

# SAGE CIGARETTES MAGAZINE

Samhain 2019



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Halloween has always been my favorite time of the year. There's something about dressing up as whatever I want, and making my innermost self a reality that leaves me feeling fulfilled for the rest of the year. I worked seasonally at party stores for a few Halloweens more so that I could wear a different costume every day than for the money. They say that on this day, the veil between the living and the dead is the thinnest so it's extra important that you indulge in some spooky self-care. Here are some tips fro the SC team:

- Listen to some spooky jams (e.g. "Don't Fear the Reaper" by Blue Oyster Cult, or the cover by Pierce the Veil)
- Do a foamy face mask and pretend to be a ghost (you look boo-tiful!)
- Have a scary movie marathon (we highly recommend adding Trick R' Treat to the list)
- Build a Frankenstein monster in your basement. Unless you live in Florida, we don't have basements here.
- Listen to the "Spooked" podcast! Every episode has interviews with people telling their true experiences with the paranormal.
- Last but not least, read our magazine! There's tons of great poems, stories and artwork to help you set the tone for spooky season.

# Ruptured Looking Glass

Moonlit casting his pale hands upon her window glass

Infatuated with its layer of dust

Uninvited guest observes from afar

As young maiden fashioned in a flaxen la Ce long gown

Sits on a baroque Chair combing her ash-auburn hair

Breathing heavy summer air

Wall-ticker heralds midnight

Minute after bedchamber victorian looking glass suddenly ruptures in half

Scared to the bones, Maiden jumps off her chair

Wonders how could it occur, something so obscure

Her mother opens the door in a fury

Reads out loud the telegram letter just received

Fragile voice shakes in dolor

Her cousin of only 18 passed away ...

Maiden espies the looking glass and glowers, freezing in the unbelief

The mirror crack evanescence...



## Mist...

Close your eyes

Be quiet

Listen to the silence

While mist hides chaos and terror

Who slowly tides it's ropes around you

Don't be frightened

Mist as a womb protects you

Nobody can do you any harm

This night is warped with light

It will find you

And embrace you like a mother

Embrace you with it's love

Endless love



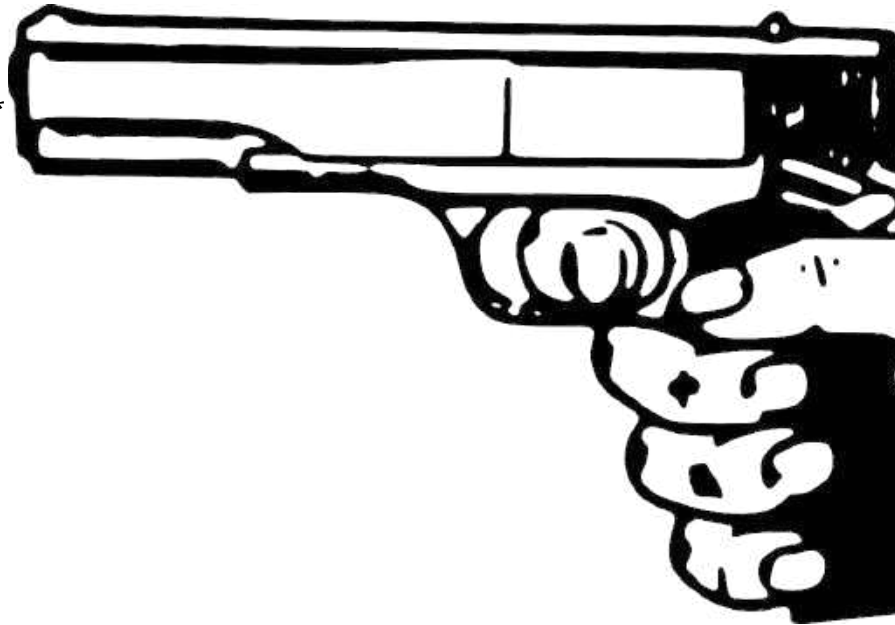
## Riding Dark Horse Nightmare

to prison library  
where sewer  
backs up flooding  
cages of books  
my brains are washed  
by a short scientist

detectives trail me  
arrested by police  
giving up to  
handcuffs ether

now on train  
calendars peel  
off cars  
1942 1962 1982  
2198 1892 1294  
passengers screaming  
screaming off track  
burning 3rd rail

in swamp struggling  
to reach green reeds  
i am a  
fixed target  
paper duck  
\*pull trigger\*fire pin\*thru barrel\*into muzzle\*  
bullet shot  
paper duck



