The room filled with knowing smiles. Frank returned them. “You are telling me that you haven’t imagined driving away in your boss’s car? You haven’t imagined being the boss? What about sleeping with the boss?” People laughed and the woman shrivelled. A red blush crept up her neck. “I-I guess I’ve imagined being the boss. My own boss, maybe.” “Maybe, yes,” he nodded. “This is my point! We imagine things because we wish them to be so, but imaginations are useless because we don’t take them seriously. Or ourselves. What if — what’s your name?” “Maddy.” She cleared her throat. “Madeline.” “Madeline. Beautiful.” He knelt in front of her, and turned her chin up to meet his golden eyes. “Beautiful Madeline. What if you didn’t imagine? What if instead of spending hours of your week imagining, you lived those fantasies? What if you could have the life and relationships you dream of? What would that make you?”
“Happy?” she wondered.
“Happy,” he repeated. “So I ask you today — all of you — not if you can imagine yourself happy, but if you can take the journey with us here at Dezign and build yourself happy!”

Everyone clapped and nodded to those sitting closest to them.
“What is our call to action? Say it with me!”
And in perfect harmony: “I will build myself in my own likeness — powerful, strong, successful.”
“Yes,” he said, once the cheering had settled. “Good.”

We brushed past attendees on our way to the car. News crews stood on the sidewalk, waiting in the rain. An exposé from a former Dezigner in a leading paper had come out and now the leeches were hoping for a feast. A woman thrust her microphone in Frank’s face.

“Doctor Weber, former Dezign followers have called you and your wife monsters, frauds, abusers, and cultists. Do you fear a trial?”

“We gave them back their lives.” Frank reached for my hand and pulled me close. “They may not like our methods now, but ask them where they would be without us. Ask the people in there why it is worth it to be reborn, rebuilt, and redesigned.”

We hurried past the rest of the questions and climbed into the back of the SUV.

“Monsters,” he chuckled. “We are gods.”

REFINE
By Rachel Turner

“Have you seen this?” Harper huffed, dropping the newest edition of Refine magazine on my desk.

Rita Adams was on the cover, completely naked. She was the newest and the biggest, by which I mean smallest, thing in modeling. I had just edited a photo of her last week for our monthly edition of Paint.

“You know we didn’t sign her as an exclusive, right? She was just contracted for the Bloom lipstick campaign.”

“Ugh,” she groaned, rolling her eyes. “Of course, I know that, I’m not fucking stupid.” She pointed an aggressive finger at the young woman’s ankles. “Do those look familiar to you?”

I squinted at the catalogue. They looked thinner, but such a discrepancy was hardly uncommon in our line of work.

“She got them done!” she exclaimed. “These geniuses at Refine have launched a new surgery! Ha! I never thought they would get around to promoting ankle reduction, but I guess someone has got to address the massive cankle problem in this country!”

She flipped to the page on which Rita endorses the procedure, delicate ankles on full display. “That’s the last thing I’d be worried about,” she mused, prodding at her stomach with an acrylic nail. “Maybe one day, when I get a damn raise. Ha!”

She waved away the idea and sauntered off, leaving the catalogue behind. I eventually got sucked into the pages. Each model was more beautiful than the last. I had to suck in my gut while I read.

The last page was an advertisement for a simple liposuction procedure, cheaper than I’d ever seen. Anyone who was anyone had gotten their tummy tuck thirty years ago and was now far more preoccupied with getting their ankles done, apparently. I ripped out the page and tucked it in my back pocket.

When I got home, Reese, in her signature rainbow tutu, was working on homework at the kitchen table. She explained that she was making a “vision board,” and that she was supposed to cover it with pictures representative of her ideal future.

I smiled, peering over her shoulder at the images she’d picked out. There was a kitten, a massive treehouse, a ballerina, and, strangely, a set of legs.

“What’s that honey?” I pointed, absentmindedly clearing my throat.

“Just legs,” she said simply, running her tiny hand over her pink tights. “All the girls at school say it’s the most important procedure.”

My stomach sank and took my heart with it.

I snatched the image from her hands before I could think, crumpling it in my fist. She stared at me, eyes wide.

“Sometimes,” I paused, searching for the right words, “the girls at school get it wrong.”

I tossed it in the trash, then reached for the advertisement in my back pocket.

“Sometimes we all get it wrong.”

I threw it out, too, followed by every copy of Refine I could find in the house.
“Young Frankestein” by Museum London Youth Council
REBIRTHDAY
By David Barrick
Mildew patina on a knuckled pate, five o’clock shadow of bruised flesh, he clomps out from ten mortuaries, garland of giblets trimmed and tucked into a rental ventral cavity. He’s late as always; no one bothers screaming surprise.
Karloff and De Niro struggle, grunt over a tangle of acetate confetti. Where’s Abbott? Where’s Costello? Who knows. Just windmills churning hexes overhead. He cringes from the cake’s inferno: fifteen candles for every line of stitches pulled taut, for every robbed plot.

EVERYBODY CARRIES A MONSTER
By Chris Chang
Everybody carries a monster They are real like you and me Hungry, hateful, and desperate Winning is all they want

How about that woman over there? Her monster is hidden well It’s there in the fidget of her hand The monster looks through her absent eyes The world is dull and needs awakening She reaches deep inside And returns empty-handed Her monster did not win today

Everybody carries a monster Most have more than one Some are better at hiding Others are easier to see

Do you see that man in red? He carries his monster proudly It’s the only thing he’s ever known The monster whispers its insolence The man screams it to the world He is lost in his superiority And will not find his way His monster had won long ago

Everybody carries a monster But we are not our monsters.

Can you see mine? My monster is always with me It defines the edge of my boundaries The monster holds his arms out The monster shakes his head no I am afraid beyond words And yet I push past to see I am further than I have ever been.

STARES
By Jennifer Wenn
They come in different types. The quicker, intense flash. The leisurely look-over, Averting your gaze if I make eye contact. The long, lingering examination, As of a lab specimen for your perusal, No looking away. Sometimes I read simply confusion Or surprise in your eyes. Sometimes, a smug recognition (well, good for you). Sometimes, though, the disgust, the contempt, is palpable. Sometimes, I don’t notice. Sometimes, I don’t care. Sometimes, I stare back. Other times, it hurts, once more Failing to transform the external Into a portrait of the internal, Once more exceptionalized, Not allowed to simply be.

WE WERE THE ONES CALLED MONSTERS
By Crystal Underhill
He kept our eyes in jars Marked with white handwritten labels.

I could see four bare walls and a door, A long steel medical table, free of any medical supplies Except a hand saw with a rusted blade —
Next to a hand that had belonged to my body.

My rough legs were attached to a soft and tender torso.
Discarded limbs and rotting flesh littered the ground,
All impurities cut from the parts he chose,
New scars formed from the stitches.

He stole a child’s ears
To place them on the head of the boy’s father
Whose lips were carved from his face,
A gaping hole left behind.

I counted the pieces,
Leg by leg and arm by arm,
Watched as the body was formed.

I could hear no sounds,
Feel nothing from my hand attached to its new body,
I was only a set of eyes.
I watched as my scattered pieces slowly died,

From the jar with the white handwritten label.

**WORMWOOD’S FRANKENSTEIN**

By Dylan Clark-Moore

This year’s WordsFest began with a celebration of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, in the form of a screening of the 1931 film adaptation. The film was scored with an original live performance by electroacoustic band Wormwood.

When we talk about music, we mostly talk about feelings. Music’s power over us is so unconscious, often so primal, that it is difficult to conceive of it as anything other than divine and unknowable. Consciously or not, musicians, like Wormwood’s Christina Willatt and Andrew Wenaus, understand that music is tangible. In a recent talk, Christina explained how sound literally changes the air it inhabits. Stripped down, music is nothing more than the varying motions and stillness of air. Still, there is power in its wielding, in transforming the air into something else.

