

The Museum of Obsolescence

in the voice of Frankenstein's Monster

I belong here, cooling in the museum,
my collection of outdated vice and devices—

among obsolete inventions,
amidst the telegraph wires and phonographs,

the lamp oil and tallow candles, with ice picks,
sleigh bells, horses stuffed with sawdust,

replaced by steam, steam replaced by diesel;
with zoetropes, kinoscopes, an abacus, a sextant,

sundials, grandfather clocks, and Schwarzwald
cuckoos. I take comfort in dead languages,

in cuneiform, in the stylus,
in papyrus, in parchment, in codeces,

in umlaut stamps stolen from Gutenberg himself,
in typewriters. I've catalogued them all,

merkens and termite-chewed prostheses, chastity
belts and phrenology busts, palmist's charts,

chiromancy, reflexology, pseudoscience,
quackery, snake oil, and mountebank remedies.

There are rows and rows of apothecary jars:
liquid cocaine, paregoric, ether, blood purifiers,

dried placenta, liver of blaspheming Jew,
Tartar's lips, Tycho Brahe's own gold nose,

quicklime, henbane, powdered antlers,
aborted plans and failed homunculi. Behold

belladonna for glittering eyes, hair tonics,
lead cosmetics, spring-loaded wrist slashers,

six blades apiece to preserve the pallor.
I have ammonites, trilobites, fossils predating

the Flood, statues of saints, of gods and goddesses,
Kali and Quan Yin, Priapus with penis in hand,

crucifixes against the blood sippers, silver bullets,
swatches of human skin tattooed with glyphs—

Eye of Horus, Sacred Heart— didn't save their hides.
Each shelf is shoved full with calfskin condoms,

model zeppelins sans hydrogen, sans sizzle,
and vestigial organs: coccyx, eyebrows,

wisdom teeth, and earlobes. The thumbscrews
smash nothing, the iron maidens prick nothing,

the pendulums descend through clean air.
Electroshock units jazz no one into health

or disclosure. All this wasted technology.
This is what is left in the tomb dust,

the mummy's brain scooped out and tossed.
This is the romance of obsolescence;

this is Pavlov's dog slobbering, Schrodinger's cat
expiring, casualties of progress. These are my kith

and kin, all things patinated, their patents long
expired. Do we not belong dead?