



**Sage Cigarettes
Magazine**

**Cryptid Issue
2021**



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Dear Readers,

We want to start this letter with a big ol' THANK YOU from us to you. Thank you for being here. If you submitted, thank you for sharing a piece of your heart with us. If you've been here before, thank you for coming back. If this is your first time, welcome, and thank you for giving us a shot. Like many of you, there were significant events this year that darkened our doorsteps, our minds and spirits. 2021 was a toughie, much like it's sister 2020, but it's drawing to a close. One thing that has kept our team together and in good spirits was our horror movie podcast, A Ghost in the Magazine. We know, though, that not everyone who loves lit loves ghosts. So to marry our two loves together, the Cryptid Issue was born. Just a little mystery and unknown that may give you a mild shiver, but nothing a blanket and a hug can't cure. We hope you enjoy reading it as much as we enjoyed putting it together.



Portrait of the Artist as Manananggal

I.

Portrait of the artist as manananggal. Of manananggal as ghazal. How do I bridge myself? When in the end I am not art and everything is a monster?

*Jackfruit cracked yellow jewels of skin. Rotting meat belly stretched ready for blood. Bully among classmates. Blessed art Thou amongst monsters.*¹

Take my tongue and twist it around pregnant pauses. I am a child spilled in half, drowning myself in the work, cracking open my sixth can of Monster.

*Tonight, savage her body to the pale clocks. The dim ways of kiss, the chiming hands, the ribcage gates of Troy. My tongue's a long scar they mistake for monster.*²

I fly over the rooftops of all the places I came from. My wings rupture the pale moon, casting new shapes over the sleeping heads of conquered monsters.

*Conquering limbs and name, astride sea gates the imprisoned Mother of Exiles. Give me your tired, your tempest, your teeming monsters.*³

II.

Portrait of ghazal as found poem. Portrait of found poem as severed name.
Portrait of name as given history. History as blackout. Blackout as monster.

*History is a hideous female, severing intestines, sprouting huge. The Tagalog separates
itself. Crushed by sunrise. The west, salt and holy. Takot ka ba sa monster?*⁴

The gulf of saltwater laps at my toes, smooths the hard edge of remembering. Fate
is crossing water when we die. The land forgets me. We are each other's monsters.

*Hatred passed through, subway train lurching. Machinery of memory, a harshness.
Where is the dark rich land we wanted to wander through? My blood monster.*⁵

Tear me through the middle like paper. Throw my heart to the jungle, my feet to desert.
This way I am loved and lost, living like mother's exiled monster.

*So much an address it was like something living. Years after, you do not know what the address was. It is
not a name, not a thing that exists, but some monster.*⁶

The found phrases in each italicized couplet are from the following works:

1. "Blessed Fruit" by Isabel Garcia-Gonzales, from *Kuwento: Lost Things*, an anthology
2. "Lorca's Red Dresses" by Natalie Diaz, from *When My Brother was an Aztec*
3. "The New Colossus" by Emma Lazarus
4. Wikipedia entry: "Manananggal"
5. "Eye to Eye: Black Women, Hatred, and Anger" by Audre Lorde, from *Sister Outsider*
6. Excerpt of a letter by Gertrude Stein, from *Everybody's Autobiography*

Phantom Frisk

That night we walked
the halls of the Whaley House
you butt in on the poor tour
guide's rehearsed ramble.
Bouncing in the recreated
kitchen, you got too excited by
the execution of Yankee Jim
and tried to tell the story
yourself. Out of pity for the
outshone employee I stopped
you midstream, much to your
disappointment and you took it upon
yourself to defrock my demeanor.

You stood, back to me,
hands innocently clasped behind,
and with a cherub expression
that could keep butter cool,
you jabbed at my crotch.
I grasped your hand.
Another prod.
I took your other paw too.
But again —
poke.

Now,
unless I miscounted last I looked,
unless the teachings of Mr O'Hagan were
grossly misinformed in my biology classes,
unless a cicada tried to latch itself
to my zipper and chirp "I want to
break free" this should not
have been possible or,
at the very least, probable.
But I had counted properly,
Mr O'Hagan was a qualified instructor,
and I've yet to hear an insect cover Queen.
There is no other explanation.

