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.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

An ambitious project of this nature could not have happened without a lot of coordinating efforts. WordsFestZine would like to thank all of the WordsFest organizers, and in particular, Josh Lambier, of the Public Humanities Program at Western, and Brian Meehan, of Museum London.

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

We are grateful for the many sponsors of Words, including the London Arts Council, who make the festival possible.

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

Cover artwork: Ben O’Neil
## Contents

### Pastors and Post-Pastorals:
- **Sameer Z. Hussain (Art): “Lockdown”**  
  Jennifer Wenn: “Hatchlings”  
- Richard-Yves Sitoski: “Anatomy of the ditch and soft shoulder of Round Lake Road between the Sherwood River and the village of Bonnechere, Township of Laurentian Valley, Renfrew County, Ontario, throughout the summer of 1977”  
- Andrees Gripp: “The Ruses of Mild Air”  
- Lisa Marie Kovac: “Gruff”  
- Julian Matthews: “ORANGE”  
- Ryan Gibbs: “Coventry Gardens”  
- Pauline Shen: “Racoon under the yoga studio”  
- Rebecca St. Pierre: “Returning”  
- Paddy Scott: “Bio Metric”  

### Breathless but Hopeful:
- Rimaz Nazeer (Art): “Dear Pandemic”  
- Kelly Ge: “BLUE”  
- Marlyne Scott: “DA WOMAN YAH!”  
- Marlyne Scott: “MOTHER”  
- Arivukkarasi Manivannan: “Maybe it’s the time”  
- Kellie Choinard: “breathless but hopeful”  
- Courtney WZ: “At-Home Agoraphobia”  
- Catty Greentree: “The Magic”  
- Samsara Leung: “Either Way: A Dialogue”  
- S. Jane Fletcher: “i am standing at the edge of the earth”  
- Akshayaa Selvaraj: “NATCHATHIRA KAADU – FOREST OF STARS”  
- Akshayaa Selvaraj (Art): “FOREST OF STARS”  
- Nirosha Shanmugam: “Madras Memories”  
- Nirosha Shanmugam (Art): “Journal Page 1”  
- Nirosha Shanmugam (Art): “Journal Page 2”  
- Thirupurasundari Sevvel: “The Long March, India, May 2020”  
- Alexas D’Entremont-Smith: “The Sky is Gone”  
- Marlene Laplante: “healing haiku”  

### Unrealized Futures:
- Arunkumar Periyasamy (Art): “Kaappu”  
- Arunkumar Periyasamy (Art): “Maasu”  
- Arunkumar Periyasamy (Art): “Kaakka Kaakka”  
- Abbey Horner: “Fragmented Frankenstein: The Eternal Justice of Man”  
- Paula Ethans: “she tried to leave”  
- Peter Heft: “we finally took indigenous knowledge squid-fungi hybrid seriously”  
- Gareth Boyle: “The Fear of Missing Me”  
- Travis Thompson: “A ‘conflict with the unnatural’ world we have become accustomed to living”  
- Mahdiyeh Ezzatikarami: “We Survived!”  
- Isaac Sherry: “Mazzocchio”  
- Dieter Heinrich: “Found Notes of Rad Harkey, Dated 2029”  
- Akshayaa Selvaraj: “YOU ARE THE UNIVERSE”  
- Akshayaa Selvaraj (Art): “YOU ARE THE UNIVERSE”  
- Chelsea Heathcote: “Wasteland”  
- Daniel Robinson: “A Lump of Iron Ore and Some Squiggly Lines”  

### Contributors
- 29
Lockdown by Sameer Z. Hussain
HATCHLINGS
By Jennifer Wenn

Fetal, cowering under a black haze,
shrinking from the oncoming day
insistently knocking at the window,
when comes the lure of the familiar burble:
My daughter, reaching out from half
a world away, texting evening pictures
from a Sri Lankan beach, tiny baby turtles
pushing up through the sand, breaking free,
past the hand-lettered sign carefully marking
place and Christmas Eve embedding.
Another burble, more images from her,
little ones skittering to the ocean
to claim their place. Entranced,
she celebrates her joy and wonder,
transporting me, and I am there too, witnessing
new hope taking its first steps.

By Richard-Yves Sitoski

Queen Anne’s lace, finery around her neck
yet at her feet a not-quite carrot fit for a hermit’s bowl.
The glint of something silver. Maybe a downed satel-lite.
Maybe a Hostess salt and vinegar chips package.
Pull tabs in the aggregate like crashed planes in the
mountains.
Molson stubbies between the devil’s paint brushes.
What was the devil painting if not himself drinking
beer?
Daisies never to feel the sting of love, of lovers
pulling their petals off to prove that love is only love
when something beautiful is frittered by degrees.
Mullein tough enough to earn a proverb’s chevrons.
Inner tubes even tougher, lengths of intestine
from some ill-tempered ruminant.
The deer crossing sign buckshot in some Lascaux-era
act of sympathetic magic.
Ditch lilies waiting to lend their name to a bar band.
Dandelions with puffs of geriatric hair, grannies
waiting to board the casino bus.
Timothy stalks playing hockey with bottle caps.
A dead ballpoint. A dead spark plug. A dead hair bar-
rette.
Cigarette butts like spent shell casings
from an epidemic of gun mishaps.
Black-eyed Susans like the daisies’ hippie aunts.
Bumblebees with their craftsman’s unhurried industry.
Monarchs like Frida Kahlo’s jewelry come to life.
Pieces of pink quartz as valuable to an eight-year old
as a ruby crystal shooter, a heron feather,
a Star Wars card, a porcupine’s quill.
A rusted motor oil can like a tin of peaches from the
Erebus.
A bicycle like a vulture-scavenged calf.
Fragments of headlights from the impact between
modernity
and John Muir’s notebooks.
Fragments of taillights like the drops Queen Anne
shed
from her pricked finger, drops that land on gravel
and turn it red, red as a setting sun that hasn’t yet de-
cided
if it will rise on the morrow.

THE RUSE OF MILD AIR
By Andrees Gripp

In this warmer than normal winter,
the trees are budding early,
in February’s
rain instead of snow.
I feel I ought to go outside
and bring some soothing tea,
play a tranquil song
for harp and strings,
be the sandman for a spell,
send the rousing leaves-to-be
back into their shells,
lest the winds return from the north,
puddles freeze over,
and greening branches waken
to a bird-less lie of ice.
“Who’s that trampling over my bridge?” asked the troll.
“You’re not supposed to ask that anymore, remember?” said the smallest Billy-Goat gruff.
“All this no-more-checkpoints nonsense,” grumbled the troll.
“It’s called the Troll Food Sector Regulation,” said the Billy Goat.
“It lets lazy lay-abouts like you go wherever you like and eat the whole hillside up, no questions asked. Never leaving any grass for the other goats. And then you just waddle off home and lay around until your next feeding frenzy. And all those other little critters that don’t get any grass would actually like to do something to better the settlement, if they had the energy. Despicable. I was performing a service for the people when I was allowed to eat you greedy goats up.”
“Well, you can’t perform it any more. It’s a new world now. Nice goats with a new lawn-mowing business can get on with their lives without great rock-brains like you casting stones and aspersions. Your job’s no longer considered worth doing.”

