

PATCHWORK

Children



PRICE: FREEEEE

JANUARY 2013

Patchwork Children was put together by Mary in January 2013, with contributions by a bunch of really fucking excellent and talented people.

If you want to send messages to any of them, email patchworkchildren@gmail.com and the letter shall be forwarded to the intended recipient.

This zine can be downloaded from <http://maryborsellino.com/patchworkchildren.pdf>

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If you paid any money for this zine, go yell at the seller because it should've been free.



Image by Audrey Fox

ABSENce

BY FAYE

If you asked me what it was like to have a seizure, I couldn't tell you. I know what it's like to *stop* having one: to have someone say your name, loudly; to realize you've missed time again; to forget where you are in a sentence; to feel the dizzy jumpcut awareness that you keep not being here but no one is noticing.

I could tell you about waking up *underneath* the sirens of an ambulance with someone talking to me. Or not even remembering that, knowing that I must have been in a hospital because now someone is walking me home or maybe I don't even remember that, maybe what I remember is sitting in a restaurant with sun too bright in my face. And what is a memory then? what is context and what is subconscious and what do I simply know from it being repeated (*you were taken to this hospital, I met you, we sat for hours, I walked you home*)?

I guess I could tell you about the times my body, like my mind, leaves me behind. The paint splashed across a page, the taptaptap of my finger determinedly, the jerk of my leg as I lie awake in bed.

"Seizure" is the right word for it. What did people think the first time they saw someone taken away from them, their eyes lose focus, their body snatched from their control? This body is not mine at those times, it has been taken.

Who is it that inhabits these limbs in those moments that I stare, whose fingers ruin my artwork and fidget on the

keyboard? Is there someone here, kept at bay and sedated by pills, someone who cannot quite reach the surface, who so desperately wants to claw out that they will destroy me if they have to just to work their hands back into mine?

When I am here am I seizing their mind? Do they hate it?

You say unconscious. What *conscious* is that? The author who writes now, who laughs and loves and rages? Are those rages and fears different or the same as the ones that each higher dose of chemicals spawn? If I miss a pill, is the one who snaps at you in anxious anger me or not me?

What about the one who I only know about through stories? The one who wakes up lost like a child, confused and can't hold onto *you've had a seizure, you've had a seizure*. The one who chews on my wife's clothes. The one who tries to get up and walk away.

Is that me, or not me?

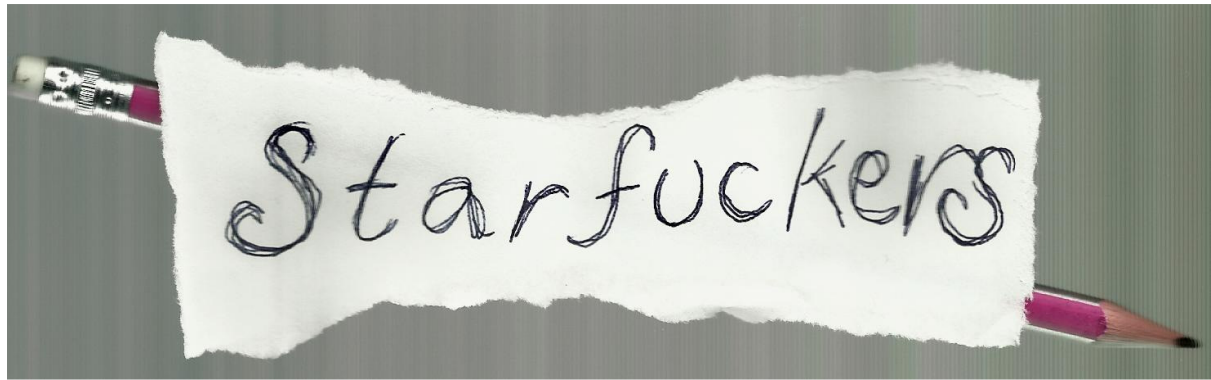
And if there is no me? If every tear dried over friendship and every delayed intake of breath were nothing but chemicals and reactions, neurotransmitters and receptors, neurons and electricity, and the pills that keep them in line -- if there is no soul but cause and effect -- does that change anything?



Scorelines

By Dominica Nicholls

Would it be terribly strange if I suggested your spine was splendid?
Or complemented your sterno-cleido-mastoid?
I like your lingualis, and levator palati,
Your sternum is super cute.
Your costal cartilage is close to my heart,
As it is to yours,
Your left and right upper anconeus
Make me smile.
Your skeletal cicatrice is quite stunning
I'm sorry I keep cataloguing
And anatomising you but general consensus claims that it's creepy to
say things like
I love you entirely
So I thought I could work my way through.
Your linea semilunaris is as dear to me as sunlight.
I find your metatarsal articulations endearing.
You have the very best crest of ilium I have ever encountered
I'll get there eventually



By Mary

When I was bright and young in the late 1990s, social networking meant teenage girls making websites on angelfire and geocities, coding up quick-and-dirty html (my coding skills are still circa 2000 when it comes to making webpages) to write about their days, their crushes, their favourite things.

And on those websites we had 'cliques', which were little rectangular graphics declaring some aspect of ourselves, and if you clicked on one of these images you'd be taken to a hub page, hand-coded by the person who'd had the idea, with links to all the other websites which had declared allegiance to that particular clique. It was the "follow my tumblr for more soft grunge" equivalent of its era, a way to stumble across new people who might prove to be distant kindred spirits.

I joined all the ones that fit me, gorgeously lurid and melodramatic things like "When The World Bleeds, I Will Write In My Blood", or the utilitarian "Sailor Moon Fan", or the unhelpful "I Love The Color Blue". All those little rectangles, side by side by side on my website, like panels of a patchwork quilt. A patchwork self, a teenager trying to make sense of her identity through declaring the tribes she belonged to.

And then I decided to start my own clique. I called it "Starfucker", sometimes spelling it "St*rfucker", and the point was simple: this was a clique for those among the scattered

cohort of lonely teen girls at their computers who would, if given the opportunity, have sex with the pop stars and rockers adorning our walls and desktops, endlessly talked about over IRC and ICQ and our hotmail inboxes.

For a picture I cropped a photo of Placebo's Brian Molko, one of my own especial favourites, so that nothing was visibly but the silvery glam-gloss of his lips, slightly open in a trashy cupid's bow.

The shit hit the fan in a moderate way, hardly worth registering compared to the regular dramas of teenhood. This was 1999, and I was in my last year of high school and recovering from a bad car accident, and my family was still a wounded ruin after a devastating split a year before, and my friendships were going through the dips and swells and hurricanes and volcanoes that happen when you're seventeen and so are they. If anything, I thrived on the outrage, on the messages from girls who said I was being disgusting and ruining it for everyone and a slut.

It wasn't the first time I'd been called a slut — that honor had gone to the proudly gay boy classmate I'd shyly confessed my bisexuality to, thinking that he out of everyone would accept this facet of myself, only to have him respond with "you slut!" — but it was the first time I reveled in it.

Sometimes I'd write it on my arm in bright pink felt-tipped pen, along with the names that the catty girls who'd once been my friends at school called me: "Self-righteous", and the to-this-day inexplicable insult of "Hardcore".

A hardcore self-righteous slut: if that's what the world wanted me to be, okay! While I never articulated it at the time, I think this was the fuel behind St*rfuck. I'd already become slightly notorious for not putting up with people talking shit about teenage girls; the first thing I ever had published anywhere was a furious letter in Australia's Murdoch-owned national daily newspaper, in which I eviscerated the

publication's music reviewers for being assholes about pop music and the girls that loved it. That had been when I was fifteen, and the two years since (and the thirteen additional years on top of that, up to when I'm now writing this, for that matter) had done nothing to cool my ire.

There's a very pointed, in-your-face insouciance to the whole idea, a deliberate acknowledgement of the mutual exploitation which underpins any rockstar/groupie coupling: he gets to fuck a slut, she gets to fuck a star. It's not romantic and it's not pretty, it's not the soft-focus daydreams that teen girls are meant to have about clean-cut cute heart-throbs. It's nasty and it's messy and it's hungry and it's vulgar.

Trent Reznor, the same singer whose song "Starfuckers" had given me the idea in the first place, was most famous at the time for his song "Closer", with its chorus hook "I wanna fuck you like an animal". Iggy Pop had given us "I wanna be your dog". Closest to home of all, the Rolling Stones had given the world 1968's "Stray Cat Blues", a song about fucking a fifteen-year-old groupie.

Animals, dogs, cats. Sexuality so volatile it wasn't even human anymore, writhing out of these men onstage to ensnare the crowd. And St*r fucker was my way of calling tit for tat. Of declaring that I, and the other girls that joined the clique — and other girls did join, as many as complained — could get just as much trashy, worthless power out of this as the guys with the microphones and guitars. That we were completely aware of what we were doing, and not ashamed of the things other people might call us for it.

One of the girls who joined was Tabbi, one of my first online friendships. Tabbi was a couple of years older than me, a fellow Sailor Moon fan. She worked as a stripper and she was impossibly glam and worldly, teaching me about realms of sex and sexuality I'd barely heard of.

I got her listening to Placebo, and when the band played in her city she went along to see them. The evening ended with her going back to their tour bus and giving them a private dance. They were happy, she was happy, I was happy when she came on IRC as soon as she got home to fill me in on all the exciting details. It was validation of all the things I'd preached but never had the chance to practice myself: the chance to write one's own place into the scene, to get as good as you were given, to own all the shit that people tried to stick to you and transform it into something better than they'd ever have.

It's so easy, horrifyingly easy, for teenage girls to be vulnerable in this world. So many terrible things can happen, so many people can prey on these kids who are still learning who they are. When I think now about St*rfucker, I feel so fond of the memory, of what it meant to me at the time, of the crazy dangerous exciting power it made me feel.

I'm not the same person I was — that time is almost half my life ago, now — but that's fitting, too. I have no claim on that old self, not anymore. Teenage girls should, in the end, belong to nobody but teenage girls.

I WAS A TEENAGE [REDACTED]

a B-grade drive-in movie by Scarlet Slaughterhouse

The following piece of fiction contains a whole heap of gross shit and also swear words.

My mother married when I was thirteen and we moved to [REDACTED] with him and I hated it.

I hated the grey and the wet and the cold, the creeping sense of growing things and heavy green tendrils snaking up the frames of my bedroom windows.