I had been groped by a ghost.



The Rest Room

Forget what goes bump in the night
For you don't need the dark to be scared outta sight
I thought it was just a story at first
A myth, a folklore of some sort
But nobody told me this is the reason why girls go in groups
But oops, it's just what girls do, I usually thought
I used to be afraid to ask the Teacher to go to the loo
Cause I was afraid of being reprimanded
But now I wonder if she was secretly protecting all the kids from harm
Especially the girls who always went in numbers guessing it was safe
My visits to the loo were no longer safe, at school at least
For a girl named Peggy had died in there
How or why no one knew
But "Peggy musaladi" "Peggy the babe" had died in there
And her spirit sought to drag someone along to hell with her each year
Nobody knew what she looked like
But their words painted a vivid picture
As only horror could
I would imagine her opening
And peeping into every stall, until she would reach mine
There was no resting in the rest room

Aerial Caterpillar Ballet

on my daybreak rounds,
swinging wildly in the breeze,
I spot a tiny acrobat,
white, thorny little wiggler,
possible stingers, a tutu of spikes,
dressed in morning light,
a caterpillar too small to even identify dancing in the wind like that,
her red head glinting in the sun rising, I wonder to myself, how—
how is this lilliputian creature
conducting her own aerial ballet,
and I, her only audience
marveling as she
bounces to birdsong,
writhes wildly, flipping and floating, bobbing in
the forest before my eyes, spinning with all of
her cares tossed to the trees, her ballerina body
bending in glorious arcs, how am I the only one
seeing this right now? am I imagining this?
am I dreaming? am I high?

on a typical morning
where I could've used a miracle,
watering the garden and thanking the flowers, suddenly she appeared,
gleaming like a Tinker-bell rendition in a community theater
children's play of Peter Pan,
rappelling down from the rafters
or a tall mighty oak
 or heaven
on an almost invisible silk line,
right to my line of sight,
plump little spiky angel in white,
whirling like a tiny dervish,
spinning the moment holy,

dancing, dancing in all her freedom—
bungee cord shot from her mouth in a liquid stream,
and as soon as it touched the air becoming fine silk,
spinneret miracle moving through her lips,
dancing from her own daring to drop from the sky,

oh, how I wish my words, spinning silk-pure
from the consciousness
of my heart,
would tumble out from my lips, touch the willing air,
and become something
someone else can hang onto, or a golden thread
I can hang onto myself
when I am
free
f
a
l
l
i
n
g
so I might
dance
in a daring ballet
of my own.



I don't want all of your tiny secrets

I don't want all of your tiny secrets, little almost-invisibles—
the pulsing world vibrates
with all this human destruction and there you are
in your small wonder
aching to shape yourself
into the vastness,
molecules
and mitochondria
multiplying
into vibrant colonies of life,
mycelium speaking in mush-rooms in a language
we cannot hear,
and just recently a thousand baby
preying mantises hatched
in my blooming red
anthurium, small murderers
wandering
in green blurs, so tiny
hiding under leaves
in clandestine clusters,
and the small jumping spider
friendly in the corner, the silk-spun
cocoon of hundreds of her babies,
thick galleries of fiery ants
tunneling underfoot,
and little black frog egg globes
interconnected
and brimming in our pool,
and the hummingbirds
in all of their humming
vibrating the universe in their
wings, all of the unseen,

I don't want all of your tiny
secrets, little almost-invisibles—

I want you to be safe and free,
I want to offer you shelter
in my large largeness,
a human being
that just leaves you to be,
there, singing
in your unheard frequencies,
living your minuscule miraculous
lives that have nothing to do with us,
your breeding and breathing,
your building and feeding,
flying and fucking,

your existential beauty is yours,
whether we humans name it or not,
your vastness is more grand
in its design than anything our
feeble human minds
can even mouth
with our heavy tongues.

Keep your secrets, almost invisible ones.
Live and flourish
beyond us.

