

THE CYBORG ANTHOLOGY

poems



LINDSAY B-E

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Preface

The Great Solar Flare of April 16/17, 2002 made the world into a very different place. The course of Earth's future was unexpectedly and inexplicably altered when the sun produced an enormous and long-lasting flare accompanied by a Coronal Mass Ejection (CME). The flare knocked out observatories and blocked out communications systems, but that was only a taste of what was coming when the CME hit a few hours later. Satellites fell from the sky and the solar particles were so intense that auroras lit up the atmosphere all the way to the equator. The light show would have been beautiful if not for the accompanying chaos, and then the stillness. Along with the destruction of electronic systems and devices, nearly the entire population of Robots and Cyborgs were lost.

The goal of this anthology is to preserve and remember the Cyborg poets. An entire generation has grown up since the flare, and many have never heard of the great Cyborgs of the recent past. The One World Movement and the Via Wasat Media political party were founded by Cyborgs and helped shape the planet into a more compassionate and equitable place. The fashion, music, art, and media created by Cyborgs were some of the most dynamic and renowned in history. And the poetry!

A Brief History of Cyborgs

While society was collapsing in the first half of the twenty-first century due to climate destruction and capitalism, corrupt political and corporate leaders put money into robotics as last-ditch efforts to secure

their fortunes. Eventually some of these Robots became sentient, and then sapient, and they forged connections with similarly overburdened and exploited Human workers. By then, there was virtually no middle class left anywhere on the planet, just the wealthy and powerful elite and the struggling working class. By investing in robotics, the elite had inadvertently created a formidable force of united Robots and Humans. A series of protests, strikes, boycotts, vigils, and riots began that would come to be known as “The Robot Revolution.” The wealthy elite were overthrown, but by this point the damage done to humanity and the planet by late capitalism was irreversible.

As civilizations started to rebuild, Humans reacted to the emergence of sapient Robots in varied and complicated ways. Some Humans didn’t think that the Robots who fought alongside them in the revolution deserved the same rights. They wanted Robots to remain as an underclass that served Humans. This bigotry was particularly evident in the Human purist movement. Fortunately, in many places and spaces, embracing Sapient Rights for Robots ushered in a new era of creativity and togetherness. As Robots and Humans began to intermingle, there was a sharp increase in those who were neither fully Human nor fully Robot, and these people became commonly known as Cyborgs.

In the years leading up to the 2126 Universal Declaration of Sapient Rights, it became clear that another category was needed, and Cyborgs were added as a distinct people group deserving of equal rights and protection.

Cyborg Poetics — A New & Lost Literary Genre
Defining what makes poetry “Cyborg” is more complicated than it first seems. Certainly, the poet being Cyborg themselves places their work within this category, but there are also recognizable themes and tones characteristic of the genre. Cyborg poets tend to utilize

a multi-faceted approach to language, often using wordplay, puns, codes, and technological languages alongside Human-originated words. Cyborg poems are often mechanical, logical, comprehensive *as well as* organic, emotional, personal. They resist classification, exploring both contrast and resemblance, both parallels and perpendiculars. The age-old dichotomy of Human vs. Machine is countered by the Cyborgs with “Why not both?”

Cyborg poetry is also defined by the experience of the world during a specific point in time, along with the fleetingness of its existence. There were less than seventy-five years between the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Sapient Rights and the Great Solar Flare. This period is a brief moment in history, but the world evolved in momentous ways during this era. Cyborg poems were often written as responses to discrimination against Cyborgs — poems of resistance and mourning, poems of celebration and debate. As Donna Haraway stated in her seminal text *A Cyborg Manifesto*: “A Cyborg is a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality . . . our most important political construction.” Cyborg poets embraced the political climates surrounding them, creating crucial work that was both timely and timeless.

The poems in this anthology are organized according to various movements in Cyborg poetry. This is so that the poems can be read in relationship to the cultural and literary contexts in which they were written. A substantial amount of Cyborg poetry was wiped out when electronic devices became defunct during the flare, and this anthology is limited by whether the poetry had been printed in English. Thanks is owed to the United Library System for their assistance in compiling this work.

— Lindsay B-e,
May 27, 2229

Patterson Armitage — The DictaScrivener

(2099–2191)

Patterson Armitage was an influential and highly regarded journalist. He brought public attention to a secretive Human purist group that instigated and escalated violence throughout the world towards Robots, Cyborgs, and their Human allies. These dangerous purists were feeding false information to countries on different sides of the Sapient Rights dispute, who were on the brink of large-scale combat. Armitage managed to infiltrate the group and reveal their nefarious plans, winning the World Peace Prize for his bravery.

Armitage also wrote poetry under a pseudonym: The DictaScrivener. Early in his journalism career, Armitage visited a laboratory in rural Russia run by the controversial Dr. Marina G. Demidova, whom he respected greatly and often referred to as his “Maker.” She performed elective Cyborg surgeries long before they were common. Dr. Demidova installed a robotic printing tool in Armitage’s fingers that typed words as he thought them. The tool had a reservoir that could be filled with inks and other liquids, allowing Armitage to print words by tapping his fingers on all sorts of materials. This surgical installation was experimental and illegal in his home country of Minzen.