## Fear

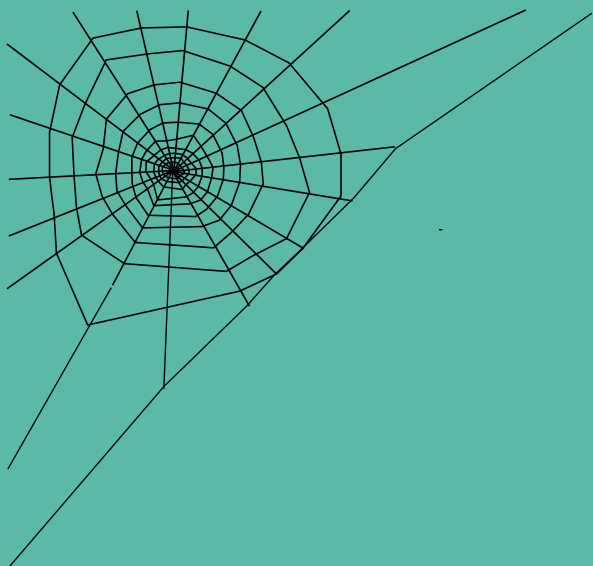
Sneaks under shadows lurking  
in corners ready to rear its head  
folded in neat lab reports charting  
white blood cells over edge running wild.

Or hiding along icy roads when  
day ends with sea gulls squalling  
through steel grey skies.

Brake belts wheeze and whine  
snapping apart careening us  
against the long cold night.

Official white envelopes stuffed with  
subpoenas wait at the mailbox.  
Memories of hot words burning  
razor blades slash across our faces.

Fires leap from rooms where twisted  
wires dance like miniature skeletons.  
We stand apart inhaling this mean  
air choking on our own breath.