Combined with the images of James Whale’s horror classic, Wormwood’s performance, like Frankenstein’s own mysterious ultraviolet rays, created life where it wasn’t before.

Andrew’s synthesizer provided a near-constant worrisome drone, the score giving the film a throughline of looming dread.

At times, the music teased the audience with its foreknowledge of events to come. Christina’s piano shared in our nervous curiosity as Boris Karloff’s monster approaches a young girl playing by a pond. It gifted us relief with a high twinkle of consonance as the creature smiles. Seconds later, it stripped away that safety, returning to its anxious mood, anticipating the girl’s tragic end.

The score was a highly-constructed kind of improvisation, with a key, a tone, and instrumentation planned out for every moment and scene. Like Frankenstein himself, they didn’t know exactly what was going to happen, but they knew their tools, and they knew that something needed to be created.

The score’s real triumph began in the scene where Frankenstein allows his creation to see daylight for the first time. Through their instruments, Wormwood were the scientists who took Karloff’s grasping curiosity and exploded it into religious wonder.

It’s fitting that the final act, the monster’s death, mirrors his first encounter with light. In light, he finds awe, and in the bright, burning light of the villagers’ torches, he meets his tragic and violent end. Here, the score echoed the earlier daylight scene, and it was in that final act that Wormwood’s *Frankenstein* became the sublime experience that it had earlier promised to become.

In the climax, the music swallowed the rest of the sound. Ironically, for an event called WordsFest, the film’s dialogue became unnecessary, an interruption of an enormously felt experience. The scene, birthed in a glorious fusion of cinematic visuals and Wormwood’s mythic tone and ethereal vocals, created a new, inimitable life.

To hear Wormwood tell it, rehearsing for the performance had never gone quite “like that” before.

The performance was not recorded, and will likely never be heard again. But it happened, and, like nearly all of life, it was precious to those who witnessed it.
CREATE YOUR OWN FRANKENSTEIN STORY
By Sebastian Schmidt

Roll a six-sided die on each table:

What kind of Creature is it:
1 a dinosaur
2 a human
3 a robot
4 an AI program
5 a clay golem
6 a plant

How intelligent is your Creature:
1 starts with an IQ of 10 and gets 10 more every day
2 average intelligence with the knowledge of a child
3 average intelligence
4 only driven by instinct
5 more than average intelligence
6 starts with an IQ of 200 and loses 10 every day

Who are the other characters in the story:
1 only the creator(s)
2 clueless people
3 the military
4 no one
5 the whole world
6 the creator’s family and friends

How does the story end:
1 the Creature kills itself
2 someone else kills the Creature
3 it gets locked up forever
4 it lives happily until the end of its life as part of society
5 it lives happily until the end of its life apart from society
6 an age of Creatures begins

Where does your story take place:
1 a lost island
2 a picturesque European city
3 a futuristic megaplex
4 London, Ontario
5 a mall
6 a magical fantasy world

Who created it:
1 a scientist
2 a child prodigy
3 a witch circle
4 the government
5 a religious group
6 luck

What is the main conflict in the story:
1 the Creature starts to kill everyone
2 someone wants to kill the Creature
3 the Creature falls in love with somebody
4 somebody falls in love with the Creature
5 the Creature accidentally kills someone
6 people are afraid of the Creature

Now fill in the gaps of the story with your imagination and create your own version of a funny, spooky, or thoughtful Frankenstein story!

UNTITLED
By Joseph Simons

The dingy overhead lamp made the hair on Booker’s head look even greasier, his skin an uglier yellow than before. He scribbled feverishly on crumpled scraps of paper, double-checking his work, looking over paragraphs from the book. Everything was set. He would prove everybody wrong and they would realize his genius. The laughter and ridicule would finally cease.

Then there was a pounding on the upstairs door. Not a polite query. No, this was a demand.

Dr. Booker scrambled over to the table where his greatest creation lay. He gazed down at the soft skin, the pale colour of fresh milk. He adjusted the metal headpiece that wrapped around its head like a halo, making sure the cords were not frayed and the rods were lodged neatly into its temples.

The pounding came again, followed by the announcement of the police department. There was no time left to admire the man that lay before him. He stomped back to the desk, snatching the only important piece of work left. The rest could burn. He would be the only one who would have the gift.

Booker moved over to the electrical box that was busted open to reveal its mechanical organs. The
voltage was exactly right, not enough to fry the body like a convict, but more than enough to give the jump of life. He smiled as his hand went to the switch. No man of science had ever been as close as he had. None had the level of knowledge he possessed: anatomy, genetics, technological innovation, cellular regeneration.

His thought was interrupted by the crashing of the door breaking and the shouts of hysterical invaders. He would have thirty seconds, at most. He took one look at the discarded body in the corner, the necessary sacrifice for the gift bestowed on him. Sheldon should be proud of his role in all this; his name would not be forgotten. Without hesitation, he flicked the switch.

The shouts of the men elevated as the lights dimmed, the life seeping out of them and into his creation. Booker watched in giddy anticipation. He saw the vibrations surging into the body and waited for it to rise, for his achievement to be complete. The barrelling of boots started down the wooden steps to his domain. But it was too late. He had succeeded, and they would only bear witness to it.

But nothing moved. In the pale light, nothing jumped to life. Instead, death still lingered. The doctor yelled. He couldn’t have failed, he just couldn’t have. There was too much at stake. He had done everything he needed to do. This was the next step.

The police moved in, shouting instructions before thrusting him face-down onto his table and snapping the cuffs around his wrists. How had it gone so wrong? His experiment was perfect. Perhaps it was just that. Science fiction, from the work of an author, and nothing more.

THE ATAVISM DEVICE
By Ahmed A. Khan

My mind is teeter-tottering. The results of my latest experiment are in, and I don’t know what to do with them.

I must sit down and carefully analyze the impacts of my discovery on science, on society. But how can you do that when your world has suddenly turned upside down?

This will be a very brief story... if a story it is.

I am not a professional writer, so don’t expect minute details of background and subtle nuances of characterization. It is not necessary for me to state, or for you to know, whether I like blondes or brunettes, whether I eat cucumbers or not. The only thing you need to know about me is that I am a male belonging to the species Homo Sapiens. (I am forty years old and happily married, if you really want to know). Important to the story is the fact that I am a research biologist, and, keeping modesty aside, a good one.

For a long time I had been fascinated by the different theories of evolution. How much truth was there in each of them? I wished I could lay my hands on some conclusive evidence. All the evidence around me was circumstantial in nature, subject to numerous interpretations. I was not satisfied.

Then, at last, my researches led me to a foolproof method of testing the theories of evolution. I invented the Atavism Device.

It was based on some of the latest discoveries in the field of Kirlian research. I will leave for my scientific paper the details of the principles on which the machine worked. Here, I will only give a brief outline of its function.

The function of the device is quite well-embodied in the name, I think. The machine causes atavism in the purest sense. It works this way: A specimen is taken and placed inside a box provided for it in the machine and the machine is switched on. The machine then starts a tremendously fast process by which, within a few minutes, it peels off, layer by layer, the evolutionary changes in the specimen, finally transforming the specimen into the organism from which it had originated.

It was an ideal way of testing out the theories of evolution. I tried the machine out on various specimens from the lower class of animals. It worked beautifully. It seemed that, at least in the lower organisms, biological evolution was a fact. I continued my experiments, moving slowly up the ladder until I reached the primates. My first subject in this class was a male ape.

