



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 was to capture the energy, dynamism, and diversity of Words by putting together a collection of reactions and responses to the festival while it was happening. Our call was simple: Visit the Festival. Write About It. Get Published. We asked festival goers and our esteemed writers to send us poems, twitterverse, creative non-fiction, fiction, and sketches. These are not works “recollected in tranquility” — indeed, the ink may still be drying as you read this preface.

So how did we pull this off? With a team of tireless editors and producers working around the clock to edit, compile, design and, finally, print the zine within 24 hours of receiving the final submissions. Of course, none of this would have been possible without the participation of the public: this is London’s WordsFest; this is London’s *WordsFestZine*.

We have divided the *WordsFestZine* into 4 sections: “Words of Celebration,” “Words of Reaction,” “Words Aloud,” and “Words Unbound.” The “Words of Celebration” section contains pieces celebrating the festival. “Words of Reaction” contains poems responding to the festival and the events and authors at it. The “Words Aloud” contains poems read at the open mic night. And the “Words Unbound” section contains the heterogeneous oddments and tidbits that collect around a major literary event.

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520 Princess Ave.

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This publication is a partnership
between Insomniac Press,
Poetry London and WordsFest.

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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; Poetry London for staffing the festival Zine table; and the many energetic and dedicated *WordsFestZine* volunteers.

We would also like to thank Jessica Bugorski, Chair of the School of Language and Liberal Studies at Fanshawe College, and the print shop at Fanshawe College. Jessica Bugorski gave her enthusiastic support to the *WordsFestZine*, and the print shop printed the *WordsFestZine*.

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: Jason McLean



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WORDS OF CELEBRATION

COMMUNITY ENGAGED LEARNING

by Penn Kemp

Students from The Local make for a delightful day at Souwesto Expo: wo/manning book tables galore:

Public Humanities in action! When town meets gown, expect fusion, confusion, fun and enthusiasm.

Here's to Insomniac Press for living true to its name and calling, in creating wordfestzine. Bells on, books out!

WORD WORSHIPPERS

by Rebecca St. Pierre

Chilly fall air swept those smitten with the written word, past candy-coloured metal trees and a silver-tusked rhino, into a haven of creativity where words that were magically assembled and reassembled and fondly bonded to wooden tablets blushed with the monumental onslaught of praise.

Pews of worshippers raised hands to exalt those who dared to tame the nebulous into concrete tales. Timid souls gathered strength amongst the united. Overzealous internal critics cowered in fear.

Mighty Word Gatherers inscribed fresh print amongst their aged script to the delight of the followers who tucked the thousands upon thousands of carefully crafted words close to their chest, as with heads bowed they stepped into the chilly fall air to be swept once again past a silver-tusked rhino and candy-coloured metal trees.

In the dead of night, with stealthy delight, Word Worshippers reveled as they seized one precious hour from the spring's daylight savings to extend the WordsFest celebrations.

ORIGINAL WORDS

by Marlene Laplante

“Keep a notebook. Travel with it, eat with it, sleep with it.

Slap into it every stray thought that flutters up into your brain.

Cheap paper is less perishable than gray matter, and lead pencil markings endure longer than memory.”

—Jack London

There is feeling in words.

I trace their letters to feel the emotion.

Original words—words of the past—are more valuable than treasure.

They hold time.

They give reason, understanding, validation, comfort.

The original words of poetry wake passion, feed our senses, to see, to hear, to taste, to touch, and bring back the beauty of a memory.

Original words are words you remember.

Written words preserve a place in time, a bundle of love letters, a note of sympathy, a letter from a fallen soldier.

I held it in my hand, written two weeks before he died,

“

rain beats in time to keys under finger pads

”

— *Erin Anderson*

the letter from my uncle to my mother in
1944.
It was an indescribable moment filled with
emotion.

There really are no life records without words.
Words carry our story through time.
History holds on to them.

STUDENT EDITOR
by Shannon Scott

Empty coffee cups litter the boardroom table
and
the sound of tapping keyboards fills the room.
As the lights over the art installation flicker,
I realize how lovely it is to edit poetry.