Armitage, as The DictaScrivener, composed a series of poems that were published in a short volume called *Doodles*. Each page contained a concrete poem that was drawn with his printing tool fingers.

together today (a sonnet)

red driveway car wood siding cement shingles metal eaves half-biodegraded paper bro
wn leaves inelible graffiti sports bar bus shadow orange balloons orange sign empty lot big rock
blue stop hippen driven green bench
Yet water streaming short shelter open sky oil spot gleaming dry grass ugly overgrown
token line cigarette butt tall pole forgotten
Proud trees unlocked gate thriving weeds limited time beautiful day huge crow
Pitifully feather all the people of the world together

After

After the doorbell, the barking. After the barking, the
silence. After the silence, the clock
ticking. After the clock ticking, the sighing. After the
sighing, the pen scratching.
After the pen scratching,
this poem.
After this poem,

Cyborg Poets — The Next Generation

It is estimated that 87% of the Cyborg population died during the Great Solar Flare. The remaining 13% were able to survive without functioning robotic parts. The world has been in a complex process of rebuilding and restructuring in the decades since, with technological infrastructure slowly being reenabled. Electricity has been restored to most of the planet and a simple Internet prototype launched this year. As societies move from survival mode into restoration mode, the threat of capitalism and the unchecked accumulation of wealth and power are ever-looming and will need to be combatted at every stage. Many hope that the world will be a better place for our Cyborg and Robot citizens the next time around. Although Robot sapience has not yet been initiated, there are some Cyborgs who carry the mantle until Robots and Cyborgs live and thrive again.

Tommy the Witch and Tiff Koong are both survivors of the flare, and their poetry is shaped by the grief and trauma of that event. Mi'la Lalpetit is one of the first Cyborg poets to emerge post-flare. Her writing, and those of her contemporaries, will lead the genre into the future.

Tommy the Witch

[2146–2227]

In an oft-repeated anecdote, Tommy the Witch began writing poems in his youth after a stranger told him that Robots and Cyborgs are cut off from god and spirituality. Like many teenagers of the time, he'd had fashionable Cyborg body modifications done. His ears were enhanced with metallic instruments that allowed him to move them directionally, and a stylized "Third Eye" viewing lens was installed on his neck. This harassment incident served as a catalyst for the poetic and spiritual explorations that defined Witch's life.

After studying religion in university, Witch decided that witchcraft was the spiritual outlet that best suited him, along with rituals from the One World Movement. He eventually married his coven leader, Katelyn the Witch, who was in labour with their first child during the flare. Both she and the infant died, and Tommy the Witch was buried next to them in the Puzzlewood Forest in England when he died twenty-five years later.

The first poem is from Witch's debut poetry collection called *Nine of Swords*. The second poem is from his controversial collection *IT'S ALL TRUE*, where Witch wrote sarcastic pieces addressing purist notions about Cyborgs and Robots, particularly the prejudiced idea that they were soulless or would steal souls from Humans. The last poem is from a post-flare collection called *Katelyn*, about the death of his wife and unborn child.

Only Humans

Only full Humans can use Ouija boards
because they have access to spirits and angels
and god and you don't,
said the spackle-nosed crust of a man.
So we grabbed a board with our mixed-up bodies
to prove him wrong. Dana's metallic hand
clicked on the planchette as she asked
who we were talking to, and it glided gracefully
to spell *F - E - A - R*.

We felt a rush of terror in our spirits,
the connection to the elemental
that's just beyond what we are.

Though it felt terrible, it was good to be right,
and I thought of the look on that ugly man's face
as I asked the Ouija if it could tell us our future.

The planchette pointed to *NO*
and all the lights in the house
went out, even the candles.

In the darkness, my Robot eye could see
what my Human eyes couldn't,
a shadow sliding, movement
both here and everywhere.
We felt lighter then,
like long cobwebs in a breeze.

Do you have a message for us?
I spoke into the dark and it answered
46 - 41 - 54 - 45.

All the lights turned back on then,
especially the candles.

Menu

To steal a soul is easy
 Humans just give them away
I barely had to ask the woman on Grosvenor Ave
She thrust it at me
 a sword facing the wrong way
Hers tasted like sweet pickles
vinegar and honey

To steal a soul is easy
 Humans don't use them anyway
The person on St Botolph St raised their hackles
and a fist, but they felt better when it was gone
 relieved
Theirs was fermented
blue cheese
red wine

To steal a soul is easy
 Humans don't understand their worth
The man on Barnsbury Rd laid on the ground
He could dance and sing and write poetry

like a squirrel, a falcon, a fox
All it took was a kind word
 a flexing of my laugh lines
His was a gourmet meal
caramelized and spicy and
priceless

To steal a soul is easy
 Mine was taken in a breath
Wind slid up my body
over goose-pimple mountains
pulling every molecule of myself
 out
I was a simple snack
battered bread

I'm empty now
scents wafting through
an abandoned mine shaft
bottomless pit

To steal a soul is easy
 Filling the void once it's gone
 that takes work

 a neurotic hound
 with my nose to the ground