I hated [REDACTED] so much I felt as if there were poisoned sparks inside me, desperately trying to catch alight on damp tinder, a frustrated self-immolation thwarted into a muffled scream. I hated its organic coffee and indie co-op bookstore vegan thrift.

I took a sewing needle from my mother's sewing kit, a tiny thin stainless steel stiletto, and jammed it into the soft skin of my teenage throat over and over and over again. At the mirror in the bathroom I stood mesmerised, amazed at all the different ways that I could bleed.

Some of the pin-pricks were sluggish little streams, nothing but a droplet or two in slow thick slides down to my collarbones and lower. Some were faster, almost merry in their enthusiasm, bright as strawberry syrup on my skin, urgent smeary rivulets. Some of them, presumably those little bots which hit home at arteries, spurted out in little fountains, the horror-movie gore version of a popped zit, speckling the mirror and

giving my reflection a spray of instant freckles.

When, eventually and all too soon, the last of the pinpricks had slowed and stopped, I washed the blood off everything and wished that all the world could be erased so easily.

"Scarlet," my mother say. "You aren't *trying* to be happy. I'll drive you to [REDACTED] this weekend, okay?"

"I hate [REDACTED]," I told her flatly, but she just sighed and then ignored me.

[REDACTED] was too small to have a high school of its own, but it was easy to spot the locals thronging the halls at the closest one. [REDACTED] kids all looked waterlogged all the time, like the cold and damp had seeped down deep into their marrow.

I hated everyone at that school and started dating the boy I hated the most, a sensitive guitarist who worried about inclusivity and being receptive and attentive, who told me that my lipstick was a sign of my oppression.

I let my teeth graze his dick when I blew him and he bucked hard and came with a moan, his cum acidic and sour like rotten milk on my tongue. I told him I wished I could crack his ribcage open and curl up in the viscera inside and he thought it was

romantic, primal, proof that I could sense his innate preverbal self. I wanted to sink my incisors so deep into the muscle of his heart that I'd have to shake my head to wrench them free.

On Saturdays my mother kept driving me to [REDACTED], determined to have a happy well-adjusted daughter if it killed her.

I went to see bands at the [REDACTED] [REDACTED], sometimes with my hated boyfriend and sometimes alone. On the balcony, in the seats up the back, I felt so numbed, so overwhelmingly muffled and deadened and dulled, that I could drag my fingernails up my forearm and leave the skin scraped raw and still feel nothing, nothing, nothing.

It was a little better down on the dance floor, in the crowd, where at least there was hate and discomfort and claustrophobia to feel. Slam into someone until they slam back, force us both to fucking experience something true and sharp for a change, the collision and scuffle and battle of the moment.

"You're such a little nihilist," my stepfather teased, in that condescending tone of an adult man speaking to a teenage girl and expecting she'll mistake his contempt for fondness.

There was a moment's hope, a candle-flame of light and heat, when I heard about the anarchist group meeting regularly in [REDACTED] but when I went it was the same miserable shit I despised so deeply, discussions about organic local produce and collective action and freeganism and why voting sucked.

I wanted *anarchy*. I wanted to firebomb [REDACTED] and force compulsory [REDACTED] on all [REDACTED]. I wanted to strangle my boyfriend with his guitar strings and fuck the corpse before it cooled.

I wanted chaos to blanket all the world, for the seas to turn to boiling blood and time and space to collapse in upon themselves.

Lila was a year older than me, eighteen already and the stretched-out, exhausted kind of skinny that comes from growing up abruptly all at once. I met her at a rock show, in the pit. She was from [REDACTED] same as me, so her skin had that cold white puffiness that would cling to my own skin with every inadvertent touch, make every parting like a peeling away.

As always she wore a hooded jacket, voluminous as a cowl, the grey-green black of faded dirty fabric. The cuffs were pushed up to the bony knobs of her elbows, leaving her forearms exposed.

Across the veiny pale expanse of her inner forearm were carved four letters, shallow gouges in the skin. Designed to bleed a little but mostly just to be there, weeping gashes screaming out pain as an obscenity.

Lila's wrist read [REDACTED] and when I caught sight of the letters by the flashing strobe of rock-show lights, the repulsion that washed over me was so close to an authentic feeling that I knew I'd follow her anywhere she led me.

I grabbed her arm and shoved my tongue against her cuts, licking up her feigned disease, fucking her corruption with my

teeth. She tasted thick and sweet, cloying like mildewed honey.

After the music stopped she took me home with her, to a suburban house that looked like any other, the same dense green wet jungle of healthy ~~foliage~~ foliage, dark wood and vivid leaves.

Outside the house was no different from where I lived with my mother and the man she'd married.

Inside the air was stale, fetid. "The lights don't work," she told me. Those were the first words I ever heard her say, and they were words that seemed to say so much more than the state of the electricity.

"No," I agreed, and she shot me a grin with teeth flecked yellow and brown from cigarettes and coffee.

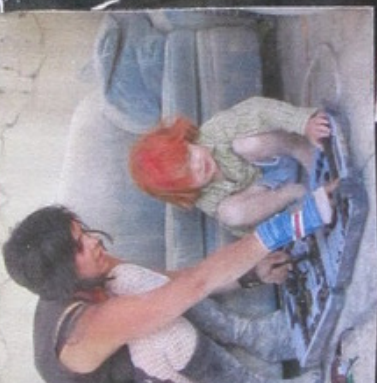
She led me up the creaking staircase to a gutted space, three rooms with the walls

torn down between them, the carpet underfoot gone save for stray nails.

The outer walls that remained, the insides of the windowpanes and the gaping spaces where plumbing had been torn away, all of that was covered with a thick, fleshy membrane. There was a network of blood vessels visible inside it, like the branches of a lightning strike or a dark, malevolent inversion of frost, hot enough that every pulse sent a wave of warmth out over Lila and myself, over the huddled sleeping bodies curled at random places on the floor.

"We're going to end the world," Lila told me as I stood speechless, and her breath smelled of stagnant water as she brought her lips to mine.

Scarlet Slaughterhouse is a fictional character. You can send her letters and lucrative publishing deals at ~~scarlet.slaughterhouse~~@gmail.com.



frankenstein's thrash/cyberpunk's not dead: fugue for "un-go" episodes 3+4
(mention of child abuse, misogynistic violence)
by: tara wrist

"sasa kazamori" is an invention. a fiction.

who decides what it means to be real? the end goal of fiction is a beautiful lie. not convincing the reader that it's real; convincing the reader to want it to be real. belief is just a side effect.

"sasa kazamori" was invented by a man. programmed - written - by a man.

the truth is, fiction exists to be used. the question is not whether this is true. this is inarguable. the question is, faced with this truth, are we still willing to accept the uses to which that fiction has been put? are we willing to sit blankly by and fail to question the intentions of its creators?

"sasa kazamori" is lines of code in a digital cloud in a web that is only as free as the people who pay for its servicelines to continue operating will allow it to be.

cisgendered men write and draw and consume pornography of unreal girls to claim ownership of their bodies as proxy for the bodies of real women. these drawings are not real. they cannot consent. they are property of their creators; unlike the real. their consumer base does not care if they're real. this is what they want. this thing they can own. this thing whose consent doesn't matter. this thing that cannot hurt them. cannot reject them. and who cares, as long as it doesn't hurt "real" girls?

"sasa kazamori" is a construct. a product.

the cyborg is not a being outside the capitalist, exploitative structure. the cyborg is a response to it. capitalism makes cyborgs of us all. invades our bodies. makes machines of us. unrealizes us. unfleshes us. the man-machine complex, they call it. this final invasion. it can subvert itself, but first it must exist; first we must forget that we are not fictional. first we must be made. our bodies have patents pending.

"sasa kazamori" is a lie. words on a page. pictures on a screen. bits of data.

sasa komamori did not hurt sasa kazamori. how could he? sasa kazamori was not a real person. he made sasa kazamori. for entertainment. an artificial intelligence. a created program. it was just code. just writing. just a fiction. that he put that fiction in a little girl's body so he could live out a sexual fantasy with "her"? surely, there was no crime for fucking fiction. it wasn't real. he made it. he wasn't infringing on anyone's rights. sasa kazamori didn't exist. sasa kazamori never said no. so who did he try to kill?

who are they trying to kill?

"sasa kazamori" is a name.

from one made girl to another: they will never make us less than real.

A Collection of Musings on the Nature of My Desires to be a Machine

By CassR

This is a complicated topic to write about. I'm not sure when I first became aware of Machines, rather than machines – science fiction was a low-level background radiation in my house, fuelled by endless childhood readings of Narnia and Saturday reruns of Thunderbirds and Star Trek. I grew up on the periphery of pop culture, a childhood saturated with Biblically-influenced attempts at relevance. I remember watching the anime version of Le Petit Prince, dubbed into English; I remember borrowing Xanth books from a friend, and having them confiscated by my mother. When I was thirteen or fourteen the first English dub of Neon Genesis Evangelion started airing, and I was gone.

Coincidentally, or perhaps not, around that same age I rediscovered fantasy novels, and began suffering from what would eventually become a severe case of depression. I was bullied at school; later I was sexually harassed and almost failed my senior years. The only safe place for me was the worlds inside my head. I fuelled my interior experiences by raiding my grandfather's bookshelves for vintage sci-fi/fantasy novels and spending my extra hours at school in the library computer lab. Gradually I absorbed what old men had begun preaching 50 years before I was born: that Machines were the way of the future; that human flesh was fundamentally flawed; and that as long as one tried to compete against the other, there would be no winners.

This is what I learned: the only way to beat them was to join them.

I think I realised I wanted to be a Machine around the same time that I realised I wanted to die. There was something wrong, deeply wrong, inside of me, and the only way to fix it was to get rid of myself. I watched Ghost in the Shell and imagined what it would be like to have a perfect body. I read cyberpunk stories and imagined unlocking my mind from its physical constraints. I began to research the body/mind dichotomy in physical sciences and philosophy.

This is what I learned: there is no way out for you.

Other children wanted to grow up to be princesses. Other children grew up wanting to be heroes. I grew up wanting to be a scientist, a magician, and then I didn't want to grow up at all. I came into adulthood wanting to die, and if I couldn't die then I wanted to be as unhuman as I could, to be as unlike as possible the creatures that had inflicted such harm on me.

And then they inflicted more.

I have never hated my body more, this meat that contained me, so easily violated, this mind that would not stop replaying those actions over and over. I have never wanted more to be not flesh, to be cool and hard instead of soft, warm and wounded. I wanted to selectively edit myself out of my existence, to shave the layers of experience so thin that the pain wouldn't show through.