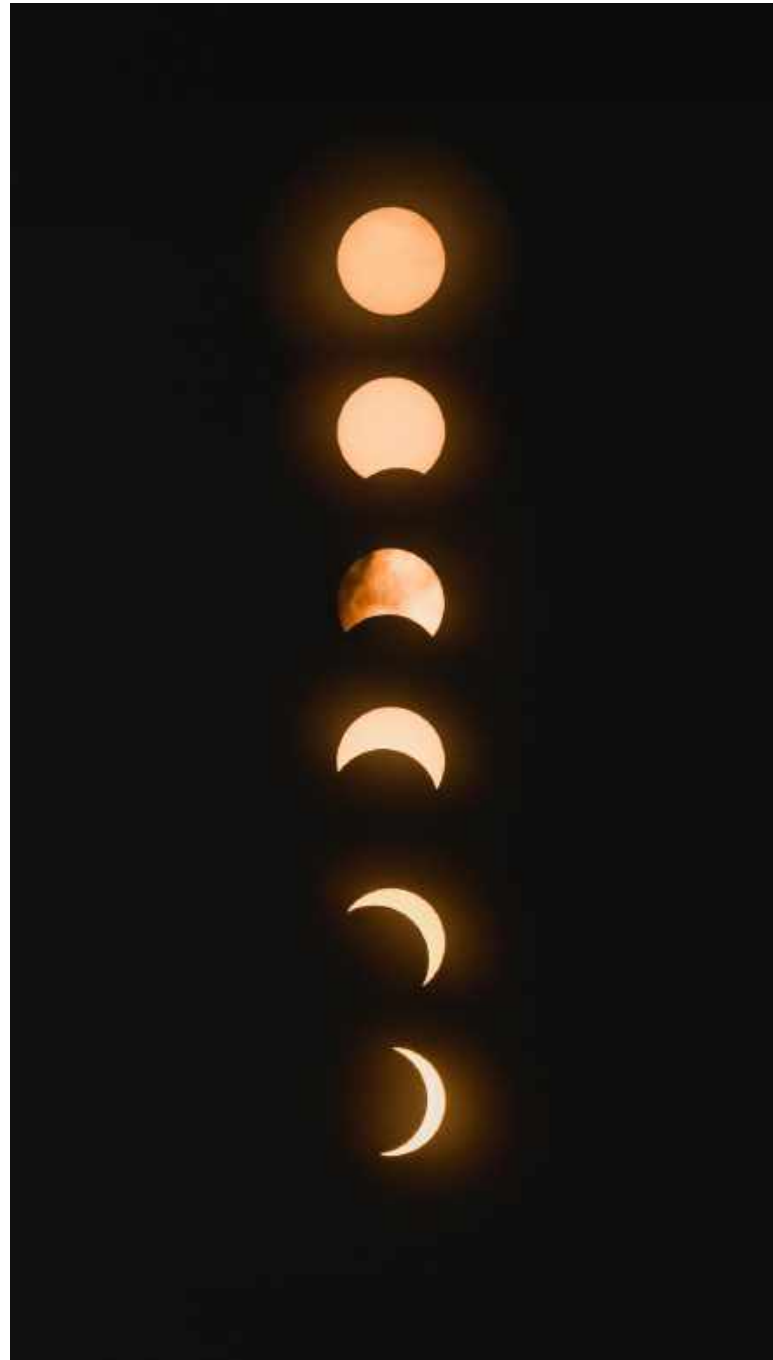
## I planted my garden

on the wrong side  
of moon forgetting  
tides of ocean  
lunar wax wane

only madness  
was cultivated  
there underground  
tubular roots  
corpulent veins

flowers called  
despair gave off  
a single fruit...

I ate it  
my laughter  
becoming harsh





## Dream Blue

Deep blue midnight blue.

Once in a blue moon.

Driving a long blue van  
through a deep blue sea.

The steering wheel pops  
out in my hand, this long  
blue van crashing crashing.

Cold cold everything cold  
Water cold icy cold.

Falling in icy cold water.  
Once in a blue moon.

Diving between the devil  
and deep blue sea.

Driving through waves.  
in dream blue.



## A Scary Story

In this house there is an ache. In this ache there is a reason. There is a reason in this ache. I squandered love as though spending magic on something mundane. She was magic: an angel shattered its aureole whenever she smiled, jealous. She fell out of love, did not tell the lover, who lives in this house that has an ache. She led him on for years. One day, she confessed he was not enough to fill her heart. There is a beast for a man now. He has tried

everything. Potions. Ointments. Ritual and séance: looking for whatever part of a man dies when love leaves. I would like to say, as the narrator, things get better. This is sometimes the case. Everyone after found him quaint, but also not enough. He cannot fill a heart. He cannot fill a void. Sometimes, I hear him crying, chain smoking peppermint menthols into the night under a moon he is small beneath. Sometimes, I hear him yipping like a coyote. Rabid for love. He has become the knocking behind the wall. Has disappeared behind the secret

bookshelf door. He wanted to believe in love, but, it seems, love doesn't not believe in him. I go to the house in the middle of the neighborhood, the one with dead leaves dried from the remaining heat of summer, the same with the leaning swing creaking in the wind, the same where the door remains locked and cigarettes litter the porch. I remove the key from my pocket. I walk in and relock the door. Away from the eyes of others, I let down my human skin. This is what happens when love forgets. This is what happens when that part of a man dies. I begin to bark and howl and scratch at the



## Ritual

The moon must be three quarters full. Jupiter must be on the horizon and Mars visible above the timberline. You must drip, into a mason jar with two shots of moonshine, a single drop of your blood for fourteen days before the final phase of the moon. Build a fire out of only dead, white birch wood. Let it burn full for nine minutes, one for every circle of hell. You must imagine those you wish to drink with be around your side.

Your incantation is as follows:

I know I have been found guilty of wanting. Return, I plead, for a drink. Let us speak only of then. Let us speak only of our bonds.

Let us speak only of the truth the damned know. The world is the only beautiful place and we cannot stay forever, for forever belongs to the dead and beauty belongs to the living.