Unicorn

The little girl in the post office doesn't know me, but turns around and says *oh hiiii* and waves real big and wavy, and shows me her brand new pink shoes that light up a little at the heel, and I say *are those your new shoes? They are so pretty!* because you have to talk to toddlers and smile when they talk to you, if you're a decent person, right? And she looks down at them and nods all smily. I love talking to toddlers, more than adults most days, and I think she's probably almost two, all soft blonde curls and bright baby blue eyes. A literal cherub in broad daylight. Her mother says she is a sponge, just hearing and saying and repeating everything, brand new words and brand new world around her. She shows me her new dress, all of its colors and stripes of rainbow. She says *this is my dress! this is my choos!* We make (very) small talk as her mom takes care of the packages. She hides under the postal window countertop like it's her own tiny little house, her very own personal cubby hole, and I so want to crawl under there too, maybe have a tea party or talk about flowers, but I just watch from my 6ft socially-distanced X mark, next in line. She picks up a sticker on the floor, maybe a corner of a stamp, and wants to put it on the wall but it doesn't stick, almost puts it in her mouth on her tongue, before I tell her *no no no that's dirty honey* and open the flap of the trash bin to have her throw it away. She bumbles adorably over and throws away the tiny scrap. *Emme* she keeps saying *Emme!* I ask *Is that your name?* Mom answers, *no that's her best friends name. Her name is Trinity, but she can't say it yet,* and I think of that newness, roll it around on my tongue, the so-new-you-can't-even-say your-own-name-yet new, that the syllables haven't even found her sounds. Trinity. Trinity. I say her name in my head, as mom and little wingéd thing hold hands and turn to leave. *Bye Trinity!* I say smiling really wide, and she turns and waves all big and wavy, with her whole arm, bright curls bouncing, heels all aglow, *bye-bye!* Her sweetness lingers a few moments in the air after they leave, that pure vibration, and I know I am not the only person in the post office who feels its thick nostalgia.

On the way home, it pours down rain out of nowhere, I mean torrential, buckets and buckets, in the middle of the day and the sun is also shining, mind you, so the moment is a mix of bright slants of light pouring through dark clouds, and downpour. I'm following a truck pulling a horse trailer that kicks up the mist from the wet road suddenly drenched, rain easing up now, the sun shining in from the west and golden. The slants of sunlight turn the mist kicking up in the tires into a rainbow, and I am literally following a rainbow all the way home, disappearing and reappearing again with the curves of the road, a path of color in the kicked up mist beaming, and the rain easing and the sun still persistently shining, and perhaps that little girl's rainbow has transcended space and time, her innocent joy lingering as fresh magic, and the sponge of her little bright heart is squeezing out all over my ride home, and maybe that trailer isn't pulling a horse at all, but a unicorn. Yeah, I bet there's a unicorn in there. For sure.

Grendel

Gigantopithecus gardarensis

Better known as Beowulf's monster
descended directly from Cain
the very first murderer in recorded human history
I was not a Dragon a Werewolf a Wildman or a Griffin
not a Monocerus Manticore Minotaur or
the Malebranche Demon but instead
a simple giant humanoid creature
more hairy and smelly much stronger
more hideous and fearsome
than you could imagine in your wildest nightmares
twice as big as the biggest Bigfoot
(oh they exist don't be fooled by the lack of evidence
I should know they are distant cousins).

Dark Age humans were easy pickings indeed
all huddled trembling
in their flimsy meadhalls and longhouses
their Fachhallenhausen and Frisian farmsteads
sturdy secure timber structures my ass
all I had do was crack in
the front door watch them staring agog
then scattering like broken twigs
a few brave ones poking at me with pikes
or pick axes until I'd snatch up a couple for dinner
and be on my way back to my den.
The whole system worked fine and so much fun
until fuckhead Beowulf showed up
playing the hero tearing off
my arm first and then . . . well you know.

Are there more of me lurking still
in the darkest shadows of the deepest forests?
Well I can't tell you that directly I'm sworn to secrecy
but there have been sightings there have been reports
everything skulking about out there can't be
Bigfoots now can they?



Harpy

Harpeia harpazein

Our name means that which snatches we are
the snatchers of the ancient world
particularly food snatchers and defilers
getting our first notoriety by stealing food
from poor hapless Phineas the Prophet nearly starving
the poor bastard to death.

(We were sent by ever-envious Zeus what choice
did we have seriously?)