There is a sense of comfort
in reading over another person's work,
concentrating deeply and
thinking critically.

It's almost as if you can hear our minds work-
ing:
“Where should I put this semicolon?”
“Should this line be capitalized?”
“I love the phrasing of this line.”

To talk about poems,
to be surrounded by writers,
to have your thoughts consumed by words;
it feels so right,
so write.

HIGHLIGHT REEL
by Erin Anderson

cold cylinder
fog climbs above lights
flicker
rain beats in time
to keys
under finger pads
flicker
precarious decision-making
edit emotions
to fit into a box
or onto a page
flicker
energy arc
connecting minds unique
as whirls and swirls
on those pads
fabric of community
flicker

“

Blurry words
fill the creased palm of my hand.”

— *Christine JC Ellwood*

THOUGHTS TO WORDS

by Christine JC Ellwood

Flowing ink from a long silver pen:

Inked letters
 melt across a lined notebook.
 Jittery sounds
 create words on a screen.
 Blurry words
 fill the creased palm of my hand.
 Pencilled
 onto a restaurant napkin.

Thoughts.

Words.

Lines.

Print.

Share.

Read words spark thoughts.

POETRY IS HARD, GODDAMMIT

by Lyss

Sitting here fishing with nothing to write.

Hoping.

Waiting.

Ideas,

please bite.

WORDS DANGLE IN BLUE VELOUR

by Marta and Emma Croll-Baehre

droop down from semi-cylinders
 no genocide here (in america, but not really)
 absences stagger into purple faux-fur
 tickets to parch tickets to remember uterine
 deserts of consumed milk teat
 we gurgle sad sounds in a dental white
 auditorium slippy discs from kinky tips
 octopus heels and wet wet teeth

if you wear the W you can't be in
 doppel dear hot consonants drip
 upward to black sticks of verbiage
 rabbit-like cross-sections make supple vowels
 sit cross-legged in suburbs
 far into this rhino shell I will eat zucchini
 cheese watch cream blobs stutter
 pinch my cheeks and finger paper

THE COMMA

by Evan Suntres

A brief pause for breath in the current
 Allows the stream of symbols to flow;
 For without this dam the damage done
 Will prove to destroy the prose.

“ Ideas,
please bite.”
— Lyss

In its absence lines run long
Resulting in ceaseless continuation.
The comma serves to correct this conflict
By providing precise punctuation.

Clauses cannot connect without break --
Adverbs and adjectives and all the rest.
As words walk and the comma confidently
Runs along the baseline of the text.

Though up to now it's nowhere to be found;
Is it really so essential?
Yes, or else the rain of words
Will be tiresome, and torrential.

LOSS FOR WORDS

by Lyss

I count four women of colour in a room of
some-hundred Including myself

For the first time in my writing career I am re-
minded of my race Involuntarily

I shift uncomfortably in my seat Squirming in
my own skin Wondering if the woman
With the diamond watch behind me Can see
me trying to shed
This armour

This shell
Once felt like home
And now I am a shy turtle wearing snake's
skin

Surrounded by creatives By artists starving to
create To purge
Was once so calming

Now I think they watch me Bloat
Binge
Maybe I'm doing this all wrong
Perhaps I am not "write" enough for them Per-
haps I'm just not "write"

These words don't feel like magic anymore
These words
Feel like a dark curse I leave early

WORDS

by Jennifer Wenn

Mysterious, mystical, and yet material:
Words, language, source of untold power,
Power to bridge, power to divide,
Power to bind, power to sever,
Power to heal, power to wound;
Magnificent gift, awesome responsibility.

II
 Forcing their way to the surface
 From depths unknown,
 Modulated by my spirit,
 Hesitatingly, delayed,
 And yet inevitable,
 Finally moulding into my own unique voice.

STRONG LANGUAGE

by Amelia Goetz

Pedal and burn
 under four layers
 of fallen
 oak leaves.

I arrive with thoughts, at least.
 Slick, slimy, and wet; can't grip
 the soaped-up ground
 under my tire and lining my skull.