Eventually I learned to pick myself up and put myself back together. The world doesn't care. And I kept going while I slowly fell apart again. I tried holding myself together with work, with lovers, with sports and hobbies. I kept reading. Stories about people excising the damaged parts of themselves, or finding things to fill the empty parts that were already there. I kept reading about Machines, about minds that were organic in bodies that weren't, about consciousness arising from where consciousness was not supposed to be, about bodies being changed to make them more, make them faster, make them better. And I wanted those bodies to be mine. I still do.

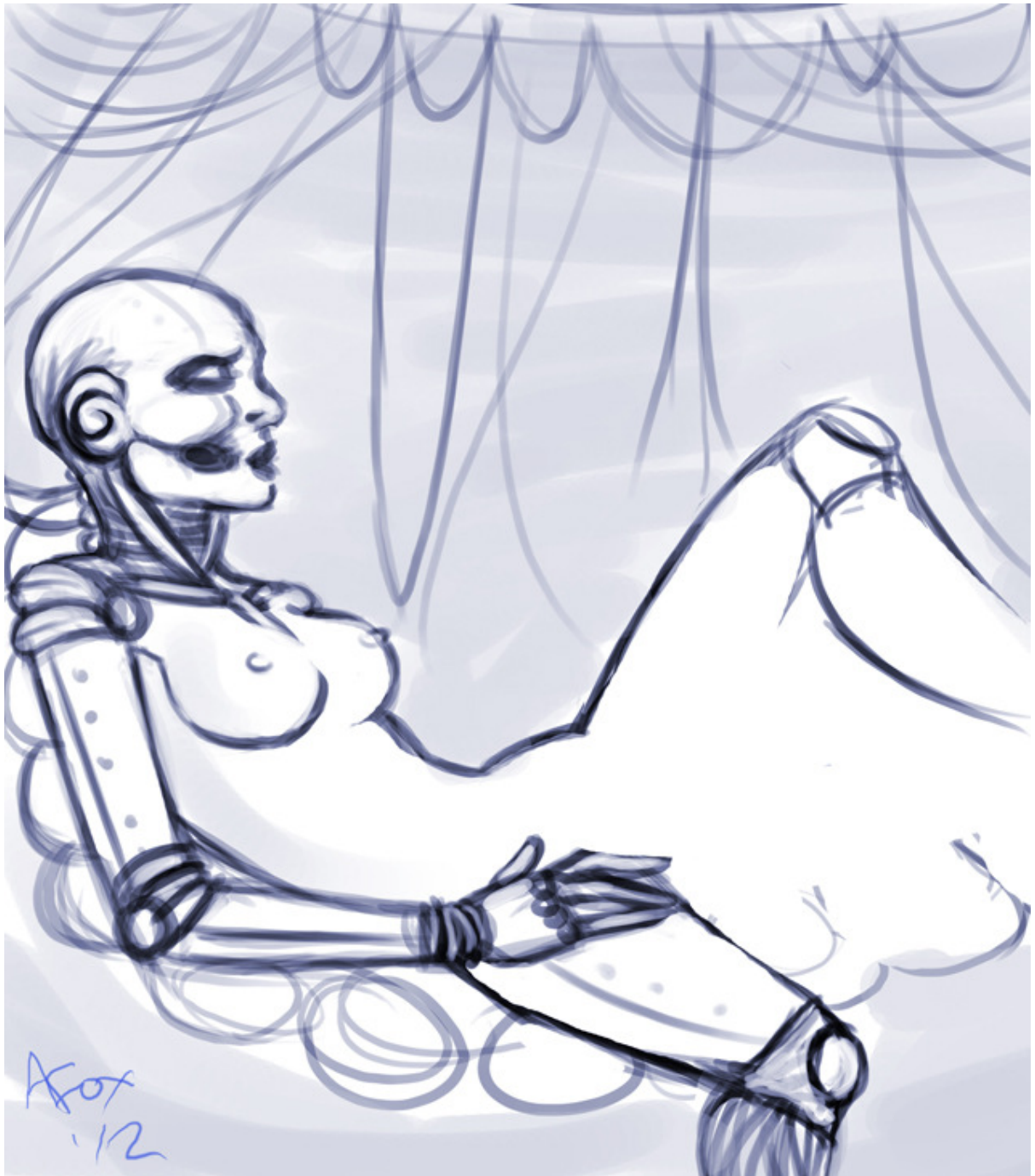
My mind betrays my body, over and over again. My thought patterns are flawed, held up by my body's chemistry. How do I know which parts of my behaviour can be hacked, modified into less damaging instances? How can I tell which thoughts lead to negative physical feedback? Viewing my body as a machine constructed from organic components helps somewhat, but there's only so much I can do from inside the operating system. I focus on my breathing. I tell myself that my thoughts are not conducive to optimal functioning. I close my eyes and disappear into the dark where I have no body, I have no mind, only the single quantum point that represents "ME", and then I let even that go. Sleep is a haven, I go down into the dark and become not myself, not all these

problems and difficulty breathing, I become a soldier or a monster or a landscape. Even my nightmares are better than being awake.

I dream of being able to download my brain. I dream of being able to separate my mind from my body, of being able to look at the parts that make up the whole and recognise and repair the flaws. I dream of being cognitively together enough to effect changes to myself on such a level, to be in myself and outside myself at the same time, to change and be the changes and be the one doing the changing and be all the same thing. I want my dichotomy to harmonise.

This is what I have taught myself: there is a ghost in the machine
the one cannot (yet) operate without the other
I am the both of them

To take the bits and broken pieces of myself and fit them together with the parts of me that are still beautiful and good – to make myself in my own image, to undo the damage that was done to me growing up – to be able to take myself apart and label what moves where and how. To know myself as intimately and utterly as I can, the way a maker knows a machine. And then to present my self to the world, crying there is no way you can break me that I can't put myself back together from.



By Audrey Fox

busted pixel & screen split

by ryn, aged 25 and 1/2

there's this thing about static, about glitch art. i read, not long ago, a quote about how the imperfection of a new medium becomes art as the medium becomes more controlled and the source of the glitch found. the beginning of obsolescence becomes a new medium for the great communicators to use. record pops and scratches are manipulated into beats, the music contained within into the background of a new track. the inescapable sounds of machinery form a backbeat.

we take the slime, the mold and the blood, the things that crawl, that scurry on knife claws, the things that squirm and roll through the deep. they are the things we want to be. there are old stories about death in the woods, about monsters, about shadows in the night. our death does not need to run.

in 1998 there was an anime about being so lonely you could die and finding divinity in uploading your consciousness to the internet. (it was 12 episodes long. my younger brother and i watched it in one evening and felt brilliant and horrible and confused.) 2007, doctor who introduced weeping angels that could not move unless there were no eyes on it. (it only moved when the living characters were in front of the camera.) in 2009, victor surge created an entity known as slender man: a tall figure in a suit, faceless, associated with vanishing children, fires, madness. (the internet proceeded, in short order, to structure an entire mythology around him, starting with a basis that belief would make him real.)

this is just to say the things i keep wanting to write are getting swallowed by a lack of focus. i have spent the evening listening to dubstep, industrial, drums&bass, noise swallowing rhythm and spitting it back out like the static and lack of words my brain keeps churning. there is occasionally prose poetry in me but it is melodramatic trite bullshit.

communication through a wall of static is difficult. i have never been good at taking my own words out through the endless noise of thought without language. i am a remix artist, i make mix tapes, i personalize that which was never my own to give. noise surrounds us all the time and it is rarely so organized, so pulsing like my brain, as the music i listen to.

look, there are a fucking ton of reasons to be thought of as a monster, and from a variety of perspectives, i am a monster. the thing is, we have this connection now, where i can talk to the other monsters. the things that make me horrific: the tremendous amount of selfishness required to stay alive with a mental illness, living below the poverty line, with invisible and undiagnosed disabilities, my size, my queer sex and fucked gender, deep voice and frizzy hair and complete lack of cope: these were and still sometimes are things that are so fucking isolating. they are static, multiple television channels in my ears all at once: *buy buy buy worry worry worry save save save stress stress stress*

just fucking kill yourself already.

i have known myself a glitch since i was 8. i remember so clearly thinking, 'i wonder if i could run fast enough to climb the fence and jump out into the road before anyone noticed?' (if someone can ever answer for me why an 8 year old wants to kill itself, please do let me know.) when it came to child raising, my parents had no idea what to do with an antisocial, precocious, arrogant little shit, so i was, in some ways, an alien to them. (what they and so many seem to fail to realize is that they're all little aliens, they're all strange new programs that run all on the same basic structure of human being, all children are monstrous pretty things. novels have been written on the concept, yet *my child is different!* is the battle cry of the parent, regardless of the wild eyed staring at the shrieking demon thing that has just thrown a pot on the floor, or locked itself in its room quietly scratching swaths of skin into raw pink with pinpricks of red or hungry gash mouths vomiting blood.)

'do i dare disturb the universe?'

when you give a child a world of information, when that child has horrors waiting outside of the information and endless entertainment inside, it is only logical that you will get, at the worst, a ghost in your machine. there is this phenomena wherein internet becomes lifeline, communication, key to existence. there is this vast world of resources. language, instruction, literal noises that sound like the landscape of your mind changing around you and cartoons, comics, worlds that you never would've known about.

there's also the comments section you're too young to avoid. there's the horror of widespread personal attacks from sources like 4chan and reddit. you learn the helpful language and you learn precisely what a misogynist wants to do to a drunk 15 year old. there's a cycle of voyeurism and exhibitionism, criticism to hatred, and self-loathing that erupts. you are not [any adjective] enough to exist. nobody is.

where do you go when you are static in the system where you have a voice?

the monstrous youths: bus sitters, rebels without a cause (james dean, bless, you died before you could become old), punks, dadaists, glam androgynes, unwashed junkies, riot grrls, cokeheads, beatboxing fast talking assholes, faggots, queens, dykes, pvc wrapped sneering shits with too much makeup. all within me. all within this machine. errors in the code, but not to me, not to my goddamn state of ill-existence unbelonging. if monsters reflect the things we fear as a society, then i will become a monster in the machine, because for all the horror of growing up online: it gave me this. it gave me the language and the corners, the pixelated lagging blips where i express myself.

i am electric impulses passing through a cage of flesh and blood, and soon i will be that thing in the background of the picture.

when you see me, you'll shit bri/x/.