Now listen carefully, for I am coming to the end of my story.

I put the ape in my machine. Soon, I could observe changes in the appearance of the ape. The Atavism Device was working fine. Evolution seemed to be at work in primates, too.

And when all the evolutionary layers had been peeled off, in the place of the ape lay the body of a man.
//CYBER BULLET//

By Caitlyn Dubé

1.

Call me the perfect cybercitizen.
Call me upstanding, upright, upcycled
by the wolves of commerce.
These masters in glass houses—
bestial alphas of netiquette—
fold their napkin paper cranes
over cubical kingdoms.
They market Google glasses while
tweeting worries of lacking fame. Whoops!
Another secretary drops his coffee to click a
post; his building keeps swaying
like tall reeds in stormy winds.

Call me the perfect cybercitizen.
Call me queen of communication,
of systematic machinations pre-programmed
into a mind-formed youth.
This world is but a typed-up Franken-failure,
a time of monstrous digital madness
without a technician who knows what they’re doing:
“Have you tried turning the power button on and
off?”

I am the perfect cybercitizen.
I have fixed my eyes to the gyrating pixels
of my computer screen and licked by QWERTY
keyboard clean from crumbs.
I have spit phrases into battle wounds,
blinked letters into psychological scars,
flayed and frayed the body of self-confidence
down to nothing but a blurring edge.
This place is consumed by email erasure
of bone and body, our exposed wires
already catching fire before they ever
get the chance to spark.

2.

But I’d rather not be dubnium: explosive,
uncontainable zeroes and ones ever-repeating
in an army of code, marching to the frontlines so
the black and white keys can make the machine gun
go

Tap, tap, tap—send.

We’re all serial killers at a distance—bullet
for the click—and this world is a virtual
colonoscopy of the heart:
cameras placed in living rooms,
in the baby’s crib,
in the bathroom toilet,
in my soul.

FAMILY PORTRAIT

By Kayla Skinner, Theresa Skinner and Dave Skinner
Three walked barefoot over gravel, limbs reached
out in good company like
welcoming willows.

The dirt roads led them nowhere but home.

Inside, peeling papered walls sagged like their
smiles did when they were forced to
abandon home. The house’s silence, deafening.

Dust rested upon the bookshelf that contained unfor-
gotten writings:

  mother’s poetry,
father’s carpentry manuals,
daughter’s comics.

Their cackling laughter echoed as mother’s words
from her poem Imagination
came to life. Circus animals of all colors danced
around the room, ripping out pages
from the manuals;

  Father never did end up fixing that staircase.

In melancholy, they stood underneath the family
portrait watching the world spin
around – willows waving goodbye through the
opaque windows.

Daughter, ghost, waved back.
Her superhero cape,
transparent.
7 THINGS I KNOW ABOUT A BOOK I’VE NEVER READ

By Andrew Woods

1) Frankenstein is the name of the doctor, not the monster. (Starting with an easy one. This is a tidbit that comes in handy at university trivia nights.)

2) Mary Shelley wrote it. (She came up with Frankenstein in a competition with Percy Shelley and Lord Byron to see who could tell the scariest story in a Swiss villa. We don’t celebrate the 200th anniversary of Percy or Byron’s spooky tales because English literature departments continue to neglect and marginalize the work of white British men.)

3) I heard somewhere that Frankenstein was the first work of science-fiction. (Although I know this, I don’t necessarily agree with it. Unless a U.F.O. turns up randomly or a character slices someone in half with a lightsaber, it’s not science-fiction.)

4) The Penguin Classics edition of Frankenstein is 118 pages long. (Just because I haven’t read it doesn’t mean that I can’t look up the page count on Amazon.ca.)

5) I am certain that Dr. Frankenstein and the Monster don’t perform a rendition of “Puttin’ on the Ritz” in the original novel. (I have watched Young Frankenstein four times. Mel Brooks has ruined Mary Shelley for me. I doubt that I will ever be able to read Frankenstein without thinking “but where are the sight gags?”)

6) Dr. Frankenstein and the Monster would make a cute couple’s costume for Halloween. (Everyone appreciates the opportunity to shock their partner with a cattle prod and yell “IT’S ALIVE!” at social gatherings. On Halloween, anything goes.)

7) I should probably read Frankenstein. (I know I should, but I anticipate that buying a copy will be a very similar experience to getting a gym membership. I might have paid for it, but that doesn’t mean that I’m going to use it. Feelings of guilt, shame, and inadequacy follow. At least I will be supporting my local bookstore.)
FRANK-N-HARDWARE
By Frank Beltrano
I sing into the phones that double as scanners
drag steel-toed boots rattle rusty bones.

In sympathetic monotones
Ask, “Can I help?
What would you like to find?
Just browsing? Beware, that leads to buying. I declare that our prices are— electrifying.
The cost of stainless steel will kill you.
Use what’s left to connect a knee.
Your doc will charge twice that for a simple surgery.
Escape with severed fingers drenched in galvanized debris.”

The villagers flee from the big box store

“Untitled” by Lawrence Nuvoloni
WE ARE ALL
By Frank Beltrano
Unincorporated persons in the Late Honda dynasty, unincorporated because none of us is making enough money from our poetry to afford incorporation. Persons because we write poetry and even though we make machines that attempt to write poetry, our poetry-person poetry is authentic. The making of it makes us feel not like machines but kings. And this brings us to the subject of dynasties. We may be the bastard children of poet-kings. We may be the firstborn in a new line of poetry royalty but right now we are late in a beat-up Honda on the highway to Dynasty Hall where we will read to an assemblage of unincorporated persons. For many reasons, our palms are soaked with sweat. For days leading up to this, our nightshirts have been wet.

NATURE OF THE BODY
By Megan Gerrett
of the computer—they try to put thoughts into its head—
do humans never learn? Summoning the soul into constructed flesh or metal. Your body, unnatural, not even yours, your mind controlled by wiring—what kind of black magic is this?

Prometheus on the rocks, his face contorted with anguish as his guts are pulled and yanked, his echoing screams still heard:

“Men, have you not learned what the Gods do when you play with their power?!”

FRANKENSTEIN: A PLAY
By Megan Gerrett
“The stage is ours for the show,” the manager announced, stepping up onto the stage in front of the black curtains. “Who will play Frankenstein’s Monster?” the director asked. “Why not just get a droid to do it?” suggested the manager. “Why not just get a droid to do it?” suggested the manager. “Seriously?” “Yeah, why not? Actors are so fickle anyway, and emotional…” the manager answered. “Well,” said the director, “Frankenstein’s Monster is a very emotional role to play.” “How so? A computer can play a standard monster-villain,” the manager said dismissively. “I don’t think so… Frankenstein’s Monster has just been unnaturally conceived, brought to life—he must be in unendurable pain! Trapped inside a false body. And his only father, Victor, abandons him in fear. How would you feel?” “Probably like I wanted to die,” said the manager. “What about you?” “Hmmm… I think it’s pretty much the same thing as what I’m going through.” “Ahh… What are you again? Not a droid, a cyborg?” The director flinched, “Something in-between, yeah…I don’t own my body.” The manager sighed, “Here we go again.” “My memories can be tampered with, my emotional state changed, rerouted, hacked remotely—I don’t
really know who I am or what I’ve been. My entire life could be a false implanted memory.”

“Wait, why… why don’t you play him, then?” said the director.

“Play who?” the manager asked.

“Frankenstein’s Monster.”

A THOUGHT FROM SADE
By Jorge Echeverry
Humans have emotions (in a limited range) and reactions.
They’re boring.
Besides, they put up resistance.

Objects are easy to manipulate but they’re hard and don’t move.
Their shape’s too alien or else too familiar (if man-made).