We are great eagle-like birds
but with a woman's head and breasts described first
as beautiful bewitching siren-like creatures
(Men are suckers for breasts any breasts whatsoever)
but later as ugly bird-women brutes
placed by Dante himself in his Inferno
in the branches of trees in the Wood of Self-murderers
forever tormenting the souls of the suicide sinners:
*They have wide wings, and human necks and visages,
clawed feet, and huge feathered bellies,
they make lament above on the strange trees . . .*
in which the suicides themselves have been entombed
punishment for having destroyed their physical bodies.

Even though they have been named for us
we are not the elusive Harpy Eagles in the rainforests
of today as you can yourself see hereunder
(They are after all mere birds not monsters such as we)

10-20-21 [POEM ONE]

In the dreams I have the wings of a bat—
and great useless hooves;
I long for the mother who cursed me
during my difficult birth—

in my dreams—I should feel free
but mostly I wish for the
Reaper and her sweet scythe
to slash me like
corn grown too tall;

sometimes I am an insect thing
with wings still—always with wings—
but these are covered
with a fine dust—
I find my eyes in the silos I fly on by,
but never recognize
who God made me to be.

10-20-21 [POEM TWO]

They call me goatsucker—
but maybe I'm just a mangey
hungry dog—

I've been wandering the southwest
for as long as I can remember;
the taste of blood is thick
on my ever drying tongue

and I howl for the rains just
like all the rest—
they shoot me for the ranch house

and my blood leaves
me quicker than the truths
of who I've been and what I was meant for—

I hope the goats I've killed,
all that livestock sent on, waits for me
in my own private afterlife.

C.R.A.S.H.

When you're a single cryptid
tired of hand or claw pleasure
one night stands
seem like a worthy endeavor

Enough crazy humans would
give us a whirl, but no one actually
wants to break their lover:
human fragility sucks because so
many of you flaunt around the planet

So, I open the CRASH app
(Cryptid Random and Sexy Hookups)
and begin swiping because, well,
monsters need lovin' too

Dobhar-chu/don't like doggy style
Left
Ningen/too weird
Left
Yeti/distant cousin
Left
Chupacabra/those hickeys would last a century
Left
Loveland Frog/ugh slimy amphibious skin
Left
Skunk Ape/yuck-stink bugs of the creature world
Left
Jersey Devil/she might be into my kind of kink
Right

Bigfoot settled in
and practiced
his sexiest smirk



Hafgufa

Camouflaged
as two rocks in an
endless sea
my nostrils rise
scenting for ships

Gullibility tastes divine,
their wood my fiber and
their crew decadent desserts;
whales and sharks and fish
staples all, but land dwellers'
terror sweetly spices sun-kissed flesh

Monsters measure my centuries:
when loneliness grows great
I conjure a child
all cunning and hunger;
parthenogenesis sparks and
manipulating matter I
birth monsters for every age:
Cirein-cròin and Jormungandr
Kraken and Leviathan
Labbu and Makara
Timingila and Umibōzu and

and now one grows
within, unique,
equal to this modern age's
sonars and metal ships;
her sides will slough sound waves
and swallowing the sea
regurgitation will dissolve steel hulls:
evolution to humble humans

She will feast
consuming cruise behemoths
inspiring mythtrue stories

An Ode to a Shark's Stomach Contents

All hail the ocean's great connoisseurs
who for centuries ingested every thing:
they care not if a feast was mine or yours
enjoying hoof, scale, hand, and wing.
A shark's stomach is a record of the age
Neolithic friends ate just fish and nets
but descendants today munch monsters galore
for the ocean hosts creatures we cannot gauge;
hiding deep in the depths shore to shore
sharks munch our mutants without regrets.

Autopsied stomachs clearly reveal
suits of armor to technology
but did not find their Achilles' heel:
sharks possess amazing biology.
To date they enjoyed whole polar bears
and Draugen meat--they do not discriminate;
they've dined on Ilomba and a rubber boot
and fur coats belonging to wealthy heirs--
clearly their menus do not constipate:
an enviable evolutionary attribute.

Sharks outlived earth's mythic dinosaurs
500 different species strong today;
having survived all humanity's wars,
humans should prostrate and pray.

What we haven't captured lies in living sharks
coveted evidence we've searched to find:
lifeforms advanced beyond our own
these hunters of the deep leave many marks
on the greatest storied monsters of mankind
escaping by sacrificing flesh and bone.