No job. But a job meant everything. A job meant out of the cave, away from Ma hurling boulders at his back and Pa drinking the pay up. A job meant always enough to eat, in a nice cavern in a safer part of town. It meant his girls staying in school, not quitting early to get work that somebody, someday, would call worthless. A job meant paying for Curling Club, where he could go when he needed somewhere to throw the anger so it would never land on his daughters.
“If you’re so smart, what do I tell my girls? ‘Guess what, kiddos? It’s a better world! That means Daddy can’t afford to give you supper tonight and you’re going for a lifetime of sleepovers with Grandma.’”
“Well, wouldn’t their grandmother be a fine role model for growing girls?”
“You don’t know nothing.”

The goat looked down.
“Well. If that’s not, well, exactly a suitable arrangement, there are food banks and things. To tide you over while you try to get useful work of some sort.”
“What’s useful? Seems everything you say or do these days is insulting somebody.”

The goat nodded grimly.
“But we’re getting to know when we’re insulting people,” he said. “I guess that’s the first step. Maybe you could tell your girls it’s a different world where we’re all learning new things, and we all take turns helping each other. Just now, your family needs some help. But you’re using it to get back on your feet, and then you’ll be the ones helping people.”
“What if I want to help people now?”
“You might volunteer,” suggested the Billy Goat.
“There’s a group that volunteers to build houses for people, and if you do it all day, they give you a free lunch. I bet they could use somebody to roll rocks around, don’t you think? They’d be a good reference to have, too, in this new kind of a world.”

**ORANGE**

By Julian Matthews

Today is a good day
I select an orange
Sit down to savour it
It’s a mandarin,
Even maybe of Chinese origin
But an orange does know better
It does not claim a nationality
Or a race, or a religion, or a gender
It’s humanity’s orange

I peel the orange, slowly
And it feels like I am tearing down a wall
I pull a segment from the whole
It’s cool and firm and real
Not fragile like the egos of some men

I place it in my mouth and it is good
It’s tangy and succulent and sweet
Its juice swirls in my mouth
Like gushing nectar
Like pure joy
Like poetry

This is my mouth—and I am free to eat with it
And to speak my mind with it
And to sing my joy with it
And to read poetry with it
My mouth is not a swamp to drain

This orange feels authentic
And I feel a piece of my soul return in some way
And the pain of loss of a million souls slips away
Momentarily

And the one known as the Orange One
is gone
And the orange that I now savour
Is real and true and good
And today, yes today, is a good day

COVENTRY GARDENS
By Ryan Gibbs

lush green lawns
turned arid through neglect
as overstuffed trash bins
belch plastic waste across
abandoned walkways
topiary hounds cower
in scant shrubs
whimpering
at pale daffodils
dying at their heels

in this forgotten tomb
rests a maiden
long-awaiting
the civic heroes
whose kiss
will restore her
sweet enchantments
the vibrant lights
the reviving waters
of her eviscerated heart

RACCOON UNDER THE YOGA STUDIO
By Pauline Shen

Amidst a sea of inhales & exhalés,
an inquisitive paw joins
the savasana’d patrons.

BURSTING THROUGH
an open knot
from under the smooth wooden slats.
Its musky claws stir the patchouli’d air.
“Ohm.”

RETURNING
By Rebecca St. Pierre

On the third day of Migration Praise Days,
the spring sky darkened at early dawn.

Undulating waves of bowed heads lifted,
in unison.

Leaves trembled in delight
at the force of feathered flight, returning.

Voices hushed,
faces flushed,
hearts yielding to Starling Murmuration.

BIO METRIC
By Paddy Scott

No one can say for sure what might survive
in the lesser beach elements of fat man ass cracks,
bare footprints, discarded chicken bones,
so we have prepared biodegradable
strongholds here, stored our finest frail within the
medulla’s ripe core of a provincial park, where
brachiopods’ pleated lips form bivalve duets to play off the piping plovers
under threat like clusters of gravelled voices seething, woke, rolling slow beneath
the cockled shells of Blanding’s turtles—
green, mossy, a muddy ancient stink, aimless
with the white-capped ghosts chasing eroding shores: pocked and grey as a privy council
gavelling brood ground into sterile beach
sand raked by conservation officers—
bell jar peacekeepers of nature’s order
under their feet, the shadow cabinet
in trilobites and crinoids who knew who
stood where on the trophic pyramid right
before the ash settled… became the first
line of stone-faced clairvoyants, seen not
heard among the antediluvian
singalong rock hounds hold; get stuffed into
plastic grocery bags, placed on window sills.

Nature in the round no rebound just full
circle like this bryozoan I get ready to let slip
from my fingers and watch the seconds skip
across an acid-washed lake tic toc tic
until escape velocity exhausts and the stone hits
the lakebed preserved… what goes unsaid the shape
and meaning to what it came all this way to deliver:
a message in dissonant diminished fifths
how systemic was their own root cause, that momen-
tous
event a million, million years in the making
for them—will be quicker for us on display at this
golden manicured shore where we still play
at casting stones and digging shallow graves
building sand castles that will wash away.

Old men with metal detectors stockpile
our tin cans and bottle caps, proof made flesh
—no one disappears without a trace but will
be basking sun-drenched sedentary long after
they’re done scouring the sedimentary,
catastrophe still sparked by a flash, just
not the brilliance of an asteroid’s
crash, not so necessary as that first
lightning bolt’s splash into a mud puddle…
but one barely a glint against my eye—
the sunlight caught in a six pack’s plastic rings;

I hold grey grit in the hourglass I
make with my hands, counting down to zero
the grains. An extinction poem doesn’t
write well upon a tabula rasa
of mud among all these dead carp steaming,
I can’t apply a scope to the sky for
any sign of epochal somethings coming
when sight is blocked by the number of species
exiting, the past repeating bears recalling
precious few acts are so well-conserved as when
a call to life directs the endangered
to ride thermals of mortal coils, to spread their
wings for leaving. So better catch the last
monarch butterfly fleeing this autumn
horde of awe and beauty. We would rather
it beat wings inside an old preserves jar
with a blade of grass and a drop of dew
than fall prey to active chaos theory.
Dear Pandemic by Rimaz Nazeer

BLUE
By Kelly Ge

there are a million ways to paint the sky gray. particles
becoming energy becoming
industry, we set the horizon aflame. charcoal
smeread across blue.
brilliant blue. we are
all artists. all part of this
cycle of creation and
recreation and
destruction. hazy skies
like a curtain, one that
cannot be pulled
back. the world,
shrouded in black. we cannot add another coat of
blue. but da vinci said art is never finished, only aban-
donned, so let us carve out
a corner,
a clean state and
start and
restart.

DA WOMAN YAH!
By Marlyne Scott

A who name yuh?
A dat mi wa’an fi know
And if COVID-19 never frightening enough
Yuh haffi give yourself an alias
So we would know you are a scorned woman
Corona, a mek yuh tan suh?
Yuh couldn’t wait til mi gone fi come wid yuh drama?
When mi si people stop drink you know wha, mi laugh
till mi nearly drop
But if you think dat did funny
Check out di one dem weh did a drink d other liquid
  Mr Man tell dem

Luckily di medical people dem did still alert
Even though round di clock shifts mek all part a dem hurt
Dem bawl out quick, quick “STOP!”
We ca’an take nuh more large numbers a drop

But fun and joke aside
Ms C, a weh yuh come from?
A wha di whole a wi duh yuh?
A so yuh fight hard fi Supa Power dat yuh decide fi tek another swipe a yuh big competitors?
Wi know yuh did a try fi spare some a wi
But yuh had to show a little transparency

Anyway mi dear, thanks for stopping by
Now ride off in the sunset and enjoy yuh life
Byeeeee!