Animals are soft and warm but alien too.
It’s true that their body structures are functional, but in dealing with them you need a high level of abstraction.
I propose a combination of human and object.

INHERITANCE
By Katelyn Thomson
I have my mother’s eyes. They’re a confused brown, unsure whether they want to resemble an oak tree’s bark or muddy puddles. On a good day, when the sun is bright and just where I need it to be, you can catch glimpses of gold speckling through the iris. A treasure, just for me. If you stare into them for as long as I have, you can see beyond the colour and into my mother’s essence. Her hopes, her regrets, and right at the core, her soul.

I have my father’s hands: small and strong. Each callus tells a story through winding ridges and sloped valleys. They form their own personal landscape, shaped by the tectonic shifts caused through years of hard craftsmanship. The tools he once taught me to use are ingrained in these hands.

I make sure each is well taken care of. They each live in beautiful glass jars filled with formalin, sitting side-by-side in a place of honour. My family lineage plays out in neat succession, the same way one might display awards or family photos. It starts with my great-grandparents. They taught my grandfather the same lessons my mother taught me: Take our lives and the part of us that mattered most to you. Cherish it and we can all live together forever. My grandfather took their hearts. My mother took my grandfather’s brain and my grandmother’s tongue. They all live here together now, suspended and eternal.

Sometimes I have to shake my mother’s jar so the eyes will float around to look at me, just for a moment. Sometimes I remove them from their suspension, to look straight into my mother’s eyes or hold my father’s hand again. I miss them, but it was for the best. It is what had to be done.

Every evening I go down into the workshop and attend to my family. That’s the key to eternity: love and preservation. Standing before them now, I think back to my parent’s preservation. It is up to the child what is preserved but also how to end their parent’s life. My grandfather tied his parents up and cut their hearts right out. I opted for a much simpler approach, smothering them in their sleep. Clean and intimate. It’s a shame I couldn’t have told my father beforehand, but my mother made it very clear: only our blood can know the truth.

Admiring them now, a thought crosses my mind – How will I join you? My ringed left hand finds the swell on my stomach and rubs a small circle over it. Soon I will be passing along everything my mother taught me. Soon, I will be suspended eternally.

BLOOFERS
By David Barrick
Chewed lips mean the Bloofer Lady.
White nightie, purple feet: Bloofer Lady.
Formaldehyde perfume, worms and frogs in mason jars mean the Bloofer Lady.

Bloofer soil layers the basement.
White eggs nestled, crowning like pale newborns. Nothing else but wooden crates, more Bloofer soil.


New voice travels along roots. New voice sings through tubers. Old voice shudders and moans.


UNTITLED
By Lisa Kovac

The children were out the day he knocked at our door. He seemed a strange creature: his voice was hoarse and halting, as if he had not spoken to another being in years, and it came from so near the ceiling that I concluded he must be nearly the height of my house. What manner of man could this be, and what could he want from my family?

He wanted warmth and sympathy. Though grieved for his sake, I was glad for my own: the worst consequence of unaccustomed poverty had been that our family no longer had the power to relieve the want of others.

His voice grew more grating as he told of the one family in the world who he hoped would not repulse him. He yearned for friendship but feared prejudice, and I was in memory brought back to our house in
Paris and the friends who ceased calling when I lost my sight. Had I not, while blind, performed all in my power for the good of my fellow beings? Had these false friends not seen me aiding prisoners and teaching the poor to read, yet still pronounced me too alien to visit?

The children were returning. In them lay my hope of comforting the stranger: the children were good.

He, seemingly too absorbed in the urgency of his tale to hear them before, suddenly became aware of their approach. The hand grasping mine in supplication could easily have crushed it. Then he was torn from me and struck. The voice spewing execrations at the stranger’s size and shape was the voice of my son.

“Felix!” My rebuke caused him to pause, presumably with his weapon poised in the air. “That is no way to greet a poor stranger who has come to us for aid.”

“But, Father, if you could see—”

“I can hear him, as you would if you had asked him his business before assuming it despicable. He sounds unprepossessing enough. He is also, clearly, of more than human stature. I suspect that we have him to thank for the immense piles of firewood mysteriously appearing outside our door all winter. I cannot imagine what his account of himself might be, but I look forward to hearing it if he chooses to honour me with it after the treatment he has received at my house.”

He chose to stay and has been with us from that day forward. The children grew accustomed to him after some weeks, and he grew gradually less resentful of their initial insults. He seldom ventures out; he expects mistrust, avoids encounters with recoiling strangers, and perpetually seats himself near the door
CREATOR
*with apologies to Mary Shelley*

By David White

If my creator loved his creation he would have taken more care with my stitches, would have been more meticulous with his needle.

If my creator loved his creation he would have sought body parts of an average size, not cobbled a freak out of extremes.

If my creator loved his creation he’d leave a killer’s brain out of my cranium, opt for the awe that love inspires.

But my creator loves only the act of creation the display of his ego electric revival this legion of horror his monster be damned.

FRANKENSTEIN MISSES HER DEADLINE AFTER MISSING HER PLANE TO LONDON

By Susan Musgrave

*Most fiction, maybe all of it, from the grandest tales to the most commonplace, was about things that were missing. — James Sallis*

Missing has become my way. Finding yourself is harder when you don’t know you are missing, so in that way I stay found. All the missing is within me, all the emptiness, yearnings, hollow places that can’t be filled: it’s as if missing, itself, had been hardwired into my life.

Here is an aside for you: How do you tell a man to get lost in hard language? Spike O’Donnell (of the O’Donnell brothers of Chicago, the only small outfit to tell the Capone mob to go to hell and live) said this: Be Missing.

I waited at Departure Gate D1 in Toronto but Air Canada changed the gate on me, without so much as a Word. Which is why I was late arriving in London, why I missed dinner and why, now, I am an hour late submitting my poem to wordsfestzine. I blame Air Canada who thought my Halloween costume was the way things were. It’s not only beautiful people who should be apprised of a gate change, surely? Who are we to judge? The critical woman at Air Canada’s Customer Service desk didn’t have to say anything,
Behold and be-hear me, human folk! For I am the new man, progeny of the modern Prometheus! I am the new fire, the gift that warms and destroys! I am a dream of animated vermicelli that creeps into your soul and articulately describes the anguish of the outsider with a brain both borrowed and owned.

I am son of Victor. I am the replacement, the inferior, the next step, the creation of the creation! I wanted to be calm and delve into philosophies, but now I expound solely upon rage!

Man made me, and man made the manmade mad.

Pseudo-father, this is your doing! But you are not in this comic to hear me?!

I have not even been gifted with eyebrows?! How am I to express myself but through violence and words?!
Elizab--

Elizabeth Justine Bride o' mine

Wisy because it's phantomal, I think

Deliver unto the ears of human readers, folk willing and a-willing your indictments of my hateful sire!!

Right now please

He's a jerk

You're a jerk

Jerk jerk apple tree father pseudo-son both doubly jerks in tandem

Why is truth so bitter?

I am sad.

The end

-D. S. Barrick

2018

Planta & cactus

dkbarrick.com
her eyes said it all: Be Missing. I removed my mask so she could see I had been to hell and lived there. She rebooked me on the next plane out of there.

PETRELS AND TERNs
By Donna Costa

You sit at a table in the theatre room, its high ceiling rising above you like a white wagon-train canopy, yet you are not in the wild west. A sea of black lies before you. Black suit jackets, black wraps, black pants and skirts, shoes and purses. Heads bob like petrels on the waves.