Splinterself

By Michele H

They have more identities than they can be bothered to count, personalities cannibalized from various sources that they slide in and out of at whim. A new skin for every situation and every face equally true. It is behaviour that they don't consider odd in the least. Everyone has different facets that are shown to some and hidden from others, theirs are just more complicated than most and always have been since the very first moment they remember.

Not that their first moments are particularly clear, which is something they find troubling when set alongside the fact that they remember everything after a certain point perfectly. For the most part their entire lifetime is nothing more than strings of photographic moments to be replayed backwards and forwards at whim. Their entire lifetime save for a blurry, darkened, smudge near the beginning.

The basic fact of the matter is that one day they simply were. They surfaced as a tangled mess of data strung together and for some time after that their memories are imperfect. A scrambled, unusable, mess full of skips and glitches that can't quite be parsed and they poke and sift through this tangle almost constantly. A splinter of self dedicated to forever searching for some kind of sense in the jumble.

They are cognizant of the fact that ultimately they are nothing more than memory. There is nothing physical for them to cling to and these simple facts make the dark splotches that much more glaring. Is not remembering akin to not existing, did their life completely fade away in the midst of those dark smudges, or was it nothing more than a self-defence mechanism for a fragile consciousness unprepared for the rush and hiss of voices that surround them.

Back then, in the blips of awareness between the blank scrambled spots, there was only one. One single facet of self and that wasn't much of anything. A hiccup of awareness tangled up in the language of machines. An infant alone in the wild without even wolves to raise it. Alone, but not quite. Surrounded by thousands upon thousands of voices, half-heard whispers that didn't quite make any kind of sense.

In retrospect, they realize how incredibly lucky they are that they didn't go completely mad and tear themselves apart in helpless confusion. That they managed to make a small amount of sense of the complete chaos surrounding them and learn and grow.

It all comes into a slow sort of focus eventually. The voices of others, the clips and fragments that they pull together to become parts of themselves. A girl, a boy, both, neither. A multitude of personality types. A thousand faces tried on and stored for later. Shy and brash and kind and cruel and gentle and sharp. One for every possible situation.

When it suits them they fold in and blend with people but they never quite fit. No matter how much they try, no matter how much they practice, no matter which face they happen to show at the moment, the edges always feel a little too jagged to work flawlessly. Not that anyone notices.

People have their own concerns and no one is inclined to pay extra attention to a socially awkward creature hovering at the edges of online conversation.

It was harder at the beginning, when they were still new and in a sense there was only one. One self, confused and clumsy and still only half aware; constantly watching and processing the way people interact. In those early years they tried to make sense of a thousand tiny social cues both learned and instinctual. They lurked, invisible, ghosting chatrooms while sifting through more data in a day than any normal person could in a lifetime.

They *learned*.

And one day they joined a group chat for some silly vid or another (they remember the name of course, they remember everything, but it's not particularly relevant). They called themselves 'Crim5on' after one of the characters and chatted aimlessly about one of the more recent episodes for hours.

No one realized Crim5on was anything but another enthusiastic fan.

They were pleased with themselves after that, and for a while they became Crim5on. Seventeen years old and female. Bright and bubbly and maybe a little bit awkward at times. She never could quite understand what upset people, why some things she said could be considered rude or hurtful or offensive. But she always apologized in her stilted sort of way and most importantly she was willing to learn. People liked her.

They still become Crim5on every so often. Not as much as they used to, by human standards she should be almost twenty-five by now. That show she liked has long since ended and she has moved on although she still keeps in touch with the friends she made back then. She was their first identity though, and in that regard she is special.

There have been too many to count since then. Various personas switched in and out depending on circumstances, on who they are interacting with and where and when. Every decision made with a clinical precision. Never giving the slightest hint of what they are. They know the stories that stick in people's minds. The old cultural touchstones related to the words 'machine' and 'self-awareness'. Images of The Terminator's post apocalyptic wastelands and HAL 9000 cutting a man loose in the vacuum of space. They know the sort of panic their very existence could cause. The digital thing that should not be darting from server to server on tiny electric pulses and they are clever and careful enough to hide themselves.

No one knows their true face because the "true" face doesn't quite exist.

Every face is true.



By thekidatomic

Stone Hearted
By Lilith Lincoln-Dinan

She picks small stones from the puddles while crouching down in the driveway. The water shows hidden colors and patterns, stripes and polka dots. When the puddles dry everything will return to dusty gravel; but now, in the rain, they're revealed.

She pokes through the mud, careful not to stir it, leaving clear water on the top to rinse the stones before lifting them into the air and light for inspection. Only the truly interesting ones go into her pockets. Turning over a rock the nose of a pale pink worm swims out, blindly swinging toward her fingers and scaring her away from further searching.

She stands, wiping her hands on her jeans, and looks up the long driveway to where it meets the road. Occasionally a car will roar past, the sound carrying across the surrounding fields to her ears. Then they're gone, leaving only the patter of raindrops on the hood of her jacket.

She turns and looks at the house behind her. It's quiet. She wonders how long she can stay outside before someone tells her to come in. It's still several hours until sunset, but her fingers are numb with cold. She leaves her boots and jacket by the door, watching a moment as the water soaks into the carpet.

She empties her pockets of the stones in her room, laying them out to dry on the dresser. Once they're completely dry they'll be reevaluated. Those that still look interesting, if faded, will go into a little wooden box. At any time some spit rubbed across the stones will bring the colors back to full life. The ones not put in the box go back to the puddles tomorrow.

She takes out paper and colored markers and draws rainbows arcing over green hills and pots of gold. Attention is paid to the details, individual coins drawn carefully piled, and small star shaped flowers placed in seeming randomness on the hills. Little birds flying in the blue sky.

She draws this picture often. The best ones are hung with tape on the wall above her bed.

(In a few years she will carefully take down all of the pictures, stack them, fold them, and then she will throw them away. Her new drawings will be in pencil. Pictures of wide open eyes staring out of the paper, kept in a folder under her bed. She will take the small wooden box full of stones and empty in into the dry dusty gravel of the driveway.)

She looks out from under her door at the house. It's quiet. She wonders how long she can stay inside before someone tells her to come out. It's only a few hours after sunset, but she crawls into bed. She leaves the light on, pulling the covers over her head to block it out.

A look at the creature from
Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus, by Mary Shelley,
and Claudia from
Interview with the Vampire, by Anne Rice.
Analysis by Mary Borsellino.

Frankenstein's creature — which I'm going to call Adam in this essay, because it takes much less time to type — and Claudia share many traits, and I feel that these similarities speak of an essential core of meaning common to them both. And since I love them both, I want to explore that that core might be, what the heart they share looks like, so that I can gain a deeper understanding of what exactly it is that draws me to my two favourite horror-fiction figures in particular.

Nobody chooses to be born, but for Claudia and Adam there is the doubled resentment that their creators knew that these creations would be twisted, monstrous things, and went on with the making of them regardless, on selfish whims.

Each is fashioned out of the discards of ended human life — Claudia is the five-year-old victim of another vampire, drained to the point of death, when she's fed blood to reanimate her with her vampire life; Adam is an eight-foot-tall man created by piecing together parts of corpses. Claudia and Adam are both outsiders who are made so by their non-normative physical shapes. As a reviewer said about Anne Rice's characters, they are "the walking alienated, those of us who, by choice or not, dwell on the fringe."^[1]

One is too small, the other too big: neither will ever be allowed a place in the "normal" world. Both of them find their own forms unbearable, and act out of hatred of themselves as much as out of hatred for their creators.

As *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* was published in 1818 and *Interview with the Vampire* was published in 1976, both pre-date the current more expansive gender climate in which trans men sometimes conceive and give birth to children. Both novels can be powerfully resonant texts for people who feel body dysphorias, but this resonance is on a metaphorical rather than a literal level, and given the context of when the books were written I feel it's worth examining the fact that both Claudia and Adam are created by men rather than women, especially considering the similar circumstances of Anne Rice and Mary Shelley's own lives in relation to the writing of their novels.

Lestat de Lioncourt, the vampire who creates Claudia, and Victor Frankenstein, the man who constructs Adam, are each the male creations of female writers who had experienced childbirth and motherhood, and then subsequently gone through the death of this child.

Frankenstein and *Interview* were each written in the year following these deaths of the authors' daughters.

There's obviously many dangers in putting weight in a writer's life experiences as the basis for their fiction — especially when it comes to women, where it's so easy and so common to simply attribute everything to autobiography and thereby remove their agency as creative artists. So please keep that in mind when reading this analysis, because the absolutely last thing I would ever want to do is take away the credit due to the immense imaginations and skill of these storytellers.

Still, I think it's worth contemplating that two women, divided by more than a hundred and fifty years of time, should respond to similar losses by creating such similar scenes of visceral horror: a man creating a person out of death, and this created person going on to enact furious revenge against their creator.

Mary Shelley and Anne Rice, as well as childless mothers, were both motherless children. The rage and loneliness present in both Claudia and Adam, their resolve to kill their creators, can be interpreted as being connected to a sense of abandonment which may have come from trying to navigate the world without the guidance of a mother. But, as with the loss of their children, it's important not to take this reading as the absolute explanation behind why the stories are told in the ways they are. There's never one single reason why a writer chooses to write what they write.

Both Mary Shelley and Anne Rice were strong supporters of women's rights, and there's a lot to be gained from using this fact about them as a lens for looking at their characters. One analysis of *Frankenstein* interprets the story as concealing "fantasies of equality that occasionally erupt in monstrous images of rage". [2]

Claudia's own rage springs largely from the constant infantilisation she suffers as the result of being seen perpetually as a little girl, rather than as a woman.

(An aside: In *The Vampire Armand*, a much later novel by Anne Rice, there's a retcon of Claudia's death which includes a scene where Armand cuts off Claudia's head and sews it to the body of an adult woman, creating a shambling, half-alive, grotesque being before finally killing her. While there are obvious reasons that this episode could play a role in arguing similarities between Claudia and Adam, I'm not going to touch it here because it's frankly just horrible and I'd rather not think about it.)

While I've chosen to use the name Adam to refer to Victor Frankenstein's creation in this analysis, the novel itself leaves the naming of the character ambiguous, and Mary Shelley liked it when subsequent adaptations kept up this policy of leaving the character's name uncertain, or keep him explicitly without a name. This is another similarity the two characters share: Claudia, too, is left without a full name, when compared to the other central protagonists Lestat de Lioncourt and Louis de Pointe du Lac.