MOTHER
By Marlyne Scott

You choose a job that has no barrier
Religion, colour, creed or class
Oftentimes going through the process
Without getting adequate rest
But bless your heart mother, dear
Day in day out you show you care
And when life’s temptations I face
You remind me of His amazing grace
Yet, how can I truly repay
All that you’ve done from day to day?
Perhaps, I can strive to be
The mother that you are to me!

MAYBE IT’S THE TIME
By Arivukkarasi Manivannan

Maybe it’s the time to pause
From the fast-forward life
To a slow motion one

Maybe it’s the time
To together pray
For the families
Who lost their loved ones

Maybe it’s the time
To show our gratitude
To those selfless souls
Who do their duties
No matter what hail or storm

Maybe it’s the time
To cherish our loved ones
To thank, to forget and forgive
And say the “Thank yous” and “Sorry”
That we would have
Ignored or missed saying

Maybe it’s the time
To sit with our family
And have that dinner
That we yearned to have together

Maybe it’s the time
To care and it’s a time so rare
Maybe it’s the time to
Breathe in some fresh air

Maybe it’s the time
To step out on the terrace
And gaze at the
Never the same sunset

Maybe it’s the time
To gaze at
The countless number of
Shining stars
And the ruler of the night
The Moon

Maybe it’s the time
To sway in the swing
In our balcony
That has always
Been beckoning us

Maybe it’s the time
To fly our kites high
Back again
The ones we have been
Chasing after in our childhood

Maybe it’s the time
To finish the
Half done painting and
To wind off the
Unfinished composition

Maybe it’s the time
To read the
Unread books and
To reread the
Classic ones

Maybe it’s the time
To watch the unseen movies
The classic ones and
The Oscar wins

Maybe it’s the time
To listen to the old playlists
And the time
To create newer ones

Maybe it’s the time
To contemplate
And speak to ourselves
“Where’s my life leading to?”

Maybe it’s the time
To give it a try
And venture into
Something new

Maybe it’s the time
To go down the memory lane and
Look at the dusty photographs

Maybe it’s the time
To realize that
Money is not everything
And so are all Materialistic things

Maybe it’s the time
To realize human lives
Mean much and more

Maybe it’s the time
To stand divided
Yet, stand united

Maybe it’s the time
To stop individual thinking
And start collective thinking

Maybe it’s the time
That occurs once in a lifetime
When even oceans
And waves stand still

Maybe it’s the time
That Earth is doing
It’s Ctrl+Z rounds
To show Nature’s
Truest colours

Maybe it’s the time
To realize the fact that
There’s something always out there
Evolving intelligently
Much more than the
So called “Greatest of Human Minds”
Both Living and Dead

Maybe it’s the time
To realize that life is short
And to start living the moment

Maybe it’s the time
To stop complaining
And start living

Maybe it’s the time
To stop racing
And start living.

BREATHLESS BUT HOPEFUL
By kellie chouinard

mark the caesura (/ / , -) as necessary architecture
a break between past // future

the pause breathless & weighted

you: overwhelmed by
sourdough starters
   wooden spoons
   what temperature turns water into wine
   & air into bread

in the tower, Rapunzel clutches her bald head &
throws a hat down to the waiting prince
begs obedience
   please help

this was inevitable, he says
no-one saw it coming

please, sing
police sign

Rapunzel folds her last remaining braid into a nest
& invites birds from the back alley

squirrels climb 17 stories of red brick
for one rogue seed & half a toast crumb

outside your window, rabbits feed from the garden
a blue jay rests on her laurels, bites into bittersweet
you stretch your spine into the floor:
inhale pause exhale
pause

in the tower, Rapunzel clutches the ache in her limbs
& pleads:
   she wants a new story

you lie on the floor & wait
earth spins outside your windows
snow falls on untended gardens
you accept the pause
embrace the caesura

breathless but hopeful

THE MAGIC
By Catty Greentree

I get hung up on the magic.
How does it work, this animate meat?
Full of salt and blood and anxiety.
Snips and snails and a hundred tales of
fear/shame/frustration.

But you get hung up on the science, insist
something hinky is going on.

When we talk about the end of the world
there it is, that arrogance,
scintillating over the quiet tick of forks on plates
sparked when everyone else but me has died.

I crack the cookie, wipe the crumbs, and read the for-
tune:
A dream you have will come true.

But in my dream there are no beaches
and waves lap directly at skyscraper stumps
cigarettes stubbed out on a burnt orange sky.

Later we spill out onto the pavement, steadying each

AT-HOME AGORAPHOBIA
By Courtney WZ

   I scuttle from duvet to drawer to pick a sock. There’s
one pair left—mismatched, holey-toed, with fabric that
stretches translucent over my heel. When tugged up, a
few strands rip past their breaking point. The rest of my
socks are in the laundry bin, but I’ll start repeating
soon; the washer is too far, too loud, too cold, too
much. Whenever I decide to wear socks next, I’ll unfurl
two from the hamper, brown-bottomed—not from leather
insoles but grit of an unwashed floor.

   Most days by two o’clock I’ve changed the scenery
in front of which I sit. Planted in the living room chair
between the lamp and shelf, the walls stare me down.
Not tinted enough to be eggshell, but not quite white.
Everything is off. My eyes flit from ceiling crease to
carpet and I am overcome with the unreasonable fear
that someone will knock on the door. Everything is too
much. Getting the groceries is too much but at least that
means the dishes cannot be too much. I’d say Mondays
are too much but they’re indecipherable from Fridays
and as meaningless as Covid June.

   The curtains are mostly closed, save a slit to peek
through. Leaves rustle around the sky behind the panes
and I’ve forgotten what weather feels like and why
leaves fall and what force keeps them moving towards
something and if all the energy behind their momentum
is worth it if they have nowhere important to land.
other beside
the walk signal, that fervent emerald.

After we debride the apocalyptic furuncle;
 delineate the ethics of collapse;
 feel out the edges of radical freedom;
after we prune the dead ends of a conversation.

Later we slip down streets thick with memory,
obligalious ghosts becoming nearly corporeal,
scarves wrapped against the vernal chill.
Watching the moon rise
gelatinous over the bearded trees.
I get hung up on the science,
you get caught up in the magic.

EITHER WAY: A DIALOGUE
By Samsara Leung

Well?
Well what?
The world is dying. It’s been dying for years and it’s only going to get worse.
I know.
The climate is changing. The earth is getting hotter.
Everything is on fire. Thousands of species are going extinct.
I know.

Aren’t you going to do anything about it?
No.
No? What do you mean ‘no’? Didn’t you hear me?
The world is dying, and we will die with it if nothing is done!
It’s too much work.
I don’t believe you! How is mitigating this crisis too much work? We have done more for less, we have pushed the boundaries of science, the mind, for simple things like fashion, or entertainment. How is this too much when everything is at stake?
It just is. Like, what can we even do about it anyway?
It’s already too late, isn’t it?
Anything we can do to lessen the damage done will be worth it. Even if it only saves one life it will have been worth it.
It won’t make much of a difference either way. I won’t make much of a difference. It’s such a big problem,
nothing I can contribute will do much. Infinitesimal in the grand scheme of things. What do you even want me to do? Oh, look, I turned the lights off! Go me! That definitely just saved a polar bear or something.
The little things add up. And it’s better than doing nothing.
Look, you don’t know it will be that bad. We’re like, due for an ice age anyway, right? It would have happened either way.
You know that’s not true. We’ve known that for years.
It probably won’t affect me anyway.
You’re kidding, right?