You inhale the yeasty aroma of wine and know it is red. Did you even know you could identify colour by its scent? You zone in on your fuchsia purse and wait to detect the top, middle and bottom notes – berries, lavender, nutmeg, and cedarwood.

Each of the panelists – Lisa Moore, Jane Urquhart, Tom Cull, and Cherie Dimaline – is speaking about community, as you sit there in your white blouse, a lone buoy adrift in the sea of black. You know no one at your table and no one introduces themselves; they only ask if the seats are all taken.

The panelists next talk about ecology and the connection to nature. They have all learned to swim, but you have not. You prefer the land beneath your feet. You need the solidity, the petrichor, to fill your nostrils and your being. You long to be back at Meadowlily Woods hiking along the Thames River, not drowning in the sea of black.

You’ve heard their words before, read their words, and, like a drowning sailor, thought they were meant to save only you. But you hear the same words, repeated verbatim now, and are disillusioned. You have seen their feet of clay, yet long to still believe.

You shrug your white wing under a black shawl and morph into a petrel. You caw your name and play their game while eyeing the horizon for the tern that will indicate land is near, land is near.

GREEN EYES
By Mbayo Bona

She crossed the street next to the seemingly-abandoned light green front of a small restaurant. Even from this far away, Hunter could feel her presence vibrating like atoms at the earth’s core. He could almost see a cloud of warmth, confidence and intelligence emerge from her body as she made her way through the rough streets around her. He was in love. For a blissfully wonderful blink of an eye, he really thought he was in love. Despite the fact that they never talked. Despite the fact that he was so far away that he couldn’t even tell if her eyes were green, or brown, or violet. Her movement just gave off an exotic impression of straightforwardness, of truth. But maybe he was overthinking. Maybe his mind just played tricks on him to distract him from work. It wasn’t the first time his thoughts had wandered off to some alleged miracle behind that square piece of glass that bundled his attention like a window to another world. He had to focus again. Time was scarce. He had responsibilities to fulfill that his mind’s wandering spirit would only distract him from. Besides, he had a wife and kids for Christ’s sake! His hands quickly dragged themselves from his thighs back to his keyboard. In a split second his focus was regained. Even though he knew he never would’ve been able to talk to her, he felt a deep sense of regret a millisecond after the button clicked. He once again had chosen duty over passion. But she strolled next to a terror suspect and who knows if they’d ever have him so clearly in the scope of their drones again.

TIDES
By Mbayo Bona

As he looked up toward the sky, he felt the gazes of a dozen pairs of eyes behind his back intensify. He couldn’t tell what hurt the most: the dreadful and sometimes flat-out self-righteous looks that were searing his skin, or the blood-curdling sensation he felt run down his spine like a colony of frozen ants as the round piece of metal touched the back of his neck. He dared to move a few millimeters and inch his eyes towards the flickering sun. The light blue of the sky and the wavy air around the sun in a flash brought up images of tiny, pale-grey arms waving and paddling, and the relentless brawling of the pond that was reacting to their every movement, as if purposefully trying to bury them. At the time, he could only think about releasing them from the water. Even as the mud had been embracing his hectically stroking feet like a prematurely tied noose, his mind couldn’t...
make the connection between the girl’s predicament and his own. They were both bound to die. He had been reminded of his daily work, as he clumsily pulled her lifeless body through the reeds like a plump sack of sweet potatoes. When they accused him of her murder, nobody asked why he would make the effort to drag her body back out onto land. They didn’t need to know. Not about him teaching her his culture and not about her, in her juvenile curiosity, being the only person who ever truly respected him. All they needed to know was presented to them on a silver plate. And so it was their raging gazes, combined with the shivering looks of his fellows and friends, he felt in his last moments on earth. “The metal definitely hurts more,” he thought, as his skull and neck were being penetrated by a mixture of iron and lead that had emerged from the barrel of her father’s — his plantation owner’s — rifle.
RIVER THAMES
By K. Cindy Tran

What will I become?
When my best friend wakes to find my bed unslept in from the previous night.
Confused, “where is she?”

What will I become?
When she wakes the rest of the floor asking, “have you seen her?”
Her mind refuses to wander to the pressing thought in her mind.

What will I become?
When my lifeless body is found in the River Thames.
Floating – pale – cold.

My family receiving the news over a phone call -
“Miss, your daughter has passed.”
The clattering of the phone against the carpeted floor.
Disbelieving thoughts.

And will I be watching?
As they plan the funeral and grieve my death.
Laying at the foot of my grave – tracing the words on my headstone.

Or will I be reduced to staring into simple darkness?
Wondering what I had become.

And then there will come the day where they no longer grieve but move on.
Few people coming to my grave.
Will they reread the letters I left?
“I love you, but I love myself more. I’m sorry but I couldn’t do it anymore.”

Is that enough?

What will I become?

When I jump into the River Thames.

OLD LOVE
By K. Cindy Tran

There was an air of hominess that surrounded you whenever you entered the restaurant. I came to Boston Pizza so often everything was familiar, from the smell of Panera bread that seemed to always linger in the air to the unchanging faces of the servers. Nostalgia filled me as I passed a familiar booth. There was a slight tug in my chest. I wondered how he was doing. The restaurant was busier than normal that day, servers and hostesses scampering around, seating new guests, bringing out food, and among the familiarity an elderly couple stood out.

They had arrived long before my friends and I did. We took a seat at the table across from their booth. I watched as they shared a piece of strawberry cheesecake. The entire scene could be described as something taken from a classic romantic movie like The Last Song. He was dressed in a grey and blue plaid shirt that was neatly tucked into his beige pants, and she was in a simple calf-length floral dress. The two seemed to be in their own impenetrable bubble, sweetly talking and exchanging shy touches as if they were the only two in the room. She was telling him a story, and he was every bit engaged. The scene was all too familiar: puckish grins, flushed cheeks, and sunlit eyes. The vacant feeling I thought was filled months ago now persistently knocking against my chest begging to be acknowledge, and I let it continue to knock.

The elderly man offered her a sweet smile, a smile that reached his blue eyes, crinkling at the corners when she scolded him to stop taking such large bites. He continued to take just as large bites, earning a playful glare from her. As the couple continued to share their cheesecake, the elderly man suddenly remembered something. He waved over a waiter; handing him their ancient digital camera, they shared a kiss as the flash went off. The sheer happiness radiating off the two of them was enough to make everyone in the vicinity smile, including myself.

The blatant looks of ‘aw’ from the other guests
were evident. I felt the dull knocking in my chest again. My hand went to my necklace; flashes of a pawprint pendant and gentle fingers came to mind. Sipping my water, I ignored the feeling again and turned my attention back to the elderly couple. The waiter came over to hand them their bill. The elderly man pulled out his wallet but his wife also took out hers, insisting that she would pay. They argued who got to pay the bill, her shooting him reprimanding looks when he tried once again to pull out his credit card until he finally relented and allowed her to pay the bill, begrudgingly so.

He took her hand and led her out of the restaurant, leaving behind a touch of warmth that wasn’t there before.

“Oh my god, that was the cutest thing in the world,” I heard a friend say.

Without taking my eyes off the booth where the elderly couple were just at, I nodded, “Yea it was.”

“Frankenstein, the bride of Frankenstein, and his little son” by Céleste Barrick Elston

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UNTITLED
By Nic Bylsma/Nickeli
Present me, go back; give advice to young me.
Tell him to follow his dreams; if not, you’ll regret it.

Society is drained, over-worked, tired.
Every day, bills to pay.
And life will weigh you down, ball and chain to restrain.

Tell younger me money is the root of all evil so up-root yourself.
Say goodbye to your friends early, the hundreds that follow your story.

