Original Introduction:
Welcome to WordsFestZine, a publication born out of a partnership among Words, Poetry London, Western University, and Insomniac Press. Our goal this year was to incite writing that mapped new ways of thinking, new ways of being, and, most importantly, new ways of imagining the future into which we are stepping at this decisive moment in history. Our call was simple: we asked for works of prose, poetry, creative nonfiction, art, and hybrid work that charted the possibilities of the present and the multiple futures branching out of it, for works that imagined new utopias.

We have divided the WordsFestZine into three sections: “Pastorals and Post-Pastorals,” “Breathless but Hopeful,” and “Unrealized Futures.” “Pastorals and Post-Pastorals” contains work that grapples with the beauty of this passing moment and looks towards “the new forms of beauty that are emerging from it. Breathless but Hopeful” contains work that makes room for the possibility of hope among the multiplying tragedies or the world. And “Unrealized Futures” contains work that turns towards futures that are variably impossible, triumphant, terrifying and inevitable.

Supplement Introduction:
Welcome to the Possible Utopias Part 2. We were so thrilled with last year’s WordsFest Zine, we decided to re-open submissions and make a supplemental edition. Words teamed up with The Write Place at King’s University College and hosted a two-part zine Talk’n'Shop with Jenna Rose Sands and Tom Cull. We invited participants to submit artistic visions of possible utopias; we are proud to share with you works by eight new writers that conjure future worlds.

Cover artwork: Ben O’Neil
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**Blight**  
**By Mackenzie Emberley**

Can you tell me where it hurts?

You ask the question, but I don’t know where to begin because it’s everywhere. My lungs, my skin, my heart; it’s all infected, I’m sure.

Describe your symptoms for me.

All right, let me describe for you the ache I feel in my chest when I breathe, how every inhale fills my lungs with smoke. Do you know what it’s like trying to convert gasoline into oxygen? The thick smog crawls down my throat, causing my chest to heave.

Why do my crimson rivers have nothing to fill them but waste? While my red cells should carry life, all my organs receive is poison. My body of streams and pools, while not administered with blood as I need, is inundated with garbage that has been force-fed to me. Waves of nausea and chemicals wash over me, leaving my skin dry and uninhabitable.

What else can you tell me?

Oh, you’d like me to keep going while my mind is racked with fever dreams? No, it’s not a dream. The fever is real and intense. My skin is slick with sweat, flooding every crevice of my land.

Does it hurt when I push here?

Does it hurt when you press your hand down onto my exposed ribs? Of course, it does! I have no more fat or muscle to protect myself because these parasites have eaten everything. They’ve excavated my bones looking for gold. They’ve shaved my foliage to make room for themselves. They’ve multiplied their masses, consuming the nutrients that were meant for me.

I’d like to keep you here overnight for observation.

Okay, you sit back and observe as the native cells of my body go extinct because of an invasive species that has made my flesh its home.

Only when my heart rate is plummeting off the cliff

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**What Matters**  
**By Penn Kemp**

I enter the garden, its ground still held by winter, spring almost released. I stand at the centre into which all flow, from which all emerge.

Wind in the upper birch stills. The garden’s breath so long it is immeasurable. But I wait, offering awareness as witness.

Pivoting, I pray. North, grant us your clarity and strength. West, your surrender and acceptance. South, your joy and creativity. East, your initiation, inspiration. Sky, your broad view. Earth, your ground, your holy round.

The moment is held in a bowl beyond comprehension, beyond belief. May we carry balance lightly on each step of the way till it recurs six months off. May we find a way to become whole. May the earth find her stability.

May the equanimity of Equinox be yours, be ours, be hers all ways.
of my collarbone, and you risk losing something too, do you start the treatment. You’ve read somewhere that the colour green relieves homesickness – and boy, is your home sick – so that’s what you try.

Sure, you keep an eye on my vitals, but next to you a nurse is refilling my IV fluids in a plastic bag, after plastic bag, after plastic bag.that has made my flesh its home.