Are you ignoring me now? Real mature. Look, I am going to go do something. Whether or not you help is up to you.
You don’t even know what you’re doing. Oh wow, ‘something,’ what a great plan!
I will figure it out! At least I’m trying, unlike you and your great plan of ‘sit like a lump and hope it goes away!’

Maybe it will!
Not because of anything you did. When people look back on history, people like you will be the villains.
You and your sloth and ignorance.
Sorry, did I ask to be taken on a guilt trip? Get off your high horse.

I’m leaving now, but you know where to find me if you change your mind.

I AM STANDING AT THE EDGE OF THE EARTH
By S. Jane Fletcher

i am standing at the edge of the earth,
wondering if she can feel this like we do.

when she dies, will she go out with a big bang?
back the way she came,
a full circle?
or will it be a soft exhale,
the dust settling,
a sweet release?

all these battles raged upon her,
all the poisons torn from her core
and thrown into the air she breathes -

she must be so tired.

exhaustion making her bone weary,
hope flickering out like a
forgotten bonfire.

at the edge of the earth,
i can see the vastness
of the space around her.

i can feel her yearning
to become it.
NATCHATHIRA KAADU – FOREST OF STARS
By Akshayaa Selvaraj

Change can be very exhilarating, sometimes a choice and sometimes a destination. The first step is always a trembling baby step with your mind posing alarming thoughts. When I took my first step, I never knew this could take me to the roots of my soul. I took my shoes off and stepped onto the muddy raw earth where the real essence of life and death had left its traces. It was more dramatic than Rapunzel’s first step onto the grass. I realised I stepped onto stardust. I could breathe deeply for the first time ever without any guided meditations, it was a natural process as if I knew it before. I felt life when I treaded onto the earth, I became one with the stardust. AND I WALKED ON THE STARDUST INTO THE FOREST OF STARS.
The busy roads are now locked down,
Not by reduced movements or vehicles,
But by unanswered questions and fears.
From morning walks along the shoreline to midnight
drives back home, everything now just seems to be
like a dream.
Maybe we didn’t appreciate it enough when we had all
the time to enjoy it.
The crowded platforms with constant hustle welcomed
me every time I stepped into my favourite city,
The constant honks, heated political arguments never
faded away,
The congested streets where you can only see heads
floating around,
The hot sand and the salty odour of the sea and fishes
that just landed on the shore of Marina,
I possibly could never imagine how social distancing
would look in real-time on our beaches or inside
the Share Autos where we go on a road trip for over
30 kilometres costing just 20 rupees along with 10
other passengers.
How are we gonna convince Ranganathan Street or
Parry’s Corner that we wouldn’t be able to crowd
like ever before,
And that shopping will more likely be online these
days.
The dense roads of the Theosophical Society are just
happy green without us,
The birds around are chirping louder than they used to.
Yes, I belong to that gumball which says Anna Nagar
is my country, and Tower Park is my capital, I’m
totally unaware of how the trees which survived the
cyclones are doing this quarantine,
The Roundtana Bus Stop, where I took most of my
life’s decisions,
The McDonald’s which will host our penny-less
parties.
The smell of old books while climbing down the stairs
in Higginbothams,
First day first show of Thalaivar’s film with Sathyam
Theatre’s popcorn.
The buzzing bees around Vaishnavas or
The drive in pick-up at Fruit Shop On Greams Road,
That one shawarma shop we all adore in every area,
And that Kalan shop for a pocket-friendly evening
snack.
The stroll around KNK and choosing where to eat,
Double Roti’s hot chocolate, filter coffee or Cheta’s
tea with 81 people around us in a 10×10 stall.
Typing out poems to strangers and random convers-
sations at Writer’s Cafe,
The late-night Dosa trucks or those old couples who
make their living by selling food every day, I don’t
know how they handled this recession,
The wholesome traffic after evening rains
Or those aimless high speed rides across the city,
Empty Metro train rides to nowhere on a Sunday
morning, to the busy Suburbans irrespective of the
day, time and place.
I genuinely hope we all get to see Thala in his Yellow
tee finishing off in style,
Scorching heat and the sudden invasion of viruses has
taken the city down, uprooting lives.
But it’s never too late to heal, and we’ve always
walked past catastrophes with grace,
I’m clueless when I think about our post COVID life,
But I hope things will definitely get better despite the
scaling up of the curve,
Holding patience,
As the city brings herself up,
Amidst the chaos and uncertainty.

Note: Madras Memories was written during the complete
lockdown in May 2020, reminiscing the nostalgia before
and after Corona.
Journal Page 2 by Nirosha Shanmugam
THE LONG MARCH
INDIA, MAY 2020
By Thirupurasundari Sevvel

The walk.
The length of flower strand is also the length of struggle;
The aroma of the tea is the aroma of strength;
The shine of the floors and walls is the sheen of dedication;
The distance they drive you around is the distance of the economy;
The heap of vegetables are the heap of faith;
The crisp of the stitch is the crisp of the talent;
The hands that create, build, feed, support and understand!

The needs of our day, the wants of our ego, the demands of our lifestyle - makes us forget, the food to the plate, the education to their children, healthcare and welfare;
In this challenging time, let’s support, until this imbalanced curve also flattens with the corona,
Till then - support and share, don’t forget to make that a habit!

THE SKY IS GONE
By Alexas D’Entremont-Smith

Our final days have gone beyond us, and we are left cold and hungry.
The sun has been swept away.
Into a place we would call heaven because we cannot imagine it but it must be better than this.
Some people claim that it gave up on its millions old, eons-old mission to warm our hearts.
Hearts, like any organ, require homeostasis of the bitter, dank environment in which they well and pump their life into fingers and eyes that would serve to make them regret it.

But others say the sun ran in fear.
That it had never seen something that could burn up the world faster than we could.

The moon has winked out.
Left to smoulder in the ashes we send cascading upwards, like rose petals twirling into old embers.
Did the moon follow the sun?
Was it whipped and yanked and strangled in circles before it could even open its eyes, now to go only where the sun will shed light?
How often the moon turned away from us to shed its tears in privacy. It must be happier to be robbed of the freedom of choice, the freedom to watch as the flames licked closer.

Where have the eyes in the sky gone?
Oh, they weep!
Oh, how they cry, how the reds and blues seep into our canvas and do the painting for us!
But do they not realize, their scarlets are too bold, their aquamarines too deep?
Why, whoever thought of such a palette, knowing we only like our artworks to be blacks, greys, and yellows.

We robbed them of their eyelashes. We needed paintbrushes to fix the mistakes they made in colouring our world.