Long teeth
 distracted by what I mean.
 Never malicious,
 too weak to bite down hard.

Imagine on the page—
 the bite.

FERVENT

by Linda Lucas

A writers' festival is one in which
 every pen tilts crazily
 across a page, a notebook, a journal—
 or two thumbs piston
 furiously on a touch screen—
 but no one is taking notes.

Night minds are on the loose
 and the administrivia police are on lockdown.

We are feeding.

A tangible energy sparks about the room,
 not vampiric, exactly,
 but charged with the same frantic hunger
 and fastidious need to find the exact
 wriggling specimens required for sustenance.
 We convince them to give up
 their lifeblood and be led, willingly,
 onto the sacrificial page.

WORDS OF REACTION

[7:59]

by Chelsea Heathcote

My reflection is the spitting image of me
 tonight, and yet so much more than I could
 ever be. Amidst the bitter stench of alcohol
 and half-hearted banter, she strolls in, adorned
 in better reds, softer blues, and bolder blacks. I
 consider if I know her well enough to wave,
 think better of it, and duck my head down
 when she walks past. What will people say
 when they see us? How will I explain our-
 selves? Two halves of a whole, but they do not
 match. I'll say, "Perhaps it's her who doesn't
 belong here tonight, looking far too glamorous
 to the point she looks shabby, don't you
 think?"

"Such a vulgar vermillion, have you ever
 seen a sapphire more snobbish? And the
 black—bold is the new boring."

My head inflates, fills up the room until I
 tumble over beneath the weight of the insecur-

“
**At the grocery store, the lady in the produce aisle
 gives me a sample of legacy.** ”
 — *Laura Brooks*

rities it holds: Will I ever be enough? She is me, but can I ever be her?

The night draws to a close and I walk away from the night, along with the rest of the crowd. When I pass her, she ducks her head down; she doesn't recognize me either. Suddenly, the wine smells a little sweeter, the chatter seems a little more sincere, and my own colours a little brighter.

Whether I am, or we are, enough I don't know the answer. And despite that twinkle in her eye that I wish I had too, I believe she doesn't either.

WRITE WHAT YOU KNOW

by Laura Brooks

I tighten the scarf around my neck as the wind whispers to me it's autumn. When I throw the ends over my shoulder, a word escapes through the tassels and flutters away in the breeze. The only thing I'm able to catch is a glimpse at paramour before it flutters onto the windshield of the bus I just missed.

At the grocery store, the lady in the produce aisle gives me a sample of legacy. I chew the morsel slowly, imagining the meal I can make out of it.

When I sit down to write, I stare into my steeping tea, half expecting words to float to the

surface so I can taste them infused with hints of apple and cinnamon. I begin to twirl my pencil slowly and soon unobtainable drops heavily from the eraser end, falling into the tea and sinking slowly to the bottom. When I take a break for dinner, all there is on my page is a tea stain.

I open my cupboard when washing the dishes and anticipate an avalanche of Tupperware, but no words can be found among the mess.

SOFA

by David Barrick

Sit around long enough
 repeating a word, any word,
 and it starts sounding funny —
udder, apocalypse, waddle,
bludgeon, evisceration, inanition,
backpfeifengesicht —
 soon it's all just syllables
 that crack you up.

One word that never quite works is sofa.
 Say it 'til your jaw's sore: still
 sounds like it's asking a question,
 then sighing. Like it disapproves
 of you. Like it's waiting
 for you to take the hint
 and get up already.

“
Today ... was ordinary people sharing and supporting each other through telling stories.
 ”
 — *Elaine Ballantyne*

ONLY WORDS ON A PAGE

by Mary-lyn Hopper

Only words on a page,
 yet—intricately woven—they
 become a transcendent world,
 giving us cause to contemplate the forces
 which guide the actions and decisions
 of those who momentarily inhabit our
 thoughts and passions.
 How can it be that we are saddened to leave
 those worlds behind?
 Worlds that only exist
 on a page.