Only when my heart rate is plummeting off the cliff of my collarbone, and you risk losing something too, do you start the treatment. You’ve read somewhere that the colour green relieves homesickness – and boy, is your home sick – so that’s what you try.

Sure, you keep an eye on my vitals, but next to you a nurse is refilling my IV fluids in a plastic bag, after plastic bag, after plastic bag.

Let the Sun Shine Down

By Lilly Cereghini

“Hey!” crows a familiar voice. I see Jeremy coming towards us, dressed in tight black clothes and a purple birthday crown he must have gotten from one of the many kids milling around us. I’m uncomfortable seeing him in such revealing clothing, but he explains quickly.

“When it gets dark on an eighteen-year-old’s birthday,” he says, “the new adult has to jump over fire as people...
make it bigger, and only stops when they get burned.”

“What?” Adam and I exclaim together.

“Oh wait, it’s before they get burned. Right. You know what they do want, though?” he asks, grinning sidelong at me.

“What…” I ask suspiciously.

“A virgin sacrifice to the ancestors at midnight.”

This time, we all laugh, but Jeremy says seriously, “No really, it’s a Seminole tradition going back twenty billion years.”

“The planet hasn’t been here that long, brainless,” retorts Adam.

“Oh yeah…”

But Jeremy hears his name and has to go off. I wheel Adam into the bedlam, because he can’t wheel himself over such uneven ground.

Suddenly, we’re beset by two enormous men, who are identical down to the last hair. I’ve never met Jeremy’s brothers, but he’s described them, and I assume this is them.


“Hi,” I say, trying to hide my embarrassment. “I’m Victoria. This is my brother Adam.” Adam, who, by the way, has his eyes down. I guess I can’t blame him: next to these two giants, how small must he feel looking up from his wheelchair? It’s the first social event he’s attended since his accident.

“We know,” one of them says. “Jerry’s happy you’re both here.”

“Want something to eat?” the other asks.

“Sure, please,” mumbles Adam, and I nod, too. I wheel him over to a free table, and we grab paper plates, which the twins load down with food.

Adam finally smiles, thrilled at the spread, and we stuff ourselves. I look around as I eat, trying to make sense of this crowd. Almost everyone is non-white. How can this many different kinds of people get along? It must be the food, and the weather, and the occasion. I look around for Jeremy, who I spot greeting guests. You never saw a more vivacious host: he hugs people, shakes hands, kisses both men and women, gives piggy-back rides to the smaller kids. You can
just hear their laughter from here.

“Vicky’s got a boyfriend,” Adam singsongs, and I can’t deny it: I like Jeremy, this heartbeat centre of the strange and beautiful world we’re in here. It’s strange because it’s beautiful, and beautiful because it’s strange. I never thought that people, just people together, could look like this. What had I been missing behind the bars of our old gated community? Jeremy catches my eye, and I know he sees it too: the beauty of humanity in its wide spectrum, and him, this brown man I mustn’t, but do, love.

Study in Anticipation
By Penn Kemp

To quote Marguerite Duras: “one must try to move from dismal despair to joyful despair.” We try to clinch such disparity as better than dismal hope—or the almost impossible delight in remembering Hannah Arendt’s line:

“Even in the darkest of times we have the right to expect some illumination.”

Poems come more slowly now. Or is it that we discriminate? Whatever, we’ll weather through another winter, glad to hibernate, home, nodding to one another.

The poet beholds and is beholden, cleaves and is cleft, leaves and is left.

Culture shock is not in the journey but on returning to what we believe is haven even if only in temporary respite, a station on standby, where we rest in spite of fear.

We began with a flicker of what could only be hope, and shifted to the cardinal sign that beckoned us on to another year, beyond what we thought would be clarity of vision in 20/20. But now we see through the mirror to the other side of expectation—Utopia, the word Thomas More coined from the Greek for ‘no place’. And yet we trust.