Now they know to wipe their tears and close their eyes instead.
HEALING HAIKU
By Marlene Laplante

all masked by fear
protected from things not seen
uneasy feelings

softness of silence
in such a runaway world
calms our battled souls

future in our hands
sun rises on a new chance
together we can

there is such freedom
in the strength of our caring
forever in time

welcoming feelings
words and voices from distance
hope shining through light

we climb a mountain
with many small steps forward
we can overcome

when touching returns
holding loved ones in our arms
healing will begin
Kaappu, Maasu, and Kaakka Kaakka by Arunkumar Periyasamy
FRAGMENTED FRANKENSTEIN: THE ETERNAL JUSTICE OF MAN
By Abbey Horner

My profane fingers animate lifeless clay
Secret grave disturbed
Lifeless eyes unhallowed
Cannot inspire love
Existence
Traversing my mind
The dead calmness of inaction
Deprives the soul of both hope and fear
Bound to prosperity and ruin
The mind can persuade itself
Falseness can look so like the truth
A satisfied conscience
Benevolence and sweetness
Monster and human
Equalled

SHE TRIED TO LEAVE
By Paula Ethans

in somalia, the ground crumbled beneath feet
people starving just like last year
in new orleans, houses ripped apart
people floating away on doors
in mozambique, bodies lined the highway
people searching for loved ones

and she tried to leave

but her land
all she knew was tilling its soil
like her mother and grandmother had

she tried to leave
but she needed a male escort
and they all fled
at the first signs of flooding

she tried to leave
but she had no money
and it was ten bucks a head for a ride in the truck

she tried to leave
but she couldn’t abandon her children
and how do you move quickly with three kids holding

your hand

she tried to leave
and maybe she did leave

she went to cross the river
but she drowned
because she’d never been taught how to swim

she ran from her village
but she was raped in the woods
by the aid workers

she made it to the border
but a guard sold her
into trafficking

so maybe she just stayed put
knowing it was hopeless

and the waves grew
the hurricane came closer
the water levels rose
the earthquake rumbled
and we lost another sister

the world has descended into devastation
and we are losing sisters
but the world has never saved our sisters
and what is more devastating than that

WE FINALLY TOOK INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE SQUID-FUNGI HYBRID SERIOUSLY
By Peter Heft

“Impress us. Reassure us. Teach us how to think differently about the world we inhabit and the future which will soon be our present.” This was the charge put forward by the editors of WordsFestZine. How can one do this (at least intentionally)? As Mark Fisher noted, under neoliberalism the future is slowly being cancelled. Indeed, not only is the future being cancelled, but even thinking about it has become increasingly difficult. Despite the above charge, intentional, articulate, clearly thought out visions of the future will always be trapped within the repetition of the same. Novelty is spontaneous and cannot be predicted or known in advance.
As William S. Burroughs once said, “When you experiment with cut-ups over a period of time, you find that some of the cut-ups and rearranged texts seem to refer to future events … when you cut into the present, the future leaks out.”

Given that, I have taken the cut-up technique—a technique where multiple texts are overlaid—and applied it to two different discussions of the future; one dystopic, one utopic: Jeff VanderMeer’s op-ed from the future, “It’s 2071, and We Have Bioengineered Our Own Extinction,” and Jacque Fresco’s discussion of utopia in The Venus Project: The Redesign of a Culture.

The following is the leakage of an as-yet unrealized future...

2035 … we finally took indigenous knowledge squid-fungi hybrid so i could work, the formal application of __________ in the past two decades, artistic biotech, i have more vision the people perish.” … dr. ehrlich attempted over to enrich the lives of system proposed by karl marx. … to bring them into their plato’s republic, the writings of that would have destroyed human called ‘the march of time” … the failure of communism to __________ the skin … to better the lives of my new home: a giant __________ ditch, surrounded by similarly-disoriented strangers? … the fear of social how can we avoid contamination money, police, prisons, militarism, … we __________ organisms might have an opinion … unclear to others: an entire … shape overshadowed by a new threat. toad “pets,” which began in what we are, because we hatched among them? in one sense, a situation in which we __________ private ownership. all proposals of time. there are no utopias. … advances saved our planet … not actually outrun the climate using biotech to change us? … “we believe that it is manipulating us and of a giant bear linked __________have done unto them as of some unknown bird? it included no property lines, banks, have had my consciousness gene … __________ did not consider whether these pursuit of progress. all that __________ shoving those brains into dinosaurs, animals that burst forth from of biotechnology was enabled not __________ realignment of social and political a whim, but there exists our future does not depend about the poor quality of macro … their bodies have the unexamined life was once reduced the probable extinction rates history of social evolution

THE FEAR OF MISSING ME
By Gareth Boyle

Would I say I missed out? Well, not really. I made a ton of friends while I was there; some lasting and some not. Majority of them were with me the night that it happened—the night that I got it.

Life had been normal up until then, I’d say. I played the generic house-league sports, learned how to play the violin, and even, in some cases, wrote a poem or two. I studied hard, graduating with honours and beginning my university career at Western. My future seemed so close.

I wish I had known.

It was my nineteenth birthday when we went down to Barney’s, a patio just ten minutes away from my sorority. Distancing wasn’t an option there. The bouncer touched our ID’s with his bare hand as he let us in. Tables meant for six were packed beyond ten with other students as they spoke carelessly, enjoying their casual beers in a maskless environment. I mean, yeah, tables were outdoors and spread, but it didn’t make any difference. It didn’t matter when someone already had it.

I wish I had known.

Yes, we were warned. They constantly tried to tell us. But after months of staying safe, we just couldn’t be locked in our colourless rooms anymore. Everyone I knew was doing the same thing, so I couldn’t bear to have “fomo”.

I wish I had known.

Was it worth it? Obviously not. But it wasn’t my fault; it’s whoever brought it there in the first place that should be blamed for it. I didn’t have any reason to fear. I was just going out with my friends.

They’ve all been tested too—some negative and some positive. But none of them have it as bad as I did, and I can thank You for that.

Yeah, I’ll miss them. You see, they can meet new people who will in some way take my place. But I am here—far away and out of their reach. I can’t meet anyone else here. I’ll be missing out on everything now.

And everything will miss out on me.
A ‘CONFLICT WITH THE UNNATURAL’ WORLD WE HAVE BECOME ACCUSTOMED TO LIVING

By Travis Thompson

to be joyously, serenely, divinely divisively aware;
Have punctured dreams & tell-tale Hats to live seeing yonder the gardened, brick walls.
Chance brought me you! Beyond a vacuous even —
star with hearts blackened by historical battles of harrowing the Absence of all Light. Fighting an
inane battle to ward off spirits: Heroic deeds that shudder thoughts of deferred time to think; write
and drink, I might! One taste we scrawl walking si-
lent through gloomy corridors. If only there were corresponding dew lines to touch and feel?
Fairly unnoticed by powers that brought olfactory re-
sponsive reek’s havoc on unconsciousness, intuitive
reinforcement impedes. Doomed to fell much wicked ways of men then see you there, I do… a
~ Confounded variability ~

Islands within an Isle, cycles Bridle, all the wiles to
memory:
Compartmentalize within Housing wits. For save your
plot, not digging grassy knolls—Sinking feeling.

Brought forth anew, to scribe, the Holiest of grail, is
But drunk. Once returned the village by systemic lot; it Moved

Found again the will to strive, by all accounts a guide.
These things, our hands typography: All told a journey. Be still again
listen to thine silence.

Where are we going to go with any of it. Were you asking a question or forming your vocalization as a
supposed statement. Spare ourselves the trouble. Our electricity functioned but at a fraction of the wattage. Although money in the physical sense existed. There weren’t any currencies worth the paper it had been printed on. Voltages gave only minus-
cule energy, and music as an art form had dis-
appeared as though never listened. Books along with acts of writing were not allowed, languages dissolved to digital symbols and acronyms only.