WORDS

by Danielle Bryl-Dam

A slip of the tongue
 like a mouth with a flurry of bees
 once opened, teeth swabbed with fuzzy
 black bodies
 I vomit, they target
 a hundred “I’m sorrys”
 dripping with cream and honey
 liqueurs that cannot extinguish

(but that hasn’t stopped us from trying)

CONNECTING WITH PEOPLE

by Elaine Ballantyne

I love connecting with people. Today was one of those days. I attended Words to help writer Elaine Cougler at her table. It was great to have conversations with so many people who are passionate and enthused over words!

I have always loved the quote by Will Durant that says, “Civilization is a stream with banks. The stream is sometimes filled with blood from people killing, stealing, shouting and doing things historians usually record; while on the banks, unnoticed, people build homes, make love, raise children, sing songs, write poetry and even whittle statues. The story of civilization is the story of what happened on the banks.”

Today felt like being on one of those banks. It was ordinary people sharing and supporting each other through telling stories. By using and delighting in words, we writers explore the quest of understanding the human experience. The words we use and carefully choose give us comfort and meaning.

“

words between covers hover in the vibe

— *Laura Whyte*

”

BOOK EXPO

by Laura Whyte

The Souwesto Book Expo is a hum with talk. Not the sound of serious late-night coffee talk or the raucous shouts in a bar when the home team scores. Not the drone of an under-her-breath reader determined to finish the page, her thoughts in the real world—her new lover, her credit card balance, dinner. The hum in the gallery is of hellos, introductions, shared moments, and the buzz of being in a space where design and words come together, where words between covers hover in the vibe.

CRAWL OUT OF BED

by Ivy Minjung Koo

November 4th, 2017;
alarm rang at 1PM.

Souwesto Book Expo;
missed workshop events.

Uber;
cost 20 dollars.

Museum London;
unfamiliar faces.

WordsFestZine volunteering;
a girl waves at me.

Sigh of relief.

WORDS ALOUD

A PAPER DISGUISE

by Leah Kuiack

I'm writing this poem in hopes that someone
is
Unfazed by eloquent metaphors and imagery.
I need someone to grab hold of my collar-
bones

When I say, "I'm fine," and shake
Until I regain consciousness and
Vomit the truth all down my front.

My depression is exhausted by sycophants,
Impressed by my ability to put
Suicidal thoughts down on paper
And add a simile or two.
When a high school teacher applauded
My "self-deprecating tone,"
I smiled and accepted the easiest 'A'
I would ever receive.

Tell me I'm captivating. Tell me I fascinate.
Tell me I loathe myself more impressively

“ I love love it and I love love them
I hope you like this love, Love ”
— *Becca Serena*

Than anyone you've ever met.
I'll tell you that I'm embarrassed by your
Overzealous attempts to make me blush.
I'll tell you that I'm not listening anyways
And that I prefer these words
[these ones right here]
Over any that have ever tumbled from
Your impure intentions.
My motives are not void of sin either,
But they don't have to be
Because they're mine.

I never minded the rain, but even less so
lately.
It blisters in the best way possible.
When it chokes me, I breathe better.
I've only ever succeeded under the pressure of
Something larger than myself.
I got caught in a storm today and life went on

YOU AUTO-COMPLETE ME

by Becca Serena

I'm trying to get a good time
to be a good man and I think
I have a good time to do with it
All I want to do is so I can do it better
I love love it and I love love them
I hope you like this love, Love
It so so cute and I mean it to you

You love me like I miss him
and you so cute and cute so cute

I love love you, so much harder to be happy
and I love you—so much harder to love
love you—so much harder to make you happy
I miss your smile I miss him too You can
make it
through the same thing again to my heart
and you will be my life
Love you so much harder love love it
I mean you love me love love you
So much harder to make you feel
like you are so happy and happy with your life
You will be my life love

I hope so much better hope you're so happy
Thank him love—so much harder to love
love you. So much harder to love
love it when you're submissive with your
heart

I miss your amazing love
He never knew what it means for your life
and love you so much harder

DE IUSTITIA

by Tyler Miller

I beat my dog for peeing on the rug.
He hasn't stopped.