Sharks' rumbling stomachs hold our greatest hopes:
chomped fragments of great Amalie beaks,
the gills of fabled aquatic lycanthropes
and Leviathan's teeth in all their mystique.
They cut through Ayia Napa's meaty fins
and rib-like structures numbering sixty-nine;
They crunch on Steller's Sea Ape's skull hollow-eyed
and Kraken's tentacles' rough, battered skins.
The evidence is clear and quite crystalline—
Oh Sharks, lead us where cryptid creatures hide!

Steps Left Behind

The lurking beast or man lumbers
Recognize the eyes are on you
"Leave giants alone"
A worthwhile warning

Roaming, groaning, a face full of hair
Beware all who trek through his kingdom.

Bipedal, relation not to man
Instead to mammoth
Some question extinction

As a tree when hiding
The wind through hair like leaves

Children handprint footsteps
For a picture, men thief.

It Has a Shape

My girl comes in to find me crying,
so early in the morning it's still night.
I say, "Oh, I was just watching videos
of people saving animals."

She accepts it because she knows
those do make me weep.
Truth is, I was up
with that old

phantom, delighting in my quivering lip,
reminding me that what I lost is still gone.

Haunted Hunger

I miss the fatty mouth-feel of fatback
and sweetbreads for breakfast.

I miss the fog and the hollow-faced ghosts
calling from the buried wagon trail,
the Cumberland Gap,
a gaping scar through the woods.



Just My Own Self Too

My Starbucks name is Amy. Don't get me wrong, I love the name Ainsel, but I don't love the immediate waterfall of questions that follow it. "Uh, how do you spell that?" "That's so pretty, what's it mean?" "Oh my gosh, are you French?" My unique-monikered siblings understand. On coffee cups and takeout bags, my brother is Kyle and my sister hands out her middle name, Nicole.

I'm not thinking about this when I step into Liquid Highway, a tiny coffee shop in my hometown. It popped up in my old neighbourhood in the years after I left. There's no bell that rings above the door, but the Barista pivots toward me anyways. The yellow walls are faded and the scone specials are written in blue highlighter on folded notebook paper.

I smile and the Barista smiles back.

"Hi there, I'll have a 385 Expressway please. Made with almond milk."

The Barista is familiar, but I haven't been here before. She's tall with strong cheeks and toned arms covered in tattoos of ferns and mushrooms and old old trees.

"Hot or iced?" It's only early fall and sunny out, but I feel a chill between my shoulder blades.

"Hot please."

"And can I get a name for that?" Her curly hair bounces as she beams at me, her hand poised over the cup with a silver sharpie.

"Call me Amy." It's such an old habit by now I don't even pause. I'm watching the ink on her brown skin shift and arch. The moon at her collarbone winks at me. The leaves along her shoulder rustle in a breeze I can't feel.

The Barista tilts her head and narrows her eyes, like she wanted a different answer from me. She's still smiling but her jaw is clenched. Her teeth seem cruel.

* * *

My new yoga teacher got angry when I didn't correct her on how to pronounce my name. I had been coming to the studio for a couple weeks but had only taken her class twice. I was uncomfortable, so I was making conversation with a towering, bearded dude named Glenn.

"Ainsel, huh? Does it mean something?"

"Uh, it's a pun I think. It means something like "Just me."

The teacher snapped in between us with loud apologies and blustering pale hands.

"Oh, it's AIN-sel! I didn't know that was how you said your name!"

“Oh, it’s okay.”

“I can’t believe you let me call you the wrong name!”

“It’s really no big deal. I mean, I respond to pretty much any name that starts with ‘A.’” I forced a laugh and tried to turn back to Glenn. She danced in front of me again.

“No, it IS a big deal!” When she shook her head, her white hair didn’t move. “It’s not fair. Names have power! By denying people your name you are denying them the chance to know you.” She wielded her finger like a baton to enunciate her point. I try to find Glenn in my peripheral, but he has sidled off.

“People want to KNOW you. You owe them that.” She tapped my chest. I rubbed the back of my neck, trying to figure out if she wanted an apology. A student walked through the door and didn’t take off her flip flops. My salvation. Even with her eyes on me, the teacher heard the transgression.