Permission granted.

If a voice was what required the masses to be heard the light emitting diodes seemed to give a fine drop of mass consumption by the people who moved in n’out spaciously under carpet piles… A subtle glance is all
that’s shared; for them it’s past, although neither, either, nor is any wiser to what was felt but their faceless shell, the stones crushed between them. Though as it was, our journey summed up… plum-
eting down toward earth, and then gazing at the beautiful blue ‘Pacific Ocean’ hue and ‘Great Di-
viding Range’ covered by lush green canopy rain-
forest behind me! A couple stepped side by each
and kissed the sky, in realizing a trip was to be had. Could there be ulterior motives or was a pound of asphalt which it was, awaited them on the other side.

End transmission.

WE SURVIVED!

By Mahdiyeh Ezzatikarami

She sighs and yells, “We are the last survivors of the Planet Earth. How do you feel about that?” She is shouting at the top of her lungs. She is not used to talking in a helmet and she is not sure whether the sound waves from her voice are really getting transferred into radio waves in order to get transmitted to the other four former inhabitants of Earth. She was a family
doctor in Canada for more than 20 years, and back home, she never imagined herself floating in space and screaming in a huge but tiny helmet. She hears some whispers but cannot concentrate on the words that are coming from the helmets of the other four. The voices look like a stifled weeping. She feels scared that they would never be able to communicate. She had taken it for granted that everybody knew English. Actually, people who were sending them to the moon offered all instructions in English; however, when people do not feel their weight and are floating in space, it is impossible to expect them to speak a language other than their mother tongue. Even she herself is not sure that she is speaking English.

When they were sent to the moon, it was 2022, but they are not sure how many years have passed since
they left their planet. These five semi-astronauts were the only people who had survived Covid-19 and the other natural disasters. Natural disasters that were the result of human greed. No one cared how many species of animals were going extinct, no one cared how many trees were cut every year, people just wanted to collect more and more money, enough money to get buried in a coffin full of $100 bills.

None of the five survivors knows who sent them to space. They cannot remember who made them climb into their spacesuits and wear their helmets.

Maybe, they were used as human samples by some aliens. Anyway, they were sent to the moon to continue their lives. They were told that they would not need any vaccines there, they would not even need to wear masks. Now that they are floating, they can see the earth getting torn into bits and pieces. It is not a sudden explosion. They see their planet falling out of breath every second. All of a sudden, she feels a spasm of fear in her spine and shouts, “I want to die in my country, gentlemen. I want to die where my kids are dying. I want to die proudly in my Canada.” The other four men nod their heads. Their emotions and tears are stuck in their helmets. In a second, they take each other’s hands and try to move toward Earth, each trying to recognize his or her country. In an unmeasurable time in space, the Canadian physician gets hit by millions of vaccines produced in Russia, the American chemistry teacher is hit by pieces of Gilgamesh clay tablets kept in the British Museum, the Iranian man gets struck by iron pieces of the Eifel Tower, the German philosopher gets hit by ISIS heavy weaponry, and the Jamaican man is thrown away by the liberty statue of New York. Planet Earth blows up and the five survivors not only do not succeed in getting buried in their countries, but also they do not even die in the arms of the monuments of the nations they are proud of. A hearty laughter in the Milky Way dissolves the broken helmets in its insatiable stomach.

MAZZOCCHIO
By Isaac Sherry

They eradicated CoV-2 in under a minute as an introductory throat clearing. The half dozen other, worse, respiratory syndromes still working up the courage to make the species jump were barely ever mentioned. Barely worth mentioning. They’d pinpointed and neutralized those too.

Magnetosphere tweaks were a literal footnote in the endless data dumps that followed their initial greeting and mission statement. Global temperature stabilization, water filtration, and targeted reforestation were among the more easily understood activities carried out by the swarms they’d dispersed across the planet.

First contact protocols prevented them from getting into any deep socio-political restructuring, but their assessment of our sentience allowed for a nudge in the right direction. They constructed massive housing complexes and suspended them above inhabited areas: latticed toruses forged of exocomposite, dripping with greenery and studded with solar rectenna.

They were relentlessly transparent, laying out the ecorepair processes in a succinct terabyte of diagrams and perfectly autotranslated walls of text. Combined with the ever accumulating raw telemetry they provided this was enough to satisfy any interested parties without encouraging attempts to replicate or interfere with their tech.

Not that there was any conceivable way to disrupt the trillions of nanites that had been hitched to the APG like spiderlings and sprinkled across the biosphere.

Any concerns over resource depletion or unilateral reallocation were preemptively addressed. A network of submicroscopic bucket brigades had been strung between earth and the various celestial bodies they’d tagged on their way in through Edgeworth-Kuiper. Raw terraforming ingredients were being hauled earthside at the direction of benevolent interlopers who by their own admission might not actually be alive anymore.

They had stated up front that they were talking at us by way of a Bracewell probe: acknowledged the possibility of having succumbed to a transient astronomical event at some point during the petasecs since launch.

The main socio-political nudge arrived in the form of a polyhedral cocoon that appeared around Bezos’s home in Medina. They assured us that it would be a one-off save a few conditions and the possibility of future reassessment. Protocols prohibited excessive social interference beyond the calculated limits et cetera but Zuckerberg didn’t believe it. They must have been aware of his livestreamed violation of community standard II.6 but their missives never broached the subject.

Their documentation of the Bezos tribunal was exhaustive, let alone the 62 hours of footage itself. They even explained how the designs adorning the structure
were fine-tuned to evoke disgust and horror. The automated systems seemed almost proud of the “bloody phlegm” colour scheme.

FARHI Holdings Corp sprung into action before the proceedings had even reached the halfway point. By then it was obvious what the possibly extinct aliens were getting at, generally. The hasty removal of name-plates missed the point a bit but was a half decent start

FOUND NOTES OF RAD HARKEY, DATED 2029
By Dieter Heinrich

Dear Reader,

It seems my friend Rad Harkey is a time traveller, and unbeknownst to me, left notes for a speech in my drawer in 2019 that he would not write for another 10 years. What a trickster.

You might be interested in it as a curiosity item. You don’t see this sort of thing often.

Dieter Heinrich

Greetings. I’m Rad Harkey, back with you again from the future. There’s lots going on there I could tell you about. I will say this: the youth of 2060 are plenty disappointed in their parents of 2029.

On the other hand, I’m happy to say, the Conspiring Utopia movement is continuing as a global phenomenon, melting all before it, so it seems. I thank you for the opportunity to tell you about it today. ...

... The utopia we were seeking was not in need of a revelation. All the ideas we needed had been thought of before. It was really a task of evaluation and assembly. We were looking for a new curation, a new construct, of what we already knew. The best of what we knew.

You see, the human psyche, like a diesel engine of old, likes to operate under load, if you can forgive my dirty imagery. The striving of Utopians, which is to say the load we apply to ourselves, is to become ever more impeccable ancestors in leaving, as a matter of respect, a world as healthy as we found it. Utopia therefore aims for the highest goal of net zero environmental impact to conserve all remaining vestiges of habitats and all remaining species world wide. Because the further the world is from achieving that, the shorter the human future.