“
**How easily we forget about the little things that
make our existence possible.**
— *Clinton Ruttan*”

He just pees at the sight of me.
I whipped my horse for disobedience.
He didn't learn to obey.
He just rears at the sight of my whip.
I scolded a man for being wrong.
He's not any better.
So I had him put in chains and locked up
in a correctional facility.
He's not correct.
He just hates me now.
I don't do wrong willingly.
I just make the world
in my own image.

DE CONDITIONIBUS PACIS

by Tyler Miller

I must not think ill,
there's no hope in that.
Revenge accepts evil
and gives it primacy.

Forgiveness is hope.
My wound is still there,
but it will get better.
It must
or what's the point?

No one can beat
belief from my body.

Why should I think
I can beat it out
from theirs?

I must not think ill,
or I've consigned
myself to war,
where evil thoughts
go to flourish.

No idea died
on a battlefield
anyway.

My hate dies
in your humanity.
I'll offer them mine
and kill them with
kindness.

HOT CHOCOLATE GHOST

by Clinton Ruttan

It has that lost at sea taste, that salty finish to a
"used to be sweet" appeal. A flavour that inspires
lonely dreams on lazy Sunday mornings spent
better with others. The scent of brine and sugar
candies haunts my brain as I walk down regular
streets with regular people. No more hot choco-
late ghosts to remind me of the inevitable loss of

“

Typically, my days are gray,
or different shades of beige.

— *Michael Couchie*

”

light that comes before entropy's greatest tune, hummed lightly by those who pass by without realizing the world has yet to start shrinking. Mortal clay is wetted for the mould, made as fresh as possible to refrain from cracking under the pressures of a society obsessed with outward appearances and social media surrogates. Half-measures only cover half the canvas with half the paints that won't stick with half the force of a halfway home's rejected dreamer. Spinning round and round in this samsara existence, an endless loop of causality and cause/effect bullshit. Twisted tree lines on a lacklustre horizon without two nickels to rub together for fear of disrupting magnetic fields and chakra sensors. Where did the good get going? When did all of the above become so bloody mundane that even the most curious individual soon is left sated with the knowledge that everything changes and yet nothing is different. When did we realize that our childhoods were dead and gone no matter how nostalgic we force ourselves to feel? We are not all special snowflakes; we cannot all be rock stars, movie stars, painters, poets, and playwrights... someone has to shovel the shit, someone has to sell you your ticket, someone has to cook the meals and scrub the dishes, someone has to do the mundane or else trash fills the streets and sewers overflow. How easily we forget about the little things that make our existence possible. And comfortable.

BLUE

by Michael Couchie

Typically, my days are gray,
or different shades of beige.

At times, I feel my days
have always been this way,
and that's the way they'll always stay.

Then there are those other days
— those rare and precious few —
filled with green and gold,
and clearest ocean blue.

NIGHT

by Naomi Marcus

Night has fallen,
Darkness crept.
Silence—the moonlit blanket kept.
There seems a difference from night to day,
But they're only lit up in a different way.
In the sky now it's true,
Where once was sun
There now is moon,
And when it's there, always nigh,
The little lanterns of the sky.
And too,
In this starlit time of night,

“

Silence—the moonlit blanket kept.

— Naomi Marcus

”

Flying fast, behold more lights.
Bright and blinking in the sky
A group of nightlights—
Fireflies.
Though as quick as they come
They now are gone,
Their light unseen with the break of dawn.
Taking their cue,
Away stars fly
Until next night, concealed only to the eye.
In the sky, now it's true,
There now is sun
Where once was moon.
Yes, there's a difference from night to day.
They're both lit up in their own way.

FLOWORDS

by Naomi Marcus

Words like I'm
Sorry
Are just another way of saying
I love
You
Are like a star, shining
The way
To do
This
Is funny,
Strange not

Ha-ha,
We're laughing with you, not at
You
Are beautiful
Inside and
Outside
It is spring

And with spring
Comes a new beginning,
A new light,
And new reason to live life
To the fullest
Where there's a way there's a
Will
You help me with
This
Makes no
Sense
Of direction is important when you're
Trying to find your way back
To me
This is just
Perfect
Is only what you want it
To be
Or not to be
That is
The question
I'm asking is:

Did you know,
That I did, and I do, and I will,
Love you forever?