“Shoes OFF in the studio!” The teacher spun around and I started attending the 7:30 class instead.

* * *

The Barista snaps the lid back on her marker. Her smile is tight and she’s looking at me like I owe her an apology. I step back and it seems to start her orchestra in motion. She spins into the arms of the espresso machine and begins to make my latte.

I watch the paper cup she’s filling. She didn’t write anything on it. I cross my arm and settle back on my heels. That makes sense. I’m the only one here. No. I correct myself. There’s the drive thru. And there was a car there when I parked out front a few moments ago.

I tip a little to the side so I can peek through the pull up window on the opposite side of this tiny building. The black Highlander is still there. At first I assume I’m facing heavily tinted windows. But as I focus more intently, I see the glint along the door where the window has been rolled down. I am looking into the vehicle: it’s dark. Empty. I keep watching as I hear steam hiss. I feel like if I look long enough, I’ll see eyes looking back.

* * *

I remember stories from my Scottish great-grandmother. My mom talks about how she went crazy as she got older. Nana had decades of good, common sense. She spent that sense wrapping new babies and sack lunches and sprained ankles, first in a tiny farmhouse, and then across the ocean, and then in a third floor Chicago apartment.

But she’d already had that lifetime when I met her, and I loved who she let herself be. She didn’t talk about how tall I’d stretched or how much mud was compounded into my jeans. Instead, she cackled and poked her finger toward the fireplace.

“I’ve met a fae child in there.”

When I stuck my head to peer up the chimney I heard her softly mutter.

“The younger ones are easier to outsmart. Word play is a good way to go if you’re sharp.” She looked over at me brushing charcoal off my hands onto my Easter dress. “Or you can just keep your mouth shut.”

She grabbed my chin for my full attention when she heard my mother returning from the kitchen. “Remember that. Don’t answer questions. If you must, lie. They’ll be able to tell, but they

won't be able to do anything about it." She settles back into her armchair and my mother is dragging me up by my arm toward a sink before I can ask who they were.

* * *

The Barista slips my latte into a sleeve and sets it on the counter while she rings me up. I notice a tiny wooden sign propped up by the cash register, "Tomorrow I brew, today I bake." My mind fills in the rest of the rhyme that my nana must have taught me. "And then the child away I'll take." The yellow walls seem ill and the darkness from the pull-up window starts to crawl along the tile floor. I look down at my hand, about to surrender my credit card. I shove it back into my backpack and flounder along the bottom to find a crumpled ten dollar bill.

I set the bill on the counter near the Barista. She doesn't look at it. She's staring at my backpack where I had buried my credit card. For the first time in my life, I am grateful that my name is weird and hard to spell. I don't have a souvenir keychain or little gold necklace with my name on it. I'm just Amy here. She can't know any different.

* * *

The last time I saw Nana, she was stroking the top of a doll's head. It was bundled like an actual baby and she wouldn't let my mom set it aside. When mom talked to the nurse, I sat beside Nana on the bed, worrying the edge of the blanket.

"What's her name?"

"You can't just ask that." Nana was serious today.

"Why not?"

"Names have power, you should not just give them out."

"Oh."

Nana leaned down to whisper in my ear, "You've got a powerful name, Ainsel. Had to lie and tell your mum it was a family name!" She poked me in the chest. "You're just your own self. Remember that."

* * *

The Barista is leaning across the counter. She pushes the cup toward me. I watch the steam curl upward. It seems to orbit her face. I want to ask how long she's been here. How many of those toadstool tattoos she has circling her upper arm. I want to know how she learned to blend in.

But I know better.

As I reach forward to grab the latte, I can read her name tag for the first time.

She notices the moment I do and her face cracks into a too-wide grin. I raise my cup in a toast and walk out before she can speak.

We both know her name is not actually Ainsel.

I Find My Lover Hidden in the Myths

I bury my past's reluctances in
the crushed black snake's skull:
at least its pains are over.

I kill night mares whose mist creeps
through the bedroom keyhole
by plugging it with freshly melted wax.

On Kupala, I wash my lover's blood from my
hands
after I float my vinok, watch it sink, and
know
it was I who served his head on the platter.