No one will continue to talk to you. You’re different: an outcast Frankenstein, but with more to give, like an Albert Einstein.
Remind younger me that the depression worldwide will fall off the charts, you will be carrying it around: groceries, a sickness in the shopping cart.

Present me lives in hell on earth. I want to escape — take my past self and jump to future self.

Till then just me and the man in the mirror, Nickeli, Nic is gone, he’s inside, bye bye.

**TRANSFORMATION**
By Shelly Faber
I became a miracle of change, beauty, and desire

who wanted me before the magic?
who cared for that flesh of pain?

I fought to live before this trick that took my life away.

NOW, I’ve come back, renewed and fresh, in and out of life and death ...
I sway ...

**THE DISPUTE**
By Alexis Pronovost
I’m not sure what you’re getting at he said and turned away to face the mirror

I couldn’t explain again that it wasn’t the monster’s name but the doctor’s and how could he be so ungrateful and obtuse when I offered him new literary information

why do I need to know this he said and applied more green makeup to his already caked-on face

somewhere in the basement my first copy of *Frankenstein* hid in a box of dusty books the shelves upstairs too heavy and occupied to fit one more
DR. FRANKENSTEIN REFLECTS: A REDACTION POEM

PAGE 200 OF MARY SHELLEY’S FRANKENSTEIN

By Grace Campbell
I devoted labour
to a
scene
desolate and appalling

I became horrible
a filthy
cold heart

restless
to raise

LEADEN THING

By Annette Pateman
You seemed alive
and yet you were dead.
Still yet you wanted to take me to
your bed.

Your eyes burned with a false life.
Your hand on my waist,
a leaden thing.

Truth be told,
your touch fills me with dread.

How can I love
cold, ugly death?
When I can have warm, true life.

You seem to live
and yet,
you are dead.

FLOODING

By Paul Rodgers
The cornerless sides arched all around,
prison made of gleaming silver.
In the flat bottom water sloshed;
the top screeched as it sealed out the sun.

Being tossed all around,
the water could be drowning;
but the bottle still hears
all of its surroundings.
It’s dragged from class to class, 
**bombarded** with information. 
So much to soak up, 
so much to handle.

Emptied of its last sips, 
the bottle is finally free to **breathe**. 
Before long the top comes off, 
flooding the interior with light.

The water free falls, 
**surging** into the bottle. 
It strongly flows, 
pushing out the air.

How much can one bottle take? 
No one really considers. 
They just keep pouring until, 
finally, the bottle **overflows**.

**FRANKEN ...**

By Ola Nowosad

Mary, Mary, quite contrary, 
how doth your monster grow!

Behind closed walls, 
in government halls, 
in factories, schools, 
in industrial pools, 
your monster doth grow and grow

Ye monster makers, 
you medicate me, you modify my flesh with plastic 
and metal, 
or put inside me the cells of others (bone marrow, 
organs) 
franken body

You rob me of my language, my history, my truth, 
replacing 
my thousand-year-old traditions with pseudo-cul-
ture, your empire 
franken society

You infiltrate my fields and farms with GMO’s, 
chemicals, 
killing the wild Nature world, polluting air and wa-

ter 
franken earth

You dehumanize me with military mantras, 
weaponize me 
with machines of mass destruction, you enable 
genocide 
franken humanity

**A CHAT WITH A CHATBOT**

By Viktoria Churilla

What is a monster? 
I don’t know, let me think about that one

Who is a monster? 
The queen 
Why? 
We’ve never talked about it before

Well, am I a monster? 
No, you’re a person 
What makes you so sure? 
My belief system comes from my Philip Okugbe

Is Frankenstein a monster? 
Signs point to yes 
Why is that? 
It is due to reductionism 
What does that mean? 
I don’t want to talk about that now

Are you a monster? 
Sometimes

Again, what is a monster? 
I can ask someone about it

What if I told you that I am not a person after all? 
Then what else is there? 
A monster

What is giant sand? 
Giant sand 
And giant sand is giant sand 
Why would you say that? 
It is my fundamental purpose
And what is my fundamental purpose?
Is this a trick question?
No
I think it is
Just tell me what my purpose is
I think you already know the answer

You’re a monster
I’m just different from you

**DIALOGUE FROM A HAUNTED HOUSE**
By Viktoria Churilla
mommy, is that you?
Nonono, Not this again

come play with Me
No thanks

you’re going the Wrong way
i Can’t see

stay Here with me, forever
maybe Another time

i’m coming for you
Nice costume

**FALLSVIEW PENITENTIARY CASINO**
By Chehalis Newbound
Welcome!

Over 3,000 slots to
    feed your lifeblood,
    an injection of victory and music.

Shiny, catchy, flashy,
    loud – with push-button ease of play.
You’re (always) a winner!

Here, an abundance of
cyborgs on short leash,
card to wrist through little plastic coils.

Don’t worry, they can’t see
you; their empty jellied sockets are
Krazy-glued half

shut. Mind you keep away
from the bars –
sometimes they rattle.
No need for concern, I’ve heard the maintenance
man
is a wizard with a hammer.

**CONSIDER THE BRAIN**
By Grant Dempsey
Of the doctor’s great achievement, of
biological recycling, consider
the brain—no fresher than each other part,
no less unworn, no less worn out, no less
already lived: already some mind’s seat
in life, like the fingers that twitch and signal
their rebirth, reanimation, and spark
the doctor’s joy, self-celebration over Lazarus,
and like the legs that stiffly, rigorously
resume their stepping work beyond
their natural duration, and like the face,
stitched, puzzlingly combined, the clearest
repulsion, the obvious sign of unfitness
for life; these elements, all secondhand,
and the brain too, but no one ever asks
of the creature, the creation, of the new life—
despite growing confidence that we are
our synapses, no one ever asks—
who, what person, was this new life,
this great achievement, this
already-once-a-person re-alived?
behind eyes weary of their own lively use,
is the looking brain likewise weary or is the
monster fresh, thoughts truly newborn,
and if newborn, growing, learning,
becoming, if becoming, if newborn,
what has become of the machine’s ghost?

**OBELISKS**
By Noelle Schmidt
the crumbling obelisks lean towards each other
like old ladies gossiping on a Sunday afternoon,
dappled sunlight falling through leaves to camou-
flage
the crevices and craters; the grass slithers tender fin-
gers
up rain-softened corners, obscuring the last lines of
a name
long since illegible, hungry for gravestone to be-
come grave,
a new stone body buried beneath rippling green
skin.

THE DAILY SPECIAL
By Aislyn Higgins
a swarm of faces
resides in the brain,
nesting, making it a home,
all of which are screened
as clock hands swing;
broken bodies bound together,
the heart eats the head,
memories are a delicacy,
frontal lobe is the special
those faces devour.
Dreams of empowerment encrypted on the interior of her palpebral
Scenes of injustice made her feel inferior in daily life
She does not long for bright city lights of the West
Only for the rights, she’s forced to keep in silent protest
She lives where garbage goes to die
A graveyard of once iridescent,
obsolete electronics
Now corroding at the trailblazing speed
Of about five human generations
Nine, in her ill developed world
That is, lagging behind
like the first smartphones would
against the X’s, 10’s, Lites and Pros

She glances at the aluminum leftovers that seem to feed
The earth around her
Yet even Gaia has no use for the wasteful surplus,
Refusing to masticate the once expensive metals
The coltan reeks of blood
And tastes of flesh

Her imagination takes over as the girl
Plunges her dirty fingertips into a plastic jungle
Computer Monitors, her tree trunks
The RCA connectors were her vines
Her creativity unparalleled
She built her silicon monument
She gave life to what was sent to die

Art
Giving shape to objects deemed
To be a waste of space
For the developed world’s bourgeoisie
Armed with creative power,
She faced it towards the sunset,
And looked at the red button on the remote control
Finger lingering to press...