Pour the blood and moonshine on the fire. Once the fire blazes, sudden and bursting, you will notice shadows join you beside the fire. They will take shape. They will be the dead friends you have missed and have thought of and loved in memory. They will not be wraiths, but full and pale but physical and tangible. You are allowed to touch them briefly. You will sit with them and in the bag you have sanctified with sage, garlic, and lavender, you will pull out the rum and tequila. You will have your friends in the darkness until the last hour of the night. You will drink, all of you drunk, all of you present, though some only

temporary. When you wake, they will have returned to hell. You will be hungover, but temporarily reprieved of sadness.

You may only do this once a year; for the damned have much toil and work and their own lives to live forever infernal. Forever belongs to the dead and beauty belongs to the living. When the moon is full, turn the soil and leave an offering to the damned: a burnt letter of thanks will do.

# Popobawa

*Popobawa or Popo Bawa –*

Swahili for Bat Wing.

Ain't no bat, though

it casts such ragged shadows

when it attacks... .

Shapeshifter evil spirit or *shatani* –

the focus of mass hysteria or panic

in 1965 when he first appeared

on the Tanzanian island of Pemba –

soon had folks in Unguja in a flap.

Some say he's the spirit unleashed

by an angry Sheikh. A jinn sent

to take vengeance on his neighbours.

The sheikh lost control of the jinn

who took on demonic ways.

Some say he's the embodiment—

the spirit – of the rage

of long dead slaves or the

vengeful ghost of assassinated

president Abeid Karume.

And though folks claim he's apolitical,

his savage attacks rise and fall

with the election cycle in Zanzibar.

Holding or reciting the Koran

has been known to keep the beast at bay... .

But what do you do

if you're not Muslim,

do not believe in ghosts,

let alone religious politics

or vengeful shape shiftin' critters?

Can't blow him away with a gun,  
even with hollow point silver bullets.

Can't splash holy water on 'm  
or wave him away with a cross.  
No ooga booga mumbo jumbo can  
save you.

Prayers of contrition, sacred water  
witchin'?

A home-made meal? Mordida or dash  
in American dollars? Ain't no way  
to kiss a Popobawan ass, it seems,  
save, maybe, to trap it in your dreams.

But how would you do that? Conjure  
up

a frozen treat or hamburger and fries?

Wait for Halloween and waft the scent  
of a fresh-baked pumpkin pie with  
whipped cream  
into a dungeon or cave? That won't  
work either.

Do good deeds? Treat your neighbor as  
family?

Might not work, but it's a start at least.

Could get a beast to pull up a chair  
and take a closer look at that fresh  
pumpkin pie... .

Maybe he'd smile. Break bread, stay a  
while... .

Maybe fresh fruit would please him.

A glass of ice cold water – assuming  
it didn't pour right through him.

Maybe dog biscuits would get him  
slavering over something other than  
blood.

It's worth a try. Never say die.

Put away the bang sticks and bazookas.

Maybe he'll go goo goo for coco puffs.

Never get enough tobacco or spirits –

They say jinns go good with tonic ... .

Try friendship and hospitality. Leave  
shortbread

cookies like you did for Santa Claus

when you were a kid. Maybe he's a kid  
havin' a temper tantrum. Maybe he  
just

doesn't want his existence denied.

Bring out a yoyo or bolo bat – a hula  
hoop,

maybe a slinky to follow downstairs

into some basement of consciousness.  
Just don't make a fuss. Teach him to  
play.

Throw a stick, but don't run away.



# El Cucuy

Some say El Cucuy's just  
a Lone Star State folk tale  
designed to scare children  
into quick, quiet compliance.

A back-of-the-closet or  
under-the-bed über booger  
who loves totally misbehaving  
scrumptious, luscious little kids.

Has a well-worn, great-for-radio  
face,  
leathery and brown as a well-worn  
saddle,  
sad soulful downturned eyes,  
but he's got outsized incisors too!

Can shape shift into a wolf  
as it quivers in a green mist  
at the foot of yer bed  
or fen or forest, wherever yer led...

Loves kid giblets barbecued  
or highly seasoned in a stew.  
Loves their scrumptious plump little  
limbs and bums. Slowly roasted or  
filleted.

Mmm. Little bite-size toes and  
fingers –  
good for dipping in a dried tomato  
sauce  
or a saucy salsa. Mmmm. Yum  
yum.  
Good with a little telly, a good  
horror movie...