I push my firstborn son
into a name amalgamated
from each of my past's conquests.

I turn away when my lover reveals cloven
hooves,
tears my crucifix from my neck,
and the ground swallows us whole.

At the funeral feast, I release
the death shroud. The crowd
gasps, disbelieving.

I shine: a jeweled snake who sees
my father's tears, his age. I clear the fields
in a single night for the king's daughter's
hand.

I sing. I hold. I keep. I muse.
I live. I understand. I build.
I surface.

After calling upon the King of Ravens,
I destroy the evil crone
who imprisoned her daughter
underground.

After my lover leaps the bonfire's flames,
after he retrieves my vinok from the river,
I drown.

I shout to the giant whose belt
and bread I stole. After all,
what did a single loaf's disappearance hurt?

I cast out the devil's visitors
by crossing myself three times
and standing in a circle of juniper twigs.

I welcome the gold my lover leaves
beneath my pillow as I sleep. He creeps
into my room. He thinks I do not know.

I dance with my lover's swords, his spears,
the scars I take from the blades
dictating each step.

I honor my lover by passing
our son beneath my skin,
the one he stripped me of long ago.

Jormungandr on the Fence

I am washing my face with the sheds
of a woman my lover hung across
the lath
fence in hopes of rain,
sweet rain,
a purge billowing dust
from trenches and gutters,
a blow to leaf-packed
ditches where,
eventually,
I'll see a vulture stripping
her remains—
swift tug,
jerk of neck
and press of claw—
through
a kitchen window
speckled
with white film.

Malanka

My lover has loosened my hair from my khustka,
and he drags me to the underworld for feasting.
The Moon hunts, unaware of my disappearance.
Little does he remember, without me, blossoms wilt;
trees become skeletons; fields wither; North Wind
freezes those who dare question him.

When I return, released from my lover's vices,
the flowers will peek from their sleep, and for a short time,
the cold will end, only for a short time, and then begin again.

Meet the Contributors

Maria Bolaños

Maria Bolaños (she/her/they) is a Filipina-American poet and book reviewer and is committed to building spaces to nurture and showcase Filipinxao literature as well as Black, Indigenous, and POC literature. She is the General Editor for Marías at Sampaguitas literary magazine and a 2021 Best of Net nominee. Her writing has been featured in Touchstone, Cut Fruit Collective, Antigone, CP Quarterly, and the International Examiner, among others. Her work can be found on her Instagram, @mariabeewrites.

Jay Rafferty

Jay Rafferty is an uncle, an Irishman and an eejit. He's the Social Media Manager for Sage Cigarettes Magazine and a Best of the Net Nominee. His debut chapbook Holy Things is forthcoming in early 2022 and you can read his other poems in several journals including Lights on the Horizon and Daily Drunk Magazine. When not playing games of pool he, sometimes, writes stuff. You can follow him on Twitter @Atlas_Snow

Rachael Chitondwe

Rachael Chitondwe is a 24 year old writer, book reviewer, poet, singer, and rapper from Mutare Zimbabwe. She has self published three books to her name, Sweet Deceit, The Indians Child and Book of Poetry. Her work has appeared in The Blue Marble Review, Poetry Soup.com, Eureka Street, Wet Dreamz Journal, Africangn.net/poetry-platform, Cloutbase, and East wave Magazine. Five of her unpublished poems are set to appear in an upcoming anthology called "Poetry is Life". She is the receiver of the 2019 Certificate Petal Star Award from Inked with Magic and the 2nd runner up of the Kuchanaya Poetry Contest and one of the first winners of the Fortnight Poetry Competition and 3rd runner up of the of the Black History Poetry Slam 21. Twitter @RachealChitondw, Instagram @rachealchie

Jain Coble

Jain is a professional illustrator and fine artist who is heavily inspired by anything fantasy, female empowerment, and nature. She also travels often, and owns too many plants. She can be found on instagram, etsy, twitter and tiktok all under the same handle JainMakesArt.