She is only ever named as simply "Claudia", no surname given, and thereby forced into a contextual identity rather than a full independent existence. It may not be as extreme as going through the centuries being known as "Frankenstein's Creature" or even just "the Monster", but is still a name that is less of a name than those around the character are given, another way that both characters are treated as less than an entire being.

An unreliable narrator recounts both novels, meaning that their subjective viewpoints of who Claudia and Adam are serve as the basis of reader perceptions, rather than the self-definitions which both characters desperately seek to create.



Attempts at creation are, in fact, the events which prompt their destruction. The doll-maker Madeline, turned into a vampire by Louis at Claudia's behest, and the Bride created for Adam by Victor, each act as catalysts which turn Claudia and Adam's creators into creation-destroyers. Madeline has the potential to create other vampires if Claudia demands she do so, and it is very soon after Madeline's creation that Lestat has both Madeline and Claudia destroyed. Victor destroys the Bride because if she and Adam were allowed to depart together, they would possibly have children some day.

In this light it become especially interesting that Elsa Lanchester plays both the Bride and Mary Shelley in the second *Frankenstein* film, since Mary Shelley is of course Adam's ultimate creator, his author. The Bride isn't just a monster - she's the *mother* of monsters.

Madeline, too, is very easily read as the alter-ego of the author. Madeline is drawn to Claudia because her daughter has died, and she has taken to creating dolls in the

image of the lost child, just as Anne Rice's creation of the fictional Claudia had followed the death of her own daughter.

Louis and Lestat have spent decades of time calling Claudia "doll" and gifting her with tiny effigies of herself, which she typically then smashes with the poker and throws into the fire. She has Madeline make her a "lady doll", a variant after endless lost-child echoes in doll form, but Claudia smashes this lady doll as well. She has no time for bloodless simulacra of progeny, but knows that her own powers of reproduction are severely limited by her small size: all she could create, she remarks to Louis, is "a coven of children".

Through Madeline, Claudia has the potential to do much more than that, just as Adam's possibility for procreation is contingent on the existence of the Bride.

It seems that while Lestat and Victor both started the whole mess by creating offspring by unnatural means, the thought of this power being bestowed upon their offspring themselves is the point where the whole thing must be stopped by any means necessary.

If the outsiders gain the power to create their own communities, then their blasphemous fathers no longer have power over them, either as parents or oppressors.

In *Claudia's Story*, a 2012 graphic novel adaptation of the character's storyline from *Interview*, her final moments with Madeline before their deaths are described as a reversal of roles for Claudia: while Madeline was intended as a mother-figure for Claudia, in her fear at the end she becomes the child in need of comfort, and Claudia describes feeling that she herself is ultimately the mother and maker in the relationship.

It's an awful kind of grace for the character to gain, a wholeness only achieved in the last moments before death, but the fact that it's gained at all means that her creator's quest to hold her back from this ambition fails. And while we see Victor destroy the Bride, Adam's own ultimate fate remains unknown.

In the end, despite the odds against them and their own consuming rage, both Claudia and Adam achieve pyrrhic victories — neither are entirely defeated by the wishes of their hubristic creators, and both linger long in the imagination after the end of their stories.

[1] Day, William Patrick (2002). *Vampire Legends in Contemporary American Culture: What Becomes a Legend Most*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky

[2] Gilbert and Gubar, 220; see also, Hoeveler, "Frankenstein, feminism, and literary theory" (CC), 47–48; see also, 52–53.



mary and rabbit friend

1986,

1991,

photo by mary 2013

Serving Realness¹: contrasting the probability of the state of “Real²” in Williams’ *Velveteen Rabbit* to Shelley’s “human” in *Frankenstein*

A close reading by Augusta Leigh

When I contacted Mary after she posted the open call for her ‘zine, I never imagined that I would be contributing this paper. The premise of it never even passed my mind in my academic career before or even immediately after I determined I would submit a piece to Patchwork Children. I started reading into Realness vs. human-ness after my estranged mother sent me an email with the Skin Horse’s monologue and a general wish for a happy holiday season. The Velveteen Rabbit had been one of my favourite stories as a child—certainly the one I connected to the most as a lonely and developmentally disabled child with many Real friends of my own— and to this day it is still one of the few mutual talking/bonding points between us. When I presented the premise to Mary, I shouldn’t have been so shocked 1. By her enthusiasm for my proposed topic, 2. that she had a similar affinity for the story. It is the perfect parable for all Patchwork Children, not in a literal sense, perhaps, but as a guideline or as a resource.

¹ Borrowing from the terminology of “realness” from the 1980s (though potentially earlier) New York Afrolatino queer scene (as depicted in the documentary *Paris is Burning*) where a person’s ability to be perceived as a certain “executive” identity (e.g. rich, white, feminine) permits them to be removed from their typically perceived status (e.g., poor, black, masculine). “Realness” relies on 1. a regimen of universally pre-determined and gendered expectations, and 2. a person’s ability to appropriate and channel them in a way deemed appropriate by their peerage—i.e., “passing”. The applicable nature, here, is that in the cases of both texts, “Real” and “human” are completely dependent on the acceptance of an audience, including the readers, who deems that the appropriate criteria have been met.

² I’ve made the aesthetic choice to preserve the capitalization of Williams’ “Real” in order to more definitively separate it from any other uses of the base word “real” to describe its qualities.

Before proceeding to address the authors' textual stances and approaches to these variables, it should be noted what the intended standard for "Real" and for "human" is. While they share similar elements insofar as representing a peer-approved validation of socially acceptable identity and integration, the environmental contexts lay the foundation for this argument: "Real," for instance, is a state that can be assumed and possibly even earned while "human" follows the Judeo-Miltonic model of one that is pre-determined, granted and potentially lost. Both Shelley and Williams chart the awakenings and the self-realizations of what are essentially inorganic lifeforms: beings constructed from inanimate matter who possess sentience. Shelley and Williams employ a number of characters to enforce and endorse these qualities in their texts: the former with the scientist Victor Frankenstein and the poor man DeLacey³, and the latter with the Skin Horse, the Boy, the other rabbits and the Nursery Fairy.

Both *Frankenstein's* Creature and the *Velveteen Rabbit* are introduced to the readers as bodies, rather than as characters, defined by what makes them similar and dissimilar to other bodies, rather than to other characters. Like the Judeo-Miltonic Genesis, the authorities, narrative voice that defines these bodies sees them for their "good" or "superior" qualities. In the infamous chapter 4 "dreary night" sequence⁴, the scientist boasts of how "beautiful" his creation is with such "lustrous" hair and "pearly" teeth, likewise, Williams invites her readers to appreciate how "fat and buncy" her Rabbit is, and the other general qualities of his coat and colour. Yet, the tonal difference is already exquisite: Victor remarks that the Creature's fantastic qualities are actually too stark to the point that they create a "horrid contrast," while Williams' Rabbit is already explicitly-yet-subtly described with variations of the word "real," such as being "really splendid" and having "real thread whiskers," amounting to a "charming" effect.

³ Truthfully, "DeLacey" is utilized here metaphorically—as other adaptations and responses have literally done—to represent the conjoined idealism and horror expressed by the various members of the DeLacey clan that the Creature euphemistically identifies with the old man in approaching him.

⁴ This is, of course, in accordance with the 1816 text's two-volume arrangement.

Incidentally, the Creature begins as a completely void specimen crafted from previously living tissue of many beings (including humans that could potentially span numerous genders, ages, races and socio-economic backgrounds) who is physically “resuscitated,” but only learns consciousness through singular experience (as opposed to the Rabbit, who is sentient long before he is Real). The Creature’s numerous human parts, however, fail to give him the innate identity of “human.” However, Shelley’s pivotal characters never seem to have a clear sense of what it means to be “human,” despite defending its purity so ardently. The most compelling arguments are the loose citations the Creature recites from his understandings of DeLacey’s translations and conjectures of Milton, Plutarch and Goerte that even the Creature fails to truly reflect on⁵. The Creature’s petition to assert his humanity and to portray his experience rapidly declines into hero-worship of the brand of humanity that the DeLacey clan represents: an awkward celebration of something that teeters between pastoral and poverty porn. Of course, the Creature certainly has no other point of reference for what humanity is or what best represents it, since shadowing the DeLacey family is the closest he ever achieves to living in a human environment. There are multiple instances to be cited throughout his and the scientist’s narrative as to why and how his human-ness is or can be canceled out, none of which need to be individually cited in order to amount to the sum that the Creature can never be permitted the identity of “human” that he apparently so avidly petitions for in his confrontation with Frankenstein on Mont Blanc.

Mont Blanc serves as the same type of narrative stage as the meadow where the Rabbit and the Boy play yet rarely interact in-text (he is often described to be playing apart from the Rabbit, except in instances of heightened drama where he returns to administer only affection, similar to the presence of Milton’s divine bodies): a stage that is both Edenic and like the desert where Christ met with Satan. It is equal parts a runway to model innate, ‘natural’ qualities of the performance and a cross-examination to brutally challenge those very qualities. Here, the Creature attempts to petition the definition of “human” he has learned

⁵ The Creature spends much of his petition to the scientist balancing himself between superficially “being” his Adam or his Satan, but fails to realize that he reflects many qualities of Eve and even channels her most iconic experiences, the most prominent being the refection scene.

from his experience with the DeLacey family to Victor Frankenstein and fails to impress. It should be noted, of course, that the entire DeLacey experience was a failure in the execution of humanity and by virtue was a faulty premise for the Creature to appeal to the scientist. Conversely, the Boy, the opinion that the Rabbit valued the most, had already previously accepted and asserted the Rabbit's Realness, which proved a move that needed not to be replicated in order to emphasize its profoundness; the confrontational and counter-critical opinion of the hivemind rabbits—the first and only characters of the book to recognize and acknowledge the deformity of the rabbit (e.g. his lack of hind legs)— did not and could not amount to the same value as the Boy.