UGLY

by Vivianne Quang

Hi, my name is Vivianne
And I'm ugly

Now before you deny that for me
Let me explain to you how society defines
beauty

To be beautiful is to have your torso mirror an
hourglass

And your thighs, smooth and curvy

For them to pass

Well, I'm definitely curvy

But curving in the wrong direction

And in the wrong places

Wrong, as if there's a right way for bodies to
be shaped

Wrong, as if I'm a broken body needing to be
fixed and taped

To be beautiful is to have the hair on your
head lush, luminous, and lustrous

And to have the hair on the rest of your body
gone

As if the little black hairs on my arms are a big
secret, needing to be hidden from the world

To be beautiful is to have your nose straight
and narrow

But not too narrow

And your eyes wide

But not too wide

And your lips full

But not too full

To be beautiful is to wear expensive clothing
that is elegant and stylish

Clothing that reveals your body

But not too much

Because then you'll be "asking for it"

And it doesn't matter if the cloth wraps

around your body a little too tight

And it doesn't matter if the price is unreason-
ably high, making it not feel right

It's not about what you feel

It's about what men feel when they see you

Perhaps you're thinking, "Well, if you're so
discontent, just ignore the standards"

You see, I would love to

But I look up and I see billboards plastered
with pretty, voluptuous women in expen-
sive clothing

I look in front of me and I see television
shows plastered with pretty, voluptuous
women in expensive clothing

I look down and I see magazines plastered
with pretty, voluptuous women in expen-
sive clothing

All of them are screaming

"Look, look! This should be you!"

Well, no

That can't be

Because I am me

And this is my body

I live in a society where unrealistic expecta-
tions define beauty

Men need to have big, muscular bodies

Women need to have curvy, smooth bodies

People who don't fit into the binary need to
just not exist

Because that's too confusing, am I right?

“

I feel like I'm putting blank puzzle pieces together

— *Nic Bylsma*

”

I'm a bird in a cage plastered with rules to
dress, rules to act, rules to live
As if my life is comparable to a kitchen appli-
cance that comes with a manual script
As if the terms and conditions of my body
were already encrypted

To all that I say
Hi, my name is Vivianne
And I'm ugly

WORDS UNBOUND

UNTITLED

by Nic Bylsma

To the lady that adopted me at the toddler age
I don't know how to feel so I got these
words on the page
People telling me Wright Nic write everyone
expresses pain in their own way
But my head's been spinning like a turbine all
day!
Sometimes I wish I could dump my thoughts
like a tea poured but I'm always hooked up
everywhere I go like an extension cord
Because you see my mom's got cancer I'm
just here looking for answers
But the chemo is starting to take her hair
She's like the nicest lady out there

Wow this just ain't fair
She always told me to stay on my feet 'til my
goals were complete
When I was alone, placed a hand on my shoul-
der now I just want to be there for you pay-
ing it forward
I feel like I'm putting blank puzzle pieces to-
gether and all I want to do is help my mother
and be there for my sister and brother
And help all of you
Like look to the guy next to you
Lots of you gonna get cancer
Like what the fuck we supposed to do
I wish I could fix this like my shoe add some
gorilla glue, but reality check cancer is the
real killer here do I really gotta go door-to-
door for the cure, Nickeli
In time of pain they don't know how much
time my mom has left

THE ROOM

by Kaela Morin

A half-tube, swaddled
in tawny light.
Focus the eye.
At eye level,
the Soup Can, the Cheese Wheel,
the Peacock, framed
beside a small white card.

“

The Room is a heart,
is a cup.
— *Kaela Morin*

”

Downtown gathered
around black tables,
tables covered in silk,
curling paper shadows,
bright silvery chips cast
by glass, watches, rings
swallowing thin-skinned fingers.
A gold dagger cuts
a grey man's tie in half;
glistening, a woman's fur
stole.