Little Red Riding Hood and Her Grandmother
By Lisa Kovac

There was once a girl named Little Red Riding Hood who often went to visit her grandmother's cottage in the woods. One day, on her way there, she met a wolf.

"Good morning," it said. "Where are you off to today?"

"I’m not supposed to talk to strangers," said Little Red Riding Hood, “but I’ve known you for five whole seconds now, so maybe it’s alright to tell you. I’m going to Grandmother’s. She lives all by herself, and she doesn’t get to town much these days. So I’m bringing her some groceries.”

"How about I come, too?" said the wolf. "I'll go the short way and you go the long way."

"Alright," said Little Red Riding Hood. The wolf bounded off.
When he reached Grandmother's, he found no one home. On the table, there was a note explaining that Grandmother might be late and Little Red Riding Hood should make herself comfortable. The wolf ate the note and jumped into bed. Minutes later, Little Red Riding Hood arrived.

"Come in, my dear," said the wolf in his best impression of a very old, quavering, human woman.

"Well, that's that taken care of"


"I'm very sick," said the wolf, trying to speak in a higher, less growly register.

"And, Grandmother, what big ears you have!" said Little Red Riding Hood, approaching the bed. "And they're furry! What kind of sickness do you have?"

"The better to hear you with, my dear," said the wolf inanely. "It's a very strange sickness that makes everything swell up and grow fur."

"I'll say! And what big eyes you have! Their colour's changed, too. And what big nails! Your whole hands are huge.

And Grandmother," she said, in an especially loud voice, "what big teeth you have!"

The wolf began to stretch slowly and paused for dramatic effect.

"All the better to--"

The wardrobe door suddenly opened, and Grandmother jumped out brandishing her axe. She sprang nimbly to the bed and chopped off the wolf's head before he could finish his speech.

"Well, that's that taken care of," Grandmother said briskly, wiping her axe on the rest of the already-spoiled bedspread. "That's the last time he'll eat one of my goats. Why couldn't he just go to the butcher-shop in town, like a reason-
able talking wolf? Anyway, thank you for luring him here, dear. That was some good acting."

"Welcome," said Little Red Riding Hood, looking away. "That was disgusting, but impressive."

"Well," said Grandmother with smug satisfaction, "when you live all by yourself in the middle of the woods, there are some things you just have to know how to do."

The moral of this story, children, is: your grandparents may not be as fragile as you think, and their minds can be as sharp as their axes.

**The trees sing through me**

**They tell me it is time**

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**Untitled**

*By Jade Walker*

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Diesel clouds  
Where the adders roam  
Diesel clouds are terrorizing my home

Anything to achieve his means  
And all I smell is gasoline

By the riverbank  
Waywardly  
I'll softly lay me down to sleep

With my arms and legs all bare  
Spiders weaving in my hair

Diesel clouds  
Where the adders roam  
Diesel clouds are terrorizing my home

Anything to achieve his means  
Find the means to your ends

---
Fire destroys everything it touches

The land speaks through me and it says
You are not men
You are not men
You may call yourselves men
But you are not men
You are so much lesser than
You are so much lesser than
Mankind is an abomination
Burning the Earth
Slaughtering the animals needlessly
Raping women and the land

For your own amusement
For your own gratification
For your own pleasure
For your own enjoyment

No more
No more

I shall beseech again
I will stand strong and tall to cleave them
As Mother Nature’s loyal shield maiden

~X~

The more people I meet
The more I befriend trees
Hear them sway, moan and creak
Down in Fox Hollow Ravine

Whimsical wiles beguile
Clandestine corpses pile
So many stories and lies left untold
Take me back to the place you bore me
I’m in a forest of blood
Old, dead and owned

So serene
And peaceful to me
The forest is my home
The only home I’ve ever known

Preparing for the hunt
It’s man flesh that I’ll be cooking
The more people I meet the more I like my cunt