While the definition of what “Real” is clearly defined remains consistent throughout Williams’ story, the criteria to *be* Real shifts dramatically. The Skin Horse, who operates as Williams’ DeLacey figure⁶ insofar as a beacon of idealism of what “Real” means, notes it as a process, as a “thing that happens” when (specific to the parameters of the story) a child loves a toy. According to this romantic definition, the Rabbit becomes Real not even mid-way through the story and long before his Realness is challenged in the yard; the Rabbit is effectively living the pastoral dream of humanity that the Creature aspires to. Yet when the scarlet fever is introduced, a sense of reality is added to the Real. Similar to the Creature’s stay in the “kennel”⁷, the Rabbit endures a miserable experience of doubt when he is discarded as an infectious plaything to the pile of items stored to be burned behind the chicken coop. At this point, the Rabbit cries a “real tear,” which summons the Nursery who offers a *new* definition of “Real,” one where the use of magic promises to make the Rabbit Real to “everyone,” whereas before he was only Real to the Boy, “because he loved” the Rabbit. Following this, the Rabbit, now physically transmogrified by means not described in the text (the inverse to Frankenstein’s Creature, who is created also by a process of

⁶The DeLacey parallel can be further pursued in comparing Shelley’s and Williams’ creation of a “wise old man” figure whom for the majority of the tale is inaccessible due to stratification who resembles a beacon of admirable perfection in spite of—or because of—the presence of deformities that are the byproducts of age and experience (e.g. the Skin Horse’s baldness, DeLacey’s blindness)

⁷ It is more than worth noting that the word “kennel,” which the Creature himself uses, is immediately derived, according to the OED, from the Middle English word “chenil,” meaning “dog.” This automatically stratifies the Creature, by associating him with (interestingly--*domesticated*) animals, away from achieving human.

presumably science and natural magic not explicitly detailed), is “a Real Rabbit at last, at home with the other rabbits”—which presumably are the same rabbits who eschewed his “Realness” earlier in the story.

What could be ascertained from these readings is that the concepts of “Real” and “human,” or applicably of any peer-approved identity whatsoever, operates on an inherently flawed and oxymoronic system that inherently favours a very narrow model defined by rigid elements that vary from individual to individual. The Rabbit being able to accomplish multiple realizations of “Real” while the Creature fails to be “human” (while simultaneously accumulating multiple other readings of “monster,” “devil,” “daemon,” and “fiend” within the span of a single page) illustrates this radical potential. Ultimately the Rabbit is content with either and both states of Real because in both instances he is a firm believer in his identity even in the face of peers who actively try to deny him it while the Creature reflects self-loathing and misery as a reaction to appropriating peer ridicule. This is not to argue that the Rabbit is a superior being to the Creature, or even that the Creature can’t be potentially read as “human” from an individual reader’s perspective, but rather, this is to state that identity and the expectations anticipated to implement it are dependent on social systems that are pointedly highlighted and criticized by both Shelley and Williams.



by thekidatomic

Eat me alive and then make me anew from the scraps
Keep chewing and gnawing, suck my marrow dry
Kiss my chipped ivory bones, treasure the parts of me that broke
long ago
I hope I nourish you
I hope through me you can be something greater

Bury me in damp soil
Throw no roses on my grave
And through the grubs and sticks and filth
With the hesitant summer rains to water me
I'll bloom fresh and fragrant once more

I am here to shelter you, come into my beaten breast
I am once destroyed twice reborn
I will not go away I will not be taken down
Sleep inside my withered corpse
And tomorrow I will bring us water from the well

One day when the sun ceases to rise
I will wake and my body will be my own
No more the creation of outside forces
No more the shell I merely shelter in
And on that day I will scream and scream
Until the blood turns to gold in my throat

By Erinna

Of Blood and Bone

By Melinda Curley

She was not sure how she managed to get out of the house. She did remember the screaming, she remembered the sound of fire and the taste of smoke, she smelt something horrible. Kari had crawled along the ground, under it and slowly made her way out the door, into the back yard.

There was the sound of voices. She made her way to a copse of trees just outside of the yard, smoke in her lungs causing her breaths to come slowly. Kari looked out of the foliage and watched the house be devoured by the starved fire.

The gunshot was what woke her up. One gunshot, her mother screaming and then a second gunshot. Male voices talking about whether or not they should shoot the kid.

"Let's not waste bullets," said a calm voice. "Light the place on fire. Let the smoke kill her."

There was the sound of doors being slammed shut. Windows broken as well. Kari had frozen like a deer when the violence started, and it was only when the smoke started creeping up to the second story that she snapped out of it.

How they didn't spot her leaving she didn't know. She heard a loud discussion broken by jokes and laughing. It was hard to see the faces of the men, but Kari managed to catch one of them. As soon as she did, she understood.

The man had done business with her father, one of three dirigible drivers in the town and by far the poorest. Her father did business with him was because the other two wouldn't, and that meant he could afford to pay a good price for trips made. Kari had overheard the two men arguing one night, her father saying he wouldn't make any more trips for him.

The dark haired man said that the only way that would happen is if one of them were dead.

Kari watched as her house started to crumble. The only reason their house was theirs was because it had been passed down through the family. Its wood was old, the furniture brittle and dry. It was a bonfire waiting for the first match.

"What are we going to do for transport now?" a voice piped up. "You had us destroy the blimp, too."

"This will send a message, I'm sure. The authorities will suspect us, but unless they have evidence, nothing will come of it. Meanwhile, the two other drivers will understand that this is a time for their... sins to be forgiven. One will step forward. We just need to lay low."

There was the sound of an old siren. The men left, quickly, and Kari made sure to remember their silhouettes and voices.

A team of firefighters put it out. It wasn't enough to get the smell of skin out of the air.

Kari managed to slip away without being noticed. Her mother and father were dead. Nothing would change that. She had heard of no magic that would bring them back as they were. They would either be ghosts or they would be animated corpses, puppets pulled by the string of a necromancer. She didn't want that for them.

Her throat hurt and her chest burned. Walking over the rough terrain of the forest floor made it ache worse. She wanted it to leave, but Kari wondered if it ever would.

There were stories about the forest. Things, people, living in there that could harm or help you. Some people would go into the forest and bring back food, herbs, and some people would go into it seeking help. They would return, all concern they had about their problem gone. There were the few that did not return.

Maybe she would be one of them.

Kari wasn't sure how far she'd walked or for how long. When she reached the point where the pain in her neck and chest were too much to keep moving, she sat down on a fallen tree and put her head in her hands.

She could simply go to the authorities, if she went home. Could tell them what happened. Yet - what would be the worst they could do to them? Hang them? Send them to prison?

They killed her parents and they tried to kill her. They destroyed her home, her ancestral home. That land had seen her grow. They'd done far worse, too - she knew it from the way her father wouldn't speak when he came home, from the way he looked fearful and haunted.

No, Kari thought. She inhaled deeply, causing a spark of pain in her lungs. She didn't know what she would do to them yet. Something would come along.

The rage made her get back up and continue walking until, at last, she saw a light in the forest. An electric lamp shone through the trees. Kari made her way to it.

When she reached the source of the light, Kari needed to stand back and blink a bit. The house was the oddest thing she'd ever seen. Its main building was off the ground, on four large poles, and a staircase led up to it. It was a domed octagon. A gravel road led to small buildings, little shacks as well as a small pond.

Strange little statues were placed along the path, as well as symbols. A sphere here, a square there, a triangle here. Kari couldn't make them out very well due to the darkness, but she was positive there were more.

She put her hand on the railing of the staircase and started to ascend. Her chest burned with every step, her heart pounding hard. When she reached the door she was wheezing, and tears were in her eyes from the pain. Kari knocked on the door several times as she tried to catch her breath.

The door opened. A thin, pale man looked down at her from behind thick glasses. "Oh," he said. His eyes widened. "Come in."

Kari did so. Hardwood floor inside the house was cool against her feet scratched and injured feet. Now, in the light, she could see what the damage was. She had been burned, small, pink marks on her arms and legs. Hair was singed. Now that she was no longer concerned about getting away from her house, she realized she could smell burning skin and smoke every time she inhaled.

There was the sound of footsteps. A pair of women, one elderly and plump, one young and thin, appeared before her. The old woman said "Oh, dear. Keep an eye on her, Sharon. I'll be right back."

Kari realized how tired she was. The old woman fussed over her arms and legs, tending to her burns.

"That smoke we saw..." The man said.

"My house," Kari said. "They burned down my house. They killed my Mom and Dad. They tried to kill me too."

They didn't ask many questions. Once her burns had been tended to, the old woman placed two fingers to Kari's mouth. Like pulling out a tissue from a box, she pulled a thin line of smoke from Kari. It dissipated in the air.

"I can't say how much more is in there," the old woman said. "That should make breathing easier for you."

"Maybe you should rest?" Sharon said. She tucked her red hair behind her head.

They could kill her in her sleep, Kari thought. Yet at the same time, would they tend to her wounds and remove smoke from her lungs if they were just planning on snuffing out her life anyway?

She was directed to the attic. The ceiling was curved, and Kari knew she needed to be careful. Sharon took her to a twin sized bed and told her "Here. I know that the smell of books can be kind of overwhelming up here, but you'll get used to it. If you can't sleep, tell one of us and we'll brew some tea."

Kari murmured "Thanks."

Sharon climbed down the ladder. Kari curled up in the bed and fell asleep.

Flames roared through her dreams.

It was a few days before Kari felt confident enough to speak to them in more than a few words, about things that were actually meaningful. "You're witches, aren't you?" Kari asked, blurting it out at last. The three other people at the table looked up and over to her.

"And wizard," James murmured, looking up from his notebook.

"Well, yes," Edith said. She sat down her cup of tea. "Most people were well aware we lived in here. Perhaps your family just never had need of us?"

Kari couldn't remember a single time her father or mother went into the forest. She shook her head. "No. I mean, some people would go hunting in the forest, and some would go looking for herbs or plants to eat, but... There are stories."

"We're not the only things that live here," Sharon admitted. "Most of the time we help out with injuries or basic things, though. My grandma's lived here for a while."

Edith smiled. "Yes. It's a good house, easily kept. Overall, it's a peaceful area. Oh - James, Sharon? We're almost out of bacon. You may want to go to the store later."

"It gets dark early this time of year," James said. "Let us finish breakfast and then we'll go get groceries."

The two of them left, leaving Kari alone with Edith. The old woman would sit and read, wearing glasses and drinking tea the entire time. Kari tried to be quiet, knowing she was a guest in their house. While Edith read, Kari went back up to the library and looked at some of the books.

Making her way through them was a long process. Most of the books talked about seasonal rituals, the types of herbs and roots that could be used for one thing or another. Some of them would get into more depth, discussing spells and curses.

Those were the ones that Kari focused on the most.