The foam from my beer
smears the inside of the glass
in my hand. The Room rumbles,
throaty—the appetite whets
in this climate—
mouth and mind split
open, catching, holding.

The Room is a heart,
is a cup.

Five empty stools
wait.

THE BABY (THE WRITER)

by Sydney Brooman

ripped wrapper lips give you
paper cuts

choosing the groves of
teeth means choking on
crumpled prescription receipts
and pocket paper feels
softer
cause it's been there
so long—

floss with fake-ass
frat boy
business cards

they wash out the
words that are not

yes

words sit stoic and spill
from the stick of rotting rose stems
killed
by cold drafts

stomachs sick
with plot

“Long way from the days as a slave.
Now I'm paving the road to a master's degree;
I mastered my own destiny.”

— *Mandela Massina*

stuff sleep number mattresses
with napkin serenades

immortalize it
all.

DARK IS NOT EVIL
By Mandela Massina

Son of a skin tone most hated,
thankful to know hatred but separate it
from what is love-related.

Long way from the days as a slave.
Now I'm paving the road to a master's degree;
I mastered my own destiny.

Rejected the image they project on me.
The picture of a boy from the projects,
not an academic prospect.

Young, black, and gifted.
Not what the KKK wanted for Christmas,
but exactly what Malcolm X wanted to witness.

Copied and traced, but would never trade
placement.

Appropriation confused for adoration.
The pain of a nation used as inspiration.

REFUGEE HAIKU
by Ola Nowosad

longing for release,
refugees in crowded tents
recite old poems

as always, not far,
ignorant armies still clash,
wordless bullets fly

I forage for food:
language is my sustenance,
tongue untied by words

poems are wagons
pulling me from world's madness
to green grass of youth

poems are my kites
flying me, war-wearied, up
through skies, dark or bright

SLEEP//WAKE

By: Josh Thompson-Persaud

I keep my phone on do-not-disturb these days because my head is so loud, full of crowds cheering my demise at the hands of a beast so twisted it would make a corkscrew look straight.

To date, I haven't picked up a single call for help, and I feel numb like a drumbeat that kept going after the song finished. I feel dumb for holding on to something said three years ago on a park bench where the stench of dead leaves was just starting to rise, and the trenches we dug were never deep enough in our eyes.

I forgot how to remember to smile and laugh and cheer, and I fear I'll never taste ice cream the same way again, twisting around a cone, trying get at the inside before it melts.

But life isn't fair—that's what my mother told me, and I'm tired of excuses for an abusive mind that sentences me to life in prison and holds a gun to my head asking if this is triggering. I'm still figuring out how to survive mental illness, and the truth is an icepick lobotomy doesn't sound so bad. Maybe that's a tad overdramatic, but when words are not enough, what am I left with?

Hope.

Some days that's 4 hours of sleep, leaving me wired into the word, tired, like jumper cables into a car, trying to restart, restart, restart. Some days it's one more break—one more break will get me through. Some days it's staring at the back of my eyelids till the colours dance, entrancing no one but myself. And some days—it's you. It's knowing there are people out there surviving this war-torn desert, one day at a time, fighting ghosts from the

past more violent than the living. Marching through sandstorms of time, barely clinging to belief that one day it will be better. Maybe not today. Maybe not tomorrow. But one day.

I live for that day. I live for the possibility that I will one day turn my do-not-disturb off and not be disturbed by the jingle of my cell phone. And maybe then the crowds won't be so loud, the beast a little less twisted. And if not, at least I'll know I persisted.

ANTI-APOCALYPSE

by Tom Cull

no nuclear winter
no zombie apocalypse
no ice age
no superbug
no second coming
no robot revolution
no alien invasion

a pear tree
buckthorn
plastic bags
a river
turtles

BIOS:

Erin Anderson is a second-year English and Creative Writing student at Western.

Elaine Ballantyne attended WordsFest.