Utopia is stridently inclusive, not just demographically, but internationally. Utopia must be species-wide, with species consciousness. Humanity will succeed together, or not at all, because we are joined at the lungs. That means we cannot simply wait for people to include themselves in their own good time. Utopia is expansionist. We seek to win over, and we measure success by our converts. We all have a human right to be the best persuaders we can be, and so we study the sciences of persuasion in our academies. That is a core strategy.

We can’t have a utopia for ourselves if we overlook a world of suffering and degradation beyond. The despair of others becomes our despair, because we are human and so we are humane, and because we know that the practical consequence of masses of people in perpetual deprivation is revolt.

We unapologetically seek to support people in liberating themselves from arbitrary treatment everywhere so that they may participate in the global project of achieving...

[The text ends here.]
YOU ARE THE UNIVERSE

By Akshayaa Selvaraj

Every journey has a destination to end on, and the process through the journey is always created inside our minds with a lot of hypothetical fears and hallucinations.

I took my first step, but the thought of what next inside a world of unknown realm creeped me, hindering the joy I experienced before. Beyond me lay a huge natural bridge, it could lead me to a darkened realm or a world of light. All I can see is the seducing stars beaming high up and spreading their stardust contagiously on me. I chose to move ahead, as I realised it’s not the destination, it’s the journey that will transform me to the infinite destination. The alchemist beamed again from the distant skies as I moved onto the Journey to the Infinite.

Everything that you start with love has the potential of changing impossible to possible, intangible to tangible and dreams to reality!! Love is the highest frequency one can vibrate with that attracts mammoth love in return.

My heartbeat jerked in excitement when I saw the beautiful sign of love.

The whole universe welcomes me with love to experience my dream. The love the universe shows me is a reflection of my love given to myself accepting my journey of life despite all darkness.

What is out there is what is inside you!

You could have dreamt it endless times and never followed it because of all the mental boundaries and the conditional way of living. Here I stand before you for which I was destined to live all these years. Those haunting dark pathways, endless falling down, unending disappointments, irresistible anger, clueless days, unanswered prayers were all the catalysts and evidence for this moment of truth. All the darkness, secret owl friend, butterflies, unicorn, variety of vegetation, flying dandelions, the raw earth, the shimmering stardust, the galaxy, the seducing moon and the whole universe was a manifestation of my inner soul and my whole journey ends here with the understanding of the only naked truth which is, YOU ARE THE UNIVERSE.
WASTELAND
By Chelsea Heathcote

bamboo cotton rounds make polka dot patterns on swampy lakes, with pretty pink flamingo straws, chalice of humanity as footprints tread lightly over fossils of giants, raw oil for a raw globe buffed, bare necessities sloughed off from east to west, clogged consumerism puffs up the chimney of stocks and tumbles onto assembly lines, supplying the demand of a million empty homes, frozen over as exhibits of times festooned with totes and compost gardens, ripe with two-headed lemons, yield of smog and acid rain, barbie doll precipitations fill oceans of fabric, dolce and garbage styled to the wilds of empty shells and six pack rings that marry capitalism, vows fossil fuels, go green means chopped lumber, a social construct of all take and no give as overpopulation satiates overpaid big-wigs and bald-headed freedom fighters wear blinkers as hung flags salute the glory, the pride, nurtured and teethered - home, wasteland

Finally, we reached the behemoth of a telescope. I practically shoved my friend’s face right into the lens. “Look!” I ordered.
“What… exactly am I looking at?”
“You mean you don’t… oh, never mind. You’re looking at system 86-B, right?”
“Yes.”
“Okay, so look at the third planet from the star!”
There was a moment of silence while he looked for the planet that I was talking about. “What about it?” He finally said, “It’s a dust ball. From the looks of it, it hasn’t even been geologically active for….”
“Now look at its moon.” I interrupted.
“If you say so.” He said with a sigh. I saw him see what I had brought him in to see, and he frowned.
“What is that?”
“Exactly! It looks like footprints!”
“I’ve never seen footprints in that shape. Maybe they just forgot to clean the lens again.”
“No, look to the left just a bit and zoom in.”
“Oh, okay!” He did as instructed.
“You see that weird lump?”
“Yeah… a different color grey than the rest of the moon. Brighter. Could be a lump of iron ore.”
“It isn’t, but that’s not the point. Move it ever so slightly upwards, and zoom in as far as you can.”
Once again, he did as instructed, then shot me a quizzical look.
“Is that…”
“It is: I think that’s a plaque!”
What I’d shown him was a small, rectangular shape, with what looked like a map at the top, with odd symbols and squiggly lines underneath it. I’d instantly recognized it for what it was. Words. Writing. A language.
Life.
My colleague turned to me, rubbing his eyes. “I don’t mean to…”
“Oh, don’t tell me you don’t believe it.”
He shrugged apologetically. “I’m sorry, I don’t! That planet’s been geologically dead for almost four billion years!”
“That may be. But,” My colleague groaned emphatically, “Its moon has no winds! So things there have been mostly the same for billions of years. Regardless of whether or not they’re still out there, this is proof that life was out there.”
Rubbing his forehead and yawning, my colleague gave me a condescending smirk. “I think you need more sleep.” He raised a hand to interrupt me before I
could interrupt him, “You and I both know that there are a million explanations for those things that don’t involve alien life.”

I felt myself deflate. Of course there were. Why hadn’t I seen that? What were the odds of a civilization getting to the point of space travel only to vanish soon after? What had happened to them?

“You’re right, of course. I’m sorry, you can go home.”

“Thank you.” With one more exaggerated sigh, he left me and the telescope alone.

Before leaving myself, I looked through the telescope one more time at the moon and its brown planet. Like my colleague had said, it had been geologically dead for at least four billion years. Once, it could have had thriving life; it was the perfect distance from its star for it, nestled in between a cold red planet and a hot yellow one, with signs that it may once have had volcanoes dotting its surface. Maybe it did support life at one time. Maybe billions of years ago, they’d looked through their own telescopes and determined that our own planet was too small or cold or barren to support life.

Whatever the case, something had happened four billion years ago to turn the planet into the dead brown sphere I saw now. Maybe a meteor had hit it, or a volcano had erupted and choked the world. It was no use dwelling on it; there were millions of unavoidable things that could decimate a planet in an instant. It was all random, all chance.

I packed up my things, and went home. After that, I rarely thought about the lump of iron ore on the dead planet’s moon.
CONTRIBUTORS

Gareth Boyle is a student studying English Literature, Creative Writing, and Film Studies at Western University.

kellie chouinard is a socially awkward writer who currently lives in London ON. Her chapbook, Dis-connect, is available through ZED Press.

Alexas D’Entremont-Smith is a first-year writer at Western. Her writings often aim to disturb the reader. Her poetry focuses on the complexity of human relationships with each other, especially through an LGBTQ+ lens, and human relationships with the world. Her prose and other writings illustrate the boundaries of human morality and what it means to push past them. She enjoys writing fantasy, horror, and Juvenalian satire.

Paula Ethans is a writer and poet living on Treaty 1 Territory. Her poems are published or forthcoming in Emerge Literary Journal, Ethel, Quarantine Review, nymphs publications, Bareknuckle Poet, and more. She most recently won the 2019 Trans Europe Expression Slam finals in Manchester, UK. You can follow her on Twitter @PaulaEthans.

Mahdiyeh Ezzatikarami is in the third year of her PhD studies in English Literature at Western University and she is currently working on the narratives of refugees and immigrants which do not fall into a specific category in CanLit.