Kai Coggin

Kai Coggin (she/her) is the author of four poetry collections, most recently *MINING FOR STARDUST* (FlowerSong Press 2021) and *INCANDESCENT* (Sibling Rivalry Press 2019). She is a queer woman of color who thinks Black Lives Matter, a teaching artist in poetry with the Arkansas Arts Council, and the host of the longest running consecutive weekly open mic series in the country—Wednesday Night Poetry. Recently awarded the 2021 Governor’s Arts Award and named “Best Poet in Arkansas” by the Arkansas Times, her fierce and powerful poetry has been nominated four times for The Pushcart Prize, as well as *Bettering American Poetry* 2015, and *Best of the Net* 2016 and 2018. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *POETRY*, *Cultural Weekly*, *SOLSTICE*, *Bellevue Literary Review*, *TAB*, *Entropy*, *SWWIM*, *Split This Rock*, *Sinister Wisdom*, *Lavender Review*, *Tupelo Press*, *West Trestle Review*, and elsewhere. Coggin is Associate Editor at *The Rise Up Review*. She lives with her wife and their two adorable dogs in the valley of a small mountain in Hot Springs National Park, Arkansas.

B.A. O’Connell

When a pivotal moment in B.As’ youth caused them to turn to poetry with serious intent, they were changed. Today, they often pen four to eight poems a day. B.A’s poetry and blog focuses on poems and art centring around trauma, recovery, and mental health. B.A also touches on themes of abusive, obsessive, and unhealthy relationships and the pain of moving on from them.

Kathryn Reilly

By day, Kathryn helps students investigate the power of words and master grammar’s awesomeness. In the evenings, she reads retold myths, fairy tale mash-ups, and fae adventures when she isn’t breathing life into new ones herself. Her most recent work appears in *Shadow Atlas: Dark Landscapes of the Americas* and *Last Leaves* literary journal. You can find her on Instagram @katecanwrite to see what’s coming next. Her two rescue mutts, Savvie and Roxy Razzamatazz, hear all the stories first.

Rickey Rivers Jr

Rickey Rivers Jr was born and raised in Alabama. He is a *Best of the Net* nominated writer and cancer survivor. His work has appeared in *Brave Voices*, *Sage Cigarettes* and *Hell Hued Zine* (among other publications). Interactive fiction: <https://rrj.itch.io/notable-neighborhood-garbage>
Twitter.com/storiesyoumight Mini chapbooks are available here:
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Kalisse L. Van Dellen

Kalisse L. Van Dellen writes about where she’s been and what she’s lost. She is a graduate of Belhaven University and currently resides as a Canadian expatriate in Greenville, SC. Her work has most recently been featured in *Capsule Stories*, *3 Moon Magazine*, and *Mississippi’s Best Emerging Poets*.

Nicola Yurcaba

Nicola Yurcaba (Ukrainian: Нікола Юрцаба) is a Ukrainian-American poet and essayist. Her poems and essays have appeared in *The Atlanta Review*, *The Lindenwood Review*, *Whiskey Island*, *Raven Chronicles*, *Appalachian Heritage*, *North of Oxford*, and many other online and print journals. Nicole holds an MFA in Writing from Lindenwood University, is the recipient of a July 2020 Writing Residency at Gullkistan, Creative Center for the Arts in Iceland, and is a Tupelo Press June 2020 30 for 30 featured poet. Her poetry collection *Triskaidekaphobia* is forthcoming Black Spring Group in 2022. She teaches poetry workshops for Southern New Hampshire University and works as a career counselor for Blue Ridge Community College. Twitter @NYurtsaba

Mel Sherrer

Mel Sherrer (she/her) is a poet and performer. Mel teaches creative writing and performance literature. Mel's work is featured in journals and magazines, and she is a 2021 Pushcart and Best of the Net nominee. Mel currently resides in Las Vegas, NV. Twitter/Insta @Heda_Mel

Shannon Gardner

Shannon transforms materials and matter to create unique memorable experiences through her artwork. Fusing Eastern and Western philosophy into a stylized aesthetic highlights Shannon's fascination with the macabre. Striking figures permeate her work showcasing imperfections in nature. Shannon has been featured in numerous publications, exhibitions, album art, and in the homes of those who connect with the aura of her work.

Michael Estabrook

Michael Estabrook has been publishing his poetry in the small press since the 1980s. He has published over 20 collections, a recent one being *The Poet's Curse, A Miscellany* (The Poetry Box, 2019).