David Barrick writes poetry, fiction, and songs in London, Ontario. Thanks to Steven Heighton for the word *backpfeifengesicht*.

Laura Brooks is a fourth-year student studying at Western University.

Sydney Brooman is Western University's Student Writer-in-Residence and an avid lover of bios.

Danielle Bryl-Dam is a second-year Western University student studying English and Creative Writing. She enjoys a good dark roast, 1920s typewriters, and long bus rides filled with good music.

Nic Bylsma contributed to the WordsFestZine.

Michael Couchie attended WordsFest.

Marta and Emma Croll-Baehre are twin opossums from the West Coast of Newfoundland. (Who knows how they got there in the first place?) Now, in a warmer climate, their fur moults to form letters that they scarp and somersault into marsupial meaning. They are hooking their tails into Souwesto land. Londoners ask: What fleas will they pass on to the citizens?

Tom Cull is the Poet Laureate for the city of London, Ontario.

Christine JC Ellwood has been a photographer and digital artist in both British Columbia and Ontario for 15 years. She holds a Bachelor of Arts degree and is currently writing a novel while studying creative writing and design.

Amelia Goetz is a fourth-year Western University student with clear eyes and a full

heart.

Chelsea Heathcote is an Arts & Humanities student at Western University trying to write.

Mary-lyn Hopper has been an avid reader for as long as she can remember. As a parent and teacher, she delights in discovering and sharing books with children. She appreciates the insights into the writing process provided by the authors showcased at WordsFest.

Penn Kemp's new book of poetry, *Local Heroes*, will be published by Insomniac Press in spring, 2018. Her next performance will be in Couplets #15 with Marta Croll-Baehre.

Ivy Minjung Koo attended WordsFest.

Leah Kuiack, a London native, is currently completing her Honors Specialization in Creative Writing and English at Western University.

Marlene Laplante has been writing poetry for about ten years.

Linda Lucas is a teacher of French at Clarke Road Secondary School and a part-time singer-songwriter who is currently revising her first novel, *The Undertaker's Wife*. She was accidentally born in France but has lived in British Columbia and Alberta. She has spent most of her life in Southwestern Ontario, particularly London.

Lyss loves pho and thinks that the world is a simulation.

C.M.M. is a poetry representative for her hometown, the youngest to compete in the Canadian Festival of Spoken Word, and a lover of literature. Obviously. She hopes to publish novels one day.

Naomi Marcus is an eleven-year old girl who has been making rhymes since she was

two.

Mandala Massina is a second-year student at Western.

Tyler Miller attended WordsFest.

Kaela Morin is a fourth-year student in the Honours Specialization in English Language and Literature program at Western University.

Ola Nowosad attended WordsFest.

Vivianne Quang is a first year nursing student at Western University. They hope to use their words to resonate within the hearts of others.

Clinton Ruttan hates most people. Animals and plants are chill. I speak too loudly. I get manic pretty often. I sleep a lot. I get distracted easily. I adore winter. I suffer from extreme FOMO. I am the first to laugh at my own jokes. I am the last to fall asleep. I will always hold the door open for you. I am super excitable. I don't always text back. I am dysfunctional. I am the best warm body for cuddles. I wing it way too often. I am an aspiring writer. I work in a kitchen.

Shannon Scott is a first-year student in the English program at Western University and a student editor for this year's WordsFestZine.

Becca Serena is the editor-in-chief of Her Campus Western. She read at the WordsFest event Poetry Live!: An Evening of Open Mic Poetry.

Rebecca St. Pierre is a writer, photographer, and Londoner.

Evan Suntres is a fourth-year English student at King's University College.

Josh Thompson-Persaud is an aspiring artist and third-year student at Western University studying English and Creative Writing.

Jennifer Wenn is a London resident. Professionally, she is a systems analyst; vocationally, she is a writer and speaker. Her latest journey is into the wonderful world of poetry.

Laura Whyte attended WordsFest.

**“poems are my kites
flying me, war-wearied, up
through skies, dark or bright”**
– Ola Nowosad, *Refugee Haiku*



Cover artwork: Jason McLean