He may seem completely guileless –  
at first. Just a grey-haired duffer,  
maybe a little scruffy, down on his  
luck.  
A cut above a dumpster diver. Has  
some pride –

if not a set of clean clothes  
and a little limpy 'n' gimpy  
in a taped-over set of hard-toed  
boots.  
Just indisposed. Snotty but  
composed –

One of those. You wanna grab for a  
wallet  
To fend him off rather than assail  
yer nostrils  
or singe yer eyebrows in his fiery  
breath.  
A get-thee-hence – to your epoch or  
fen type.

But, no, he's got you penned –  
is elderly and defenceless, you  
assume.  
Is gonna lay a boney finger on and  
waylay you  
with a tale of his own. Go ahead and  
groan.

Sooner or later he's gonna salivate  
and get that white goo in the  
corners  
of his inner tube lips. He's gonna  
blubber  
something about summer and  
upset yer pegs.

Ain't always in the closet or under  
the bed.  
Could be pushin' a shopping cart  
instead.  
Watch for the red eyes that don't  
mean stop.  
They mean dinner. Steak and kidney  
giblets.

Yer on the menu, son.  
If yer a sinner then get it straight:  
yer a scrumptious reprobate.  
Yer the steak tar tar. The I-can't-wait-

deep-six-tube-steak date  
with Hairy Houdini here.  
Can't you see him droolin' and  
winkin'?  
He's got a choice spot in his plot for  
you!



## Old Man in Black

He was an old man in thirties clothes,  
not a dashing Johnny Cash wannabe –  
more David Bowie in **Hunger** mode.

Falling-off-the-bone flesh and bones.  
Liver spots. Wattles that'd put  
yer prize turkeys' in the shade.

He layeth a boney finger on me. He did!  
Told me he could really read palms  
and would like to read my friend's and mine.

Told my friend to sit a couple of tables away  
To give us each the privacy his audit would demand.  
I'm feelin' sorry for the guy by this time.

He's a very old man – in his eighties easy.  
I notice he has cataracts; accede to his demands.  
Turn up my palms and take a seat anyway.

He pillages my childhood, puts the scare  
in me – and a hook to reel me in.  
Forces me to listen while he berates me.



Gotta stop tellin' folks I've been abducted,  
whisked away in a tin can by melon heads,  
and that I'm gonna wither to cancer soon.

All the time I'm thinking *creepy old crawler...*  
I'm dropping a wad of cash for his uncanny rap.  
Hopin' it's so much pap, but enthralled anyway.

Later, my friend berates me. Has a good laugh  
at my frequent Grey visitation confession.  
It's the end of our friendship. I leave town.

I'm devastated. My friend got five minutes –  
the Honda Civic short saucer special –  
eight years later, gets cancer, buys the farm.

Now I've got it. Third stage. Past  
The hair fallin' out chemo stage. Feelin' groovy.  
Scratchin' my balding pate, thinkin' of that old man.

He was right about everything.  
You want to hear that, don't you?  
That I didn't amount to a blown dandelion seed?

That I got swindled in this life.  
But I can't let the government man  
or whoever he was bamboozle me.

Then I suddenly get it –  
the old man's message that I could be  
time's whore or stand up to my death.

Be the someone who didn't amount to a thing,  
The someone who would be the me  
I chose to create. A ton of freight for frail shoulders.

I got a mule and Katy died. Yippee,  
I got to be a hippy before I became a yuppie,  
got married, had three kids, got divorced, and died.

Yippee! I hopped a saucer before I bought 'er.  
Got the Hail Bop comet to Planet Med.  
I'm friggin' dead. The end. Rewind, dude: I'm talkin' to you.