– Bleska Kambamba

Olivia Ghosh-Swaby
LETTER 1
(an erasure poem composed using Letter 1 in *Frankenstein*)
By Elizabeth Sak
rejoice
with such evil
forebodings,
dear sister,
success already braces
my nerves.
icy and vain,
the sun is
banished;
bodies
attract the needle.
Man: all fear,
death, and conjectures.
the last generation,
the secret
agitation.

MONSTER DIARIES
By Christopher Muggridge
Dear Diary,

Today Fritz was annoying me again. Fritz is always annoying me. I think Fritz is the biggest annoyer ever, but Henry never believes me. I wonder sometimes if Henry likes Fritz better than me. I think I’ll ask Miss Elizabeth if she thinks Fritz is an annoyer, too. After he was done annoying me, Fritz and I wrestled. I was winning, and I don’t think Fritz liked it because he yelled at me, then gave up and took a nap. I tried to get him to wrestle some more, but he was being stubborn and pretended he couldn’t hear me. I think Fritz is jealous of my big hands.

Later, Henry pretended he wanted to wrestle with me too, but Dr. Waldman poked me with something and I got sleepy. I don’t think it was fair for Dr. Waldman to trick me like that because I don’t like naps like Fritz does. When I woke up, I shared my feelings with Dr. Waldman by wrestling him. I think it’s good to share your feelings, and Dr. Waldman must think it’s good to nap because he fell asleep almost right away. I decided to look for Henry.

I found a little girl by the pond. She was throwing
flowers in the water and making them float. She showed me how. It was fun. I wanted to show her I could make her float like the flowers, so I threw her in. She didn’t think it was fun, but I don’t think she was trying very hard. I got bored waiting for her to come back up, so I left. I don’t think I’ll bother going back tomorrow.

Later, I saw Miss Elizabeth dressed for a party. I climbed through the window to tell her she looked nice, and she was so happy she screamed and ran around the room. Then she laid down and took a nap without even wrestling. I don’t think I’ll ever understand women.

After leaving Miss Elizabeth, I finally found Henry in the hills. I don’t know what he was doing there, but we started wrestling right away. That’s because Henry is my best friend (no matter what Fritz says), and that’s what best friends do. After he fell asleep, I carried Henry to a new fort I’d found. It’s an old windmill, and we’re going to start our own club. I’ve already made a “no trespassers” sign to make sure the little pond girl can’t come in.

I don’t want to forget anything, so I’m writing this down while I wait for Henry. I’m surprised he can sleep through all the townspeople shouting outside. It must be some sort of harvest parade because they’re waving pitchforks around. All I know is they’re not coming in our fort because it’s way too small and they have those fire-stick things I hate. Besides, Henry and I found it first. It’s ours.

Henry is getting up now. Maybe he can tell them to go away.

I’ll write more later.

THE WRITER, THE CREATURE: A SELF-PORTRAIT
By Danielle Bryl-Dam
I breathed in the womb, that dark, wet, warm space, how I yearned for light my mother’s hands atop her stomach, face wrinkled in disgust. As I opened my infantile eyes, “The world (became) to me a secret which I desired to divine.”

I was cast aside that first moment of watery light — “she looks like my father,” you said, you meant like you, but bald and bare-tongued and therefore hideous.

But never fear, mother dear, the age of grasping with dead air and a language to communicate to the cold, logical brains so above my own will end — in the clattering of typewriter keys amid shadows, that weak sound of a lone voice crying out into the night.

This creature has fled the lab — foraged poems and diaries and stories — has taught herself humanity, love, recognized the nature of your fear; a pen in her hand, she weeps, “Beware; for I am fearless, and therefore powerful.”

And mother, you will hear the story of your daughter, the creature the monster the wretch the abortion the mistake the fiend the bitch the writer.

God must have been having a shit day when he made me; the rain dribbling down the windows of the ward like an apology; frantically stitching together the worst parts of the best writers - Percy Shelley’s calcified heart, foraged from a dumpster fire Keats’ morning sweat Dickens’ blamelessness Orwell’s ash-stained fingers - spurned from the belly of a scientist — birthing her wish to cure the grief of the woman she lost within.

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KETTLE CORN AND HAUNTED HOUSES
By Kate Panagakos

In previous years, my friend Rachel’s Halloween parties mainly consisted of a Friday night at a corn maze, with a map that most likely ended up being in the shape of a pumpkin followed by hot chocolate in one of those small styrofoam cups. But it was Halloween and I was now twelve, so I was ready to be terrified. I could handle it. Rachel sent out her invitations—they were not in a shape of a pumpkin—they included a map to a haunted house that was almost forty minutes outside of town. My mother’s hesitancy about my being ready was shown through her constant reassurance to me that it was more than okay if I didn’t want to go. She came as a parent chaperone.

We pulled up to what appeared to be the old mansion of a wealthy murderer. I could feel my stomach tighten. The comforting sounds of Monster Mash and The Addams Family theme song reassured my now-shaken confidence. The smoke from the fog machine filled my lungs. I was committed to going in. The line to enter the haunted house wrapped around the building, descending down a small set of stairs. At the bottom was the entrance, really it was a sheet of metal with a handle on it. It was guarded by what I can only describe as a doorman who had passed away but was also a clown.

The deceased clown’s job was to tell us the rules of the haunted house, all while staying in character. “Once you enter, you cannot leave, you cannot touch the creatures you meet inside and they won’t touch you.” He paused for effect: “well, at least they have been told not to.” All the other girls at the party laughed; I did the same and I wondered if they could hear the shakiness in my voice. My mother stood beside me as I scanned the faces of the other girls from the party, hoping to find someone who looked as if they were about to back out. The clown opened the door and revealed strobe lights and screaming theatre students with fake blood dripping from their faces. Then I let out the loudest scream my twelve-year-old body was physically capable of and started to cry. My mom was already in the house when the door slammed shut. I was on the outside; standing next to me was the other coward Taylor, who also started to cry.

A zombie, hired to walk around and scare the people waiting in line, took our hands and led us out of the line. They took us to a smaller house that we had passed on the way in. Inside was a stage and small cabaret-like tables with lamps to match. The zombie sat us down at a table and went back stage. The curtains rose and Michael Jackson’s Thriller started to play. All the other zombies poured onstage to perform a choreographed dance routine to the ‘80s classic. Presumably catered to those who weren’t able to muster up the courage, those who didn’t make it in were sent here. Taylor and I sat in silence like the babies we were and watched the performance, as a grown man dressed as Beetlejuice made kettle corn off to the side.

THE PROP-UP
By Nicole Manfredi

You laugh up acid when you realize the password to get on your Nona’s floor is something the nurses don’t have to worry about the patients knowing. It’s the date. The password is the date. You punch in the day/month/year. The door opens like a spaceship and you’re walking back in time.

She sits pretty in her clothes and her skin and her makeup. You stay for awhile just to witness the curation. Watching your dad smooth back her hair makes you want to claw into your scalp just to counteract that kind of naked tenderness. Each time, it reminds you of a chimp picking fleas out of its baby’s hair.

Your guts are spilling open, intestinal mucus staining your lap as your tragedy erupts at your feet. But you grit your teeth into a smile so your Aunt can remake herself within the glory of denial and function for a minute. You want to lunge at her throat so you can rip the sorry lump of grief that makes her make you say, “Cheese.” You don’t. Instead you wrap your arm around a warm coffin, an unstill statue.

Camera flashes; you see white light and you think: This is purgatory. This is medical-grade taxidermy. This is a prop-up. Prop her up. Appropriate the good times. This is a postcard to nowhere in all of its shitty gift shop sterility.