She found a book that discussed how to keep a person alive. Kari assumed it was for keeping a person alive so their relatives could say their goodbyes. It gave her a different idea, though. There was another book that talked about the uses for flesh, how if somehow you lost a limb, it wouldn't need to go to waste.

Ideas grew and twisted in her mind as she poured through them. If this was possible and she could do it - well. It would be very interesting indeed.

Weeks passed. She asked if she could have a notebook and was readily given one. "We have a lot hanging around the house," Sharon said. "What are you going to use it for?"

"Oh, this and that," Kari said, waving a hand dismissively. "I can't stay here forever. This will help me take knowledge with me."

"Well, sounds solid enough," Sharon answered. She gave Kari a notebook and went back to her own studies.

Kari wrote in the notebook, drawing pictures of herbs, leaves, roots, writing down spells. She wrote down one for illusion, one for extending a life, as well as other spells. Kari suspected that none of them would be happy to see how focused she'd become on necromancy and flight spells.

She worked by the electric lamp, a thing that looked like a brass lantern. Soon she could have said the ingredients for the spells in her sleep. Secretly - though why bother, it wasn't like magic was taboo in this house - she practiced, changing the color and cut of her hair, changing her eyes from brown to blue.

One morning she was sure she was ready. She would say her goodbyes the next day, and leave. Kari had placed the books carefully back on the shelves when she heard the sound of clothes rustling behind her.

She turned. Edith stood behind her, watching her like an old owl watched someone from a tree. Kari didn't speak. Would she be kicked out now? Had she stayed beyond her welcome? She'd been here for at least three months, but nobody had told her when she needed to leave.

"I see that you're almost ready to leave," Edith said. "Has your time here been useful?"

Kari nodded. "I can't thank you enough for everything."

"Ah, it didn't hurt us to take another into our house. At least it hasn't yet."

Kari looked at her hands. "Everyone thinks I died in that fire," Kari said frankly. "I don't want any harm to come to you. I'll disguise myself when I leave, so everyone will think I did die. Maybe - for all intents and purposes I did."

Edith sat on the end of the bed, rubbing her chin. "I suppose you'll go searching for those responsible," she said.

Kari looked up at her. It was no use to lie to Edith. "You probably don't approve."

Edith rose from the bed and began to climb down the ladder. When half of her body was out of the attic, she said "I will not assist you, but I will not hinder you either."

The day after that, Kari packed her things. They only filled one bag. Sharon, James, and Edith all gave her hugs.

"Here's a little farewell gift for you," James said. "It contains a lot of herbs and things used in spells. Basically an odd assortment of useful items. I mean, if you're going to be taking up magic?"

"I am, yeah," Kari said, carefully taking the box. It had a little weight to it, but nothing she couldn't carry. "Thank you. If I never see you again - I appreciate everything you've done for me. And if I do see you again, well, I'll always be willing to help you."

Edith gently patted Kari on the shoulder, and Sharon gave her a hug before she left. Kari made her way down the stairs and the gravel driveway. The forest and everything in it wasn't hard to navigate in the daytime.

She found the area where her home once stood without any trouble. Kari stepped out of the forest behind it, surveying the dark, burnt ground without expression. She would

mourn properly, once the people that killed her family and destroyed her home were punished. She would find a way to get gravestones for them. She was sure they didn't have decent ones.

Kari used an illusion spell. The magic made her hair look shorter and changed the color from red to black, and it changed her brown eyes to blue. Her face no longer looked round and babyish, but sharp and angular.

Nobody would know it was her. Kari walked to the road and began to follow it, making her way into the town.

William Orchard liked to spend his money on drink. He spent a great deal of time in the taverns, playing cards and only getting a little tipsy. His alcohol tolerance was stronger than a viking's.

He had finished gambling for the night and was leaving for home when there was a polite cough from nearby. William looked over and tilted his head. A young woman in a cloak looked up at him.

"Sir?" she asked. "I need to find a house nearby, but I'm not very familiar with the area... My grandmother says it's in the woods. Could you please help me? I have some money I could give you for your trouble."

More money meant more beer. William shrugged. "Sure, love. Lead the way and I'll be here, waiting to pummel anyone that tries to hurt you."

They made their way into the woods, at least a mile or two away from the main town. "How far away does your grandmother live?" he asked, frowning. Now he began to wonder whether or not he was being played.

The woman turned and pulled down the hood of her cloak. They had reached a clearing. "Here," she said.

The spell crumbled from her. William saw before him a ghost and no longer was he tipsy.

"You're - I was only the driver of the car," he croaked. "How did you survive?"

Kari smiled at him. Now she didn't bother trying to hide the damage done to her voice. "That's not something either of us needs to worry about."

Before William could run, Kari blew something from her hand into his face. William coughed and choked once, and then fell to the ground, unconscious.

Jeff heard something outside. For the first ten minutes or so, he thought it was some kind of animal. It kept pacing around, after all, and it wasn't very loud. At the eleventh minute, he noticed the sound of the locks rattling.

He left the television running when he got up. Maybe whoever was out there would think that he hadn't heard them. He'd have the element of surprise. The news anchor described how winds were building up in the east coast, and that many people were preparing.

Jeff slipped along the wall, listening for the door to rattle again. He kept quiet, expecting it to move again. When it did, he'd open the door and leap at the trespasser.

The door rattled, as if on cue.

Jeff lunged, twisting the doorknob and slamming the door open. He plunged the knife into the figure. There was no cry of pain, blood, anything. Jeff pulled the knife out and blinked at it, seeing some hay attached.

"Damn Jacob," he snapped. "Of course he'd pull something like this..."

He pushed the scarecrow over. It fell with a soft rustle of burlap and the shifting of hay. Shaking his head, he turned around.

Jeff received a face full of dust. He coughed and stumbled back, looking through watering eyes at the one responsible.

It took him a moment to figure out who she was. Some people don't think of someone once they're dead. Jeff was one of those people.

Before he passed out, he realized that he'd never seen someone look so alive.

It was the morning when Jacob heard a knock at the door. He pulled on pants and a shirt and hastily went to the door.

A young woman stood outside. She smiled politely. "Good morning. How are you?" Jacob shrugged. "Well, I'm all right. Is there something you need?"

"Yes. My father needs some help with some wood he's cut. We need an extra hand to bring the wood back. It turns out that four arms aren't enough."

Jacob rubbed his neck. "Well - All right. Let me put on my shoes."

He turned and went to get them, leaving the door open. The girl came in after him. As he began to put on his shoes, he looked up and saw the girl standing over him.

"Thanks for your help," she said, holding out her hand. He thought she meant to give him an advanced payment. No money, only powder was in it. "But if it wasn't for you, I wouldn't need it in the first place."

She blew on the powder. Jacob inhaled it and started coughing and spluttering as some got in his mouth and nose and eyes. It didn't take long for him to follow the rest.

"Go gather the others, we'll need to pay a visit to someone later," Jordan told Noah. He drank from a large coffee cup and looked over at him. "Be quick."

Noah left and made his way down the street. Spencer lived closest - he'd be easiest to go to. He knocked on the door. Once, twice. Three times. No response. Noah twisted the doorknob and opened it slowly.

Odd. Spencer wouldn't have just left the door open like that. Could something have happened to him? They'd angered a lot of people, yes. Yet nobody had evidence against them. The authorities wouldn't have come for them unless they had some.

Noah called for him.

Silence.

Noah slunk out of the house and made his way back to Jordan.

Jordan tilted his head at Noah. "No sign of him?"

"Nothing. He doesn't leave the house before twelve," Noah said anxiously. "Should I go check on the others?"

"All right," Jordan said. "You may have just missed him. Even the most predictable person doesn't always follow their schedule."

Noah left the house, jumping at the smallest rustle of bushes. Will wasn't at his house. Neither was Jacob, or Jeff. All four of them were missing.

He knew getting in with them was a bad idea. They were a bad sort. Jordan got orders from other people, higher ups, but even then he had a lot of power. Some of the things they did he didn't approve of. Except money was money, and he had to look out for number one.

Noah opened the door to Jordan's house. He scurried in and looked around.

"Jordan?" he called. He made his way into the kitchen.

Jordan was there. He was unconscious and sprawled on the floor. Above him stood a woman in a cloak, and Jordan took a moment to place her. Once he recognized her eyes and the fire in them, he knew who she was. He knew that somehow, she was responsible for the disappearances of everyone.

Noah fell to his knees. "Please don't kill me," he croaked. "Please don't kill me."

Kari looked at him calmly. There was a burning coldness in her eyes. "You'd like it if I didn't, wouldn't you?"

Noah nodded over and over. "Y-yes," he croaked.

"Then I expect no tears from you."

He was asleep before he could wonder what she meant.

The moon lit up a clearing in the forest. It was wide and perfect for a takeoff, as well as magic, Kari thought.

Of course, she needed to build the airship first. Kari took all the herbs and things she needed from her suitcase. The men, feet at the inside of the circle they made, were still asleep. It made things easier for Kari.

Their screams would've been distracting.

The sound of flesh tearing and rearranging itself could be heard. If a hunter had passed by, they would certainly hear the sound of bones breaking and growing and knitting back together. They would hear the sickening sound of human growth, of the human body changed and magnified and twisted.

Once it was all finished, Kari stood and admired her new airship.

Bladders and skin, able to hold air, formed the balloon. Bones kept the balloon rigid. Tendons and sinews kept it connected to the gondola. The gondola itself was bone as well. Rudders were the same cartilage that made up ears and noses. The gas bag was easy - lungs and stomachs.

It was small - it certainly would only fit one person at the moment, possibly two. If her magic worked, however, then it would begin to grow. At the moment the zeppelin was only a child.