S. Jane Fletcher studies Art History at Western University and writes stories about ghosts. She is probably drinking her third coffee of the day.

Kelly Ge is a fourth year health sciences student at Western University with a passion for environmental issues and creative writing.

Ryan Gibbs is an English professor who lives in London, Canada. His poems have appeared in Illumen, Blueline, Tower Poetry, The Windsor Review, and Tamaracks: Canadian Poetry for the 21st Century. His children’s poetry has been included in the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness.

Catty Greentree is a writer from Southern Ontario who believes it doesn’t count as hoarding if it’s books, rocks, or idea napkins. Her nonfiction work has appeared at Zeldadungeon.net and The Silo.

Andrees Gripp is a long-time London resident who now lives in Stratford, Ontario, with his wife and two cats.

Chelsea Heathcote is a fourth-year student at the University of Western in London, Ontario. She is currently majoring in Sociology and minoring in Creative Writing.

Peter Heft is a student pursuing his PhD in at the Centre for the Study for Theory and Criticism @ [University of Western Ontario]. His research primarily revolves around Deleuze & Guattari’s work on political philosophy and capitalist deterritorialization with a secondary emphasis on subjectification and the envisioning of possible futures following Mark Fisher’s work. His current course of study is on the hyperstitional relationship between fictions and futures with accelerationism as the driving motor.

Dieter Heinrich is a getting-up-there bearded guy journalism graduate of the 70s who was for many years a tout for United Nations reform. He is a reverential Earthphilitic atheist who has thought a lot about utopias, large and small. His mental notebook contains items like a world union of the democratic countries as a foundation for world peace, a new kind of urban form that puts every inhabitant next to a park and a high speed transit line, and an invention for a putatively world-changing clothes cabinet that solves the problem of what to do about that piled-over chair in the bedroom. He has been writing unpublished poetry on and off for most of his life, and is currently thinking a lot about the meaning of the double slit quantum eraser experiment. He now lives in Owen Sound, which he declares to be the nearest thing to Utopia within driving distance of Toronto.

Abbey Horner enjoyed contributing to the Wordsfest Zine.

Sameer Z. Hussain enjoyed contributing to the Wordsfest Zine.

Lisa Kovac has published fiction and poetry in Enchanted Conversation, Imprints, the 2018 issue of the Wordsfest Zine, and Connecting Writing Centers Across Borders; she is working on a collection of revisionist fairy tales.

Marlene Laplante enjoyed contributing to the Wordsfest Zine.

Samsara Leung is a first-year university student, and this is her first published piece of fiction. She likes cats, fantasy and reading, and she dislikes stupid people. This is unfortunate as she sometimes does stupid things, but she is trying her best.

Arivukkarasi Manivannan is a final year architec-
ture graduate from SAP, Anna University. **Julian Matthews** is a former journalist and trainer finding new ways to express himself through poetry, fiction and art. He is based in Malaysia and can be contacted via Instagram at @trinetizen.

**Rimaz Nazeer** is an Architect by profession. passionate about art, history, speculative design, Humanities & the future. They are from the City of Madras (Chennai), India

**Arunkumar Periyasamy** enjoyed contributing to the Wordsfest Zine.

**Daniel Robinson** was born and raised in London, Ontario, and is now attending Western University. He loves historical fiction, Hercule Poirot Mysteries, and British Panel Shows.

**Marlyne Scott** is a new Canadian, having migrated from Jamaica to Canada in 2013. She lives and works in London, Ontario. Marlyne’s love of poetry started over 30 years ago, when in addition to writing letters to the editors of local newspapers, she decided to address topical issues through poetry. After over 10 years of inactivity, Marlyne resumed her creative writings during the recent stay-at-home - COVID-19 - period. One such writing is “Da Woman Yah!” which was submitted to Wordsfest Zine. While most of her poems are cultural, and are written in Jamaican dialect, she welcomes the opportunity to share these.

**Paddy Scott** has published a chapbook (Fatal Error) with Devilhouse Press, and his first novel (The Union of Smokers) came out this March with Invisible Publishing.

**Akshayaa Selvaraj** enjoyed contributing to the Wordsfest Zine.

**Thirupurasundari Sevvel** is an Architect and Urban Planner trained in India, UK and France. She runs ‘Studio Conclave,’ an architectural consultancy and ‘Nam Veedu Nam Oor Nam Kadhai,’ an initiative that stems from her passion for storytelling, heritage, history and education. For her platform Thirupurasundari curates stories, exhibitions, workshops on social issues, heritage, household heritage, personal/ social history etc and uses her expertise as a material restorer and conservationist to document traditional techniques and practices of design. This feeds into her consultancy projects for NGO’s, schools and colleges which frequently focus on the planning and building of inclusive, accessible and safe spaces in the city for all.

**Nirossha Shanmugam** enjoyed contributing to the Wordsfest Zine.

**Pauline Shen** recommends fresh air and plenty of sunshine. Water your human thrice daily. Use the good stuff—always. Works and studies at Western University.

**Isaac Sherry** is a London-based entity.

**Richard-Yves Sitoski** is a songwriter, performance poet, and the 2019-2021 Poet Laureate of Owen Sound, Ontario, Canada. He is also the Interim Artistic Director of the 2022 Words Aloud festival. He has released a spoken word CD, *Word Salad*, and two books of verse with the Ginger Press, *brownfields* and *Downmarket Oldies FM Station Blues*. His poems have appeared in several journals, including *The Maynard, Barren Magazine*, in the League of Canadian Poets’ *Poetry Pause*, and as part of Brick Books’ Poetry Pause, and as part of Brick Books’ Brickyard spoken word video series.

**Rebecca St. Pierre** is a freelance writer and photographer. Her writing has appeared in *Understorey Magazine, eatdrink Magazine*, and the *Western Alumni Gazette*. You will find her photography at Shop Museum London and Westland Gallery’s Square Foot Show 2020.

**Travis Thompson** is a resident of London for just over four years, and recovering from moving every now and again. He once made a documentary about social anxiety. Another short narrative is currently in Pre-production. For 8 hours of any given day the bills are paid by the graveyard shift. Travis loves to read, walk & daydreaming. Without his coffee there’s not much point. He’s a classical music enthusiast and all jazzy very rarely.

**Jennifer Wenn** is a trans-identified writer and speaker from London, Ontario. Her first poetry chapbook, *A Song of Milestones*, has been published by Harmonia Press (an imprint of Beliveau Books). She has also written *From Adversity to Accomplishment, a family and social history*; and published poetry in *Beliveau Review, The Ekphrastic Review, Open Minds Quarterly, Tuck Magazine, Synaeresis, Big Pond Rumours, the League of Canadian Poets Fresh Voices, Wordsfestival*, and the anthology *Things That Matter*. She is also the proud parent of two adult children with a day job as a systems analyst. Visit her website at [https://jenniferwenn-poet.wixsite.com/home](https://jenniferwenn-poet.wixsite.com/home)

**Courtney WZ** is Western University’s Student Writer-in-Residence. She is also the Editor-in-Chief of the Arts and Humanities Students’ Council publications.
Semicolon, Symposium and Premier. Her thoughts can be found on Twitter @courtneyneue.
“overwhelmed by sourdough starters
wooden spoons
what temperature turns water into wine & air into bread”

— Kellie Chouinard, breathless but hopeful

Cover artwork: Ben O’Neil