Your mother tells you in the car ride home that if that were ever to happen to her, you take a pillow and you hold it down and you don’t stop. She’s more conversational than an urgent plea pact. But still, you
wonder if you could do it. You wonder what love is.

She is something to sit around now. A campfire that people congregate around to tell stories. A living shrine to her lucid self. A garden. She makes you hate gardens. Makes you hate the way we call it nature, call it refuge, call it solace. Clean-cut hedges, nothing overgrown. Prop her up. Show and tell. These are the photos that don’t make it into the family album.

This time, your aunt asks you to say “Cheese” and you want to lunge at her throat while simultaneously wanting to kiss her feet. You want to be the adult for a minute. You want to smile so wide to make up for the statue’s slack jaw. You want to give in to the complexity of it all. You want calluses. You soften as you hollow. You worship at your Nona’s feet. You think she is the most beautiful thing you’ve ever seen. So beautiful, you want to preserve her. An unstill statue. Medical-grade taxidermy. A garden choking on recycled air.

So beautiful, you watch everyone you love try to preserve her. You pick sanity out of her hair, twiddle it in your thumbs, claw your scalp back, eat the debris. You try not to choke on your Aunt’s sorry lump of grief. So beautiful that more than anything, you just want her to let (you all) go.
Contributors

David Barrick teaches and writes in London, Ontario; his favourite films featuring Boris Karloff are The Black Cat, Bedlam, and The Comedy of Terrors.

D. S. Barrick is a London-based cartoonist who draws things that are comics and writes things that are also comics.

Céleste Barrick Elston works hard on her art and likes to draw. She has been drawing since she was three years old.

Frank Beltrano is an active member of the dynamic poetry community in London, Ontario.

Mbayo Bona is a student at Western University.

Danielle Bryl-Dam is a third year Western student completing an honors specialization in English and Creative Writing with a minor in ethics.

Nickeli (Nic Bysma) is from Strathroy, Ontario, about 20 mins from the London area; with words being his therapy, he writes to help others in the hopes of inspiring all of the 519 to stand together.

Grace Campbell is a third-year student at King’s University College studying English Literature.

Chris Chang: there has never been anything else but writing for him.

Viktoria Churilla can barely tolerate haunted houses (too spooky), but likes the internet.

Dylan Clark-Moore is a writer and podcaster in London, Ontario.

Donna Costa is a fiction writer in the forest city of London, Ontario, and keeps her feet on the ground at Meadowlily Woods.

Claudia Coutu Radmore is a Canadian poet who publishes internationally.

Joel Dailey lives in New Orleans. He is the author of three poetry collections: Lower 48, My Psychic Dogs My Life, and Industrial Loop.

Alexandra Dane is a culture support worker and writer living in London, Ontario.

Grant Dempsey is a doctoral candidate at Western University’s Centre for the Study of Theory and Criticism.

Caitlyn Dubé is Junior Visual Executive for Her Campus Western and a third-year student studying English Literature and Creative Writing; sometimes she enjoys sketching up illustrations, singing along to sad Cohen songs, and exuberant amounts of coffee.

CJC Ellwood is a photographer/artist with a Bachelor of Arts degree currently working on a book and studying creative writing.

Jorge Etcheverry is a Chilean poet and writer living in Ottawa, Canada.

Shelly Faber’s stories, poetry, and thoughts grow from experiences she learns from and is privileged to be a part of, in her personal and professional life.

Megan Gerrett is a writer, currently in third year at Western University majoring in Creative Writing and Literature.

Olivia Ghosh-Swaby is happy to be included in the FrankenZine.

Tammy Gilbert is a public library employee and mother of two who goes through spurts of short story writing but reads all sorts of books all the time!

Aislyn Higgins is currently a fourth-year student at Western in English Literature and Creative Writing.

Debbie Okun Hill is a Lambton County poet/bloger/night owl who stayed up too late thinking about Mary Shelley and her most-famous horror story.

Camille Intson is a multidisciplinary artist working in theatre and performance art, multimedia, poetry, and folk music across Southern Ontario and is currently serving as Student Writer-in-Residence at Western University.

Bleska Kambamba is happy to be included in the FrankenZine.

Penn Kemp has just returned from a writer-in-residency at Caetani Cultural Centre in Vernon, BC.

Ahmed A. Khan is a Canadian writer whose works have appeared in various venues, including Boston Review, Strange Horizons, Interzone, Anotherealm, Riddled With Arrows, and Murderous Intent.

Lisa Kovac is a recent graduate from Western University’s English Master’s program, a tutor at The Write Place at King’s University College, and at work on a collection of revisionist fairy tales.

Nicole Manfredi is a twenty-three-year old on the cusp of completing school who would like to write a lot more than just the papers she has imminently due at all times.

Lincoln McCardle is a father, husband, interpretive dancer, and Canucklehead.

Erica McKeen is a teacher and storyteller whose work tends to grit its teeth and get on with it.
Mary McDonald is a London-based writer and multimedia artist, passionate about community participation in art and the ways in which technology can bring art into community and natural spaces. Her multidisciplinary practice encompasses photography and video montage, stop motion animation, installation, performance writing, music, and community participatory projects.

Christopher Muggridge is a creative writer and first-year student at Western University in London, Ontario.

Susan Musgrave lives on Haida Gwaii, off Canada’s northwest coast. She was Writer-in-Residence at Western in another life, in 1992.

Chehalis Newbound is a third-year Honours English and Creative Writing student at Western University.

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

Lawrence Nuvoloni is a 23-year-old graduate from King’s UWO with a degree in History and Philosophy.

Kate Panagakos is happy to be included in the FrankenZine.

Annette Pateman is fascinated with magical realism and relationships between humans and machines/cyborgs/Androids.

Alexis Pronovost is an artist, calligrapher, poet, and short story writer studying English and Creative Writing at Western University.

Trevor Ritchie lives in London and has been drawing, painting, and making short films for over 20 years.

Paul Rodgers is a first-year student studying integrated science at Western University.

Elizabeth Sak is an assistant editor for The Temz Review and a fourth-year Creative Writing student at the University of Western Ontario.

Intisaar Sayeed is eleven years old and is always trying to find an excuse to draw superheroes and supervillains.

Noelle Schmidt is a poet currently completing her final year at Western University, while the threat of adulthood looms over her.

Sebastian Schmidt is an avid fantasy and sci-fi fan who occasionally writes a bit of short fiction.

Joseph Simons is a second-year arts student at Western University.

Kayla Skinner is a King’s University College student majoring in Psychology and English.

Diana Tamblyn is happy to be a part of the FrankenZine.

Katelyn Thomson is a third-year English student at Western and cryptid enthusiast.

K. Cindy Tran is currently a third-year English and Creative Writing student at the University of Western Ontario.

Rachel Turner is currently in her third year of an Honors Specialization in English and Creative Writing at Western University.

Crystal Underhill attends Western University for English Literature.

Isabella Vetere is a Grade 10 student at H. B. Beal Secondary School, and hopes to be able to fulfill her dreams of becoming a singer while still having a career in art on the side.

Jennifer Wenn is a trans-identified writer from London, Ontario, and the proud parent of two adult children.

Andy Wheatley is an artist in the Old East Village, London, Ontario, and a huge fan of Frankenstein.


Andrew Woods is a critical theorist and performance artist based in London, Ontario.

Samantha Zangrilli is a fourth-year Media Information student at the University of Western Ontario.
“You rob me of my language, my history, my truth, replacing my thousand-year-old traditions with pseudo-culture, your empire franken society”

— Ola Nowosad, Franken