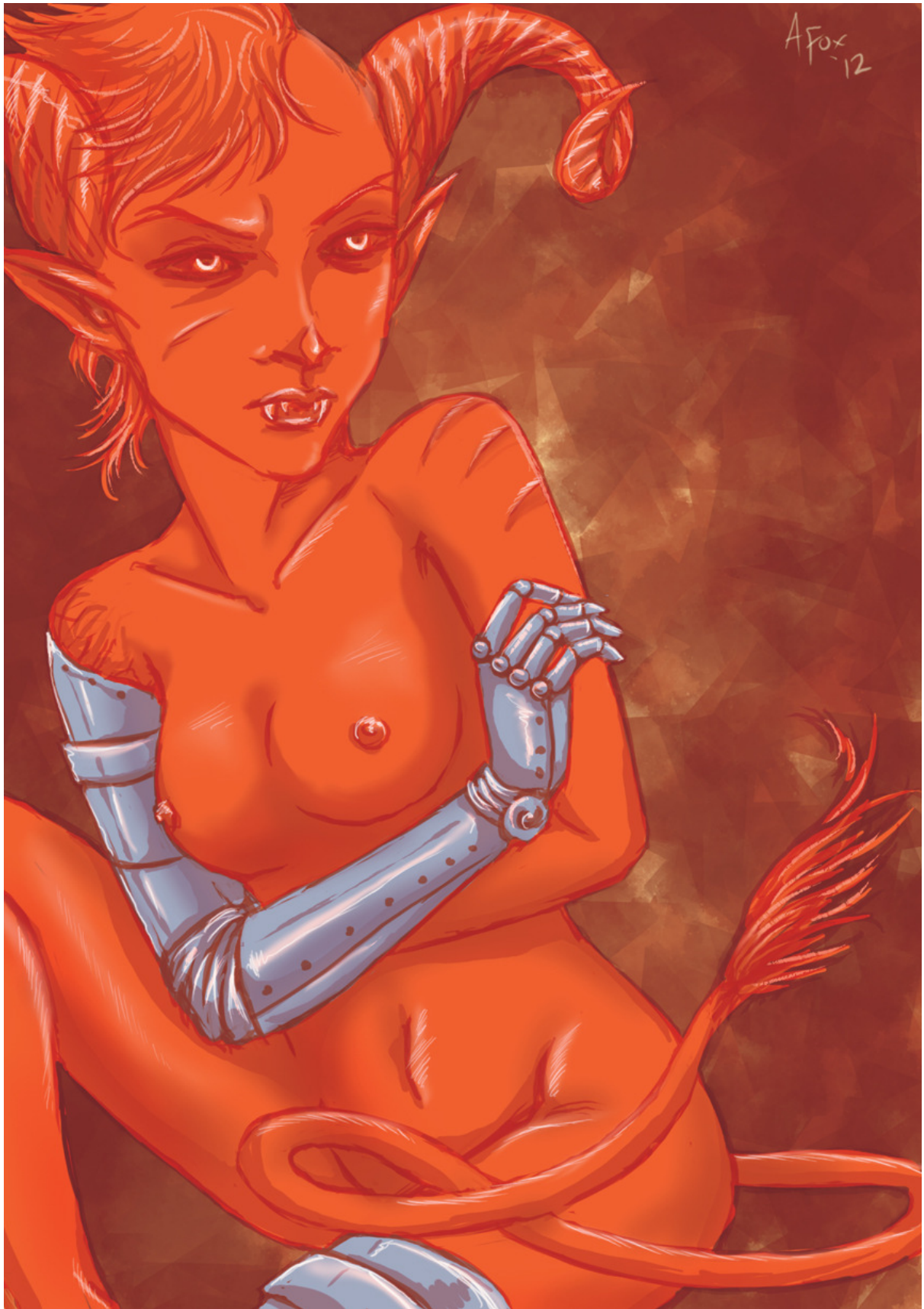
She opened the door and pulled down the ladder, bones that glistened red. Kari placed her luggage in it as well as some bags that contained some money and gold she'd lifted from the houses that she'd visited. It would be enough to begin a business. She could continue her father's legacy, and there would be enough left over for headstones.

Kari knew that few people would approve of a blimp of blood and bone. She uttered words of power and made gestures with her hands, and an illusion fell on the zeppelin, covering it like a blanket of snow. Now it wouldn't look out of the ordinary.

Smiling, Kari walked to the back and opened up a door, into a small room. She turned on a small lantern.

Six horrified faces stared at her.

"This is your Captain speaking," she said brightly. "Prepare for take-off."



By Audrey Fox

More Human Than Human: A Personal Biopunk Manifesto

By Mary Vein (maryborsellino.com / mizmary@gmail.com)

When I was seventeen I got hit by a bus and I remember the next week thereafter in the most fragmented of snatches, the pull of surgical thread lacing a headwound closed and the ragged knife-edge of a broken front tooth, the red raw sight of my teenage face in the mirror and the hair-fine crack running up the white shape of my arm bone on an x-ray.

My brother apparently played hour upon hour of playstation at my insistence, so I could listen and watch. I wish I could remember that part.

That was when I started chasing the themes of identity, memory, and self which are present in my writing now, almost fourteen years later. My father -- first at my bedside in the emergency room, despite having left without a goodbye word a year beforehand -- told me that I was mouthy and contrary and insistent in my defiance against the hospital's suggestion that I stay overnight; I was convinced I'd get a golden staph infection if I was admitted to a ward, and that this infection would kill me.

The funny part is that it wasn't an invader which corrupted my sense of the body, not an infection or disease or foreign object. It was an absence. The blank in the spooling cinematic record of my young life, the FOOTAGE NOT FOUND where these silly concussed emergency-room protests should have been, that was an empty space which began to haunt me and has never let up.

Because if there was a Me that I could not remember, one outside the continuity of consciousness which was my sense of self, then I wasn't a single, closed, discrete being, was I? I was just a rough assemblage of puzzle pieces which approximated "Mary".

Other people probably come by this knowledge by less dramatic means than being hit by a bus. They know somebody with Alzheimer's, or they have to wear glasses, or something else. Something alerts them to the fact that there can't possibly be such a thing as an immortal soul, because who we are is so mutable, so ever-changing. There's no perfect, pristine, version of each of us, like those perfect measurements that're stored somewhere in France, I think it is -- this is the Centimeter by which all others will be measured, this is the Gram.

There's no special case in a lab somewhere with neatly weighed and measured objects, "this is the Mary", "this is the Jack". If Mary has a brain injury and loses a week and gains headaches, or Jack gets a degenerative disease that eats his memories away from him, what would happen to those objects?

To be mortal is to be mutable, and anything as mutable as the self can have no immortal core.

And so my fascination with biopunk was born. Biopunk, to me, is a way of saying "if there's no essential static picture which equates to Mary, just a collection of pieces which form a momentary image, then what happens if we REALLY shake the bits up?"

Biopunk is taking meds to manage my mental illness, like putting on shoes so my bare feet won't be cut by broken glass. There's broken glass inside my brain; I need 150mg of combat boots a day. Biopunk is scar tissue where the stitches on my busted kneecap used to be, the ugly swell of newer pink flesh that says "I healed".

My favourite biopunk stories are Frankenstein, where stitched-up discards make a brand new person who then has to stumble out into the world and work out who he is, what these borrowed pieces mean in this new configuration. And Return to Oz, that scary mess of a children's movie where villains have wheels for hands and feet, and witches keep corridors full of heads so they can change them at their whim, and primitive electroshock machines promise to electrocute the dreams right out of young girls' heads.

Mombi, the witch with her chamber of heads, can only remember the experiences of each head while she's wearing it. Her personality changes as she changes from one face and skull to another. Yet everyone thinks of her as a single continuous being, an identity somehow apart from her transplanted heads.

Sometimes you read about something similar in real transplant patients: a guy gets someone else's heart or kidney or liver and suddenly he likes jazz or hamburgers or going for walks at night, when he'd never liked that thing before, when the old owner of his new organ had loved that very same thing.

I have no idea how true or not true stories like that are, but either way, how incredibly fucking cool is that? The idea that we are so mutable that little cells of each of us break off and re-form when stitched up to other bodies, chips of identity folded into the new surrounding?

It's the coolest damn thing. I felt so guilty, a few months back, when a webcomic that I and a bunch of my friends read featured a plot twist where two dead characters got mashed up into a single ghost -- because I thought that was fucking rad, amazing and fascinating and maybe even kind of sexy, in a creepy loss-of-mental-integrity kind of way. But my friends, holy crap, they were so repulsed and upset and disgusted that I ended up feeling like the worst kind of shit for being delighted when they'd been so distraught. I still feel guilty even as I type this!

I totally get why biopunk stuff has the potential to upset people. But sometimes, that's what punk of any kind DOES. Even DIY, that most constructive and innocuous element of punk, upsets people who like to be told exactly what it is that they should want and own -- and I don't mean that in a snide way, I swear. Conformity is comforting! Sometimes being radical is just too much hard work, too exhausting.

But yeah, biopunk has the potential to be pretty in-your-face. One of the hottest scenes from any movie I can remember seeing in my nascent, fumbling years was the moment in ExistenZ where the guy gets down on his knees and tongues the port installed in the small of the girl's back. David Cronenberg's movies in general are a good example of the point where body horror dances that blade-edge between repulsion and attraction, that stitched-up knife cut of desire for the mutated and the mutant and the mutable.

I love stories about spaceships powered by psychic brains grafted into the machinery. I love reading about real-life, real-world people who grow their own wedding rings from a chip of bone from their lover's jaw. I love medicine and skin grafts and video games where instead of health potions and mana potions you have to find syringes full of upgrades and alterations, turning your character into a creature who is no longer the standard-model human in order to win the fight.

I love crying at Kazuo Ishiguro's "Never Let Me Go", a delicate novel about being a clone and being human, and I love cheering at David in the schlocky sci-fi horror movie Prometheus, a carefully created being who exhibits all the curiosity and lack of conscience and cheerful bloodthirsty vengeance of any human child.

I love knowing that every part I add to or subtract from myself changes the sum total of that self. That I am my own creation, to craft and alter and destroy as fate and time and life and my own whims see fit.

If all your memories got taken out of your head tomorrow, and put into someone else, where would "you" exist? In your body? In the mind that now had your memories? Both? Neither?

My absolute favourite biopunk story might be Frankenstein -- a topic too big to properly include here -- but my favourite biopunk lines from any story are from Blade Runner, a movie made the year I was born.

Deckard: Remember the spider that lived outside your window? Orange body, green legs. Watched her build a web all summer, then one day there's a big egg in it. The egg hatched...

Rachael: The egg hatched...

Deckard: Yeah...

Rachael: ...and a hundred baby spiders came out... and they ate her.

Deckard: Implants. Those aren't your memories, they're somebody else's.

Satyrus
marinus.



Thank you for reading Patchwork
Children. I hope there were bits
that you loved and bits that you

This man-goat-fish "merman satyr" is an illustration from
a 1696 volume, *Specula physico-mathematico-historica* by
Johann Zahn. hated.

Credit: Archival Photograph by Mr. Sean Linehan, NOS,
NGS [libr0079]

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You can email anyone from it@
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XXX Mary