I’m a botanical freak
Proud to be meek
I feel the cool healing moss on me
As my wounds seep
Nature is the language I speak

~X~

You set me on fire
Pollute me
Spit on me
Rape me
Litter me

I’ve felt raped my whole life
Even when I was young
Too young to even know what it was
I’ve felt raped
My whole life
My entire childhood

Even in my youth
I was always struggling to understand the truth
The irony makes me sick
It makes me feel like I’m going to puke
Just like when I first started seeing you

Fire destroys everything it comes in contact with
Fire destroys everything it touches
Fire destroys everything it comes in contact with
Fire destroys everything it touches

Fire destroys everything it touches

Fire destroys everything it touches
Woolly Lawnmowers
By Anusha Rung

Sheep have taken over the city's cookie-cutter fields
Sheep of all shapes and sizes
Curly sheep black sheep beige sheep brown sheep russet-and-cream sheep fat sheep with stick-thin legs thin sheep with bald necks
Horned rams horned ewes
Bluefaced border Karakul
Sheep with shaggy backs that cannot be combed clean
Sheep that swing their hips as they walk
Sheep that came from nowhere and built a life for themselves here
Without even trying to
Sheep that do not remember their ancestors
But stare at you with relentless innocence
Not questioning their place in the world
Unironic sheep that never learned to worship anything
And do not know they are sacred
Harmless predators
More powerful than lions
Because lions are extinct
And sheep have replaced lawnmowers
Just by existing they save us
Without being implored
Sometimes the lambs break into a run
Making for the street
Instinctively we herd them back
To an imaginary safety
Even though there are no more wolves, no more cars, and no one eats meat
The apocalypse has come and gone
Clichés have been gutted and turned inside out
Dogs and cats and weasels live safely in houses
Pandas are back in the forest
Shark fins are left alone
And sheep rule the world
Their reputation
As rebellious artists
At last restored

Hope the Thing
By Penn Kemp

Of course, Pandora looked, what human wouldn't? All good flew out, soared into the aether beyond hope. Evil and illness, disease and nastiness, weighing heavily, slumped out, low fog clinging to ground, a miasmas of lost Hope, forlorn Elpis.

Though the jar was quickly capped, Elpis was locked inside, leaving us no Hope or all, perhaps. Who can tell?

* 

What if that jar reclaimed wings, white wings? What if it flapped upright till it could rise heavily into blue, circling on air currents ever higher out of sight? Not out of mind. Horus, move aside, roll over.

After all, Hope is caught

Inspired by my volunteer work with woolly lawnmowers at Maisonneuve Park (Montreal)
in the honey jar and we all know hope can fly like

expectation out
the window, the fastest Hawk in heaven, away.

*Whatever happened to Pandora herself and to the empty box? Would Hope refill itself with time, given hope,

Inside, the space of the empty jar offers miracles of new unknowns and the jar expands to breaking point. What does it need with sides? Or pointers? No point when we are not on edge.

*Hope trills unceasingly until our last breath, until we stop. Then hope lands somewhere else, perpetual motion, e-motion.

Hope arrives, unexpected again, and we receive the full embrace of “The Receptive”.

*Never has this unabashed little bird of breath ever asked a crumb from me.

The root of all action inner and outer, begins here, breathing in. After a pause where all is potential, we receive the space created with each exhalation.

*Allowing the jar to burst into shards of nothing, something or everything, why not? This kind of centred expansion welmed in love, neither over nor under, flowing, fluent, fast influenced, to be under stars’ protection if we choose to hear their light, their light twinkle little little so near and so far so good. So much to be discerned, unlearned, felt. Felt as light as shelter-feather, "hleów-feðer" standing windward, fanning protection.

In lee of passing storm, this past-time. In lieu of the past imperfect tense, this presence. Wings are a hopeful thing.
“the space of the empty jar offers miracles of new unknowns”

-Penn Kemp,
“Hope the Thing”