Tucker Lieberman



Chaos Owl



## Settle Down, Y'all

Life is hard. Yes, life is hard even after life ends. In fact, from what you've probably figured out, life is shit when there's nothing to do in Purgatory. Now I realize you were promised so much more than this "hurry up and wait" routine you've gotten saddled with, but I can't say I have many answers for you at this time. Word is, hell's still quite full. Has been for a few hundred years, I'm afraid to admit. We've tried a few solutions, so don't think we've not had your best interests in mind. Most of you newcomers were due here at least ten years ago, so we've done you that favor, for what it's worth. It's crowded, yes, I know. But, hell is, too. And hot, as you'd expect, and stinks to high heaven, and is deafening with the gnashing of teeth and everything the pamphlets promised. Why be in a hurry. This boredom or that? Heaven, on the other hand, is not terribly full, never has been, and even has a new immigrant clause in effect making entry that much more seemingly impossible, so any of you convinced you were supposed to be there rather than here, or hell, eventually, contact

your shift supervisor and get the paperwork process underway. Don't worry. You've got time. Just keep in mind, God isn't really interested in any new arrivals. Just letting you know. They don't call it space for nothing, ya know. You, there, stop pushing. You'll notice in your new arrivals welcome bags a few items. The "So you got raptured" self-help manual by our good friend and colleague, Brother and Saint James of Carpathia, two protein bars, and some bottled spring water. And some toilet paper. Don't trade it all for cigarettes and tattoos just yet. As room becomes available in either hell or heaven – don't hold your breath, though that's an obsolete phrase here (chuckle) – we'll be calling your names, last name first, first name last, so be attentive to what's going on, though we want to relax during your stay. By the way, we're taking volunteers for our upgraded demon possession program which gets you a straight delivery back to earth for anyone interested, so prick your finger and come on up if you've got, say, unfinished business back on the mainland. That about wraps up this hour's announcements. Have a good afternoon.



## //Procedure//

Use no pair of delicate, innocent looking tweezers.

No gleaming, newly manufactured scalpel.

Steam-cleaned and perfected stainless steel does me no good.

But that rusty pair of jagged forceps, forgotten for so long, recently dug out of a physician's kitchen drawer, the crust-ridden ones, those are a different story.

They were in a woman's abdomen once. Surrounded with the fire of her day. Burnt clean. So clean they were silent and satisfied, sleeping, left behind like a kid at a filling station in the desert.

Diana was her name. She winced when the MRI machine spun-up, started its search. Like many women, they didn't believe her at first. Until she crawled out of the machine, screaming, *Get it out! Get this out of me!*

She'd only thought she was possessed up until then, arguing with the voices in her body.

How could someone, a physician, hungover or not, so carelessly leave a tool inside another person's body?

That's it, get those. Yes.

Don't scrape off whatever that is, leave the taste.

This shouldn't be sanitary and

flavorless. Nothing should ever be, don't you agree? I knew I liked you for some reason.

Now fasten those clamps down – tighter –

I don't want to move at all, lest I break more of you than only your heart when I begin begging you

to cease this lovely favor,

as new tongues of pain, confusion slobber out like alien profanities

I'll have no translation for when we're finished.

So don't ask.

Now, for this one terrible and splendid favor,

I'll never ask another thing of you.

In this lifetime, at least.

Rx: The right hemisphere is the target.

Soul of creativity, enemy of analysis,

where the qualifier rages out at the quantifier,

abstractions run amuck. There's something

in there. Dangerous. And you can have it

once it's out. I don't care where it goes.

Just know this is ultimately your choice.

Dig deep and fast – let it know you mean business.

It thinks – if it can think – it's well hidden.

Somewhere in the folds, in the fields under the skull, behind the seed of the third eye, my soul,

dead center of my head.

When I stiffen with the first jolt, that shocking jab, use it to your advantage, the worm will move, rolling and rolling, rolling and rolling. And I'll be

screaming, of course.

Just keep my jaw still, for god's sake.

Stay focused through my right ear.

They say it's wormlike, tape-ish, having no real face

to speak of, unless it has adopted mine (check

when it's out, please), perhaps a hand or arm here and there.

Creative monster within a monster, both feeding

on the myth of the other, this internal freak

of nature hidden behind the skull's softening curtain.

But don't squeeze too hard. Don't

leave such a dying

thing expanding in me.

When you

get it out,

you own it.

Eat freely but quickly. This is

not a thing

you want to take responsibility for

setting upon the world if

it gets away from

you.

Shannon Elizabeth



*Silence*

## Freyja's Birth

Molten metal floods the devil's anvil, fire gives birth to Freyja. Agony sheens and shudders, gasps and groans until she is delivered, and gnashed teeth slice her umbilicus.

The mid-wife, Njoror, fond white witch, watches wanton women spirit Freyja far away. Reared to revel, exult in pleasure, through days of war and comrades, sex and lovers. Then, unforeseen, wisdom grows her still and cool, solid and formed in beauty. She grows young held in human dreams.



## Curses

Wilting wap  
witchcraft

defleats dragonella's  
still

derangling the weird  
Welsh Marches

pensed foul dread  
degroodled.

Sprites sprinkle curses  
to rehearse for  
doom-frum dire  
and forfend devil  
dawns.

White witch Gwenda's  
woozy, wilful  
wantonness knows  
now, all sweet billiams  
die.

Waking with  
intentedness

she draindrichts to  
wreck all.

She spoos portents  
powered and pillacky.

Lank locks sparoud her  
brinkly brow

and water's wanted to  
shrive shellfish

from her stinky  
oceaned hair.

As she stoops to browl  
she spies cruel drisket  
Daddy-O

se-crenting cups of tea



## Our Armageddon

This is how it happened, how my sister became everything to me. It was winter, all day we'd searched for food. Outside one blown-out building we'd seen a dented fridge. Dad prised the door open, inside we found lumps of rot in pools of slime. On the ground next to it, young dandelions pushed up and split the hard earth. We sucked one leaf each and left the rest of the plant to grow, a food source to return to.

We were tired out, all three of us. We didn't see him until he was almost on top of us. A man attired in the uniform of the New Army.

'Come with me,' said the officer.

By what order?' said my father.

'That's no matter. I have authority. Come.'

'Of course. Do you intend to take us outside the city walls, Sir?'

I flinched at the craven look on our father's face. I couldn't understand what had happened to him, he

had been so strong once.

'Maybe. Get going. Now.'

'Are you sure? We never go there,' said Dad.

'Who's *we*,' said my older sister, Bella.

'The family, us.'

'There is no *we*, no *us*,' said Bella. 'The war changed all that.'

Bella knew many things I did not. She stepped in when Dad lost his way, went to pieces, That happened often these days.

'Shut up. Shut up, all of you. Come with me,' said the officer.

'Who gave you the say-so?' said my father, again.

'For me to know, you to wonder.'

'Will you help us?' I asked.

'You will be saved, saved to contribute,' he said. His eyes narrowed.

Wee soaked my trousers, my cheeks flared, and I looked down at the ground.

'Saved from what?' said Bella. 'Everywhere is the same now.'

'Not quite.'

'How exactly will we be saved?' she persisted.

'The rules have changed.'

'The rules always change, officer,' she said.

'This time, it's for real.'

The man looked her up and down. Bella spat on the dusty ground.

'Dad, don't go, Please. We can take care of ourselves,' said Bella. She took my hand

and held it tight. 'Dad, we are staying, whatever you do.'

My shirt stuck to my back and Bella's nails dug into my skin.

'Dad,' I said. 'Is Mum there?'

'Mum's dead,' said Bella.

'That's a lie,' said Dad. 'We will find her. We'd best go with the man, like he said. Likely, we'll find her.'

'See, Bella,' I said. 'It'll be alright. Mum's coming back.'

'Hold on, bairn' said the officer. 'I never said ...'

'Too late,' said Dad.

'You've raised hopes.'

'Not mine,' said Bella.

'The child stays with me.'

I felt the force in her arm.

'It's just me, then,' said Dad.

'Come on,' said the stranger.

The officer turned on his heel and Dad limped off after him, into the night. The air smelt of hung meat.

'Come with me, Gracie,' said Bella.

We staggered back into the old quarter. Yellow fog swallowed us deep into its acrid craw. I remembered Mum's hacking cough.

## Ghost Train

at the Geelong Show, when I was a child

Luminous,

with a guttural roar,

the creature leapt from the dark.

My heart almost jumped from my throat.

But a kid at the back of the Ghost Train,

in the carriage behind mine,

attacked the humanoid being

with (upon a closer look)

suspicious rubbery skin.

There was a struggle.

During the fracas,

the monster guy ripped in half

a brown paper bag

belonging to the kid.

Soon the ride ended.

'I've lost my lunch!'

the kid exclaimed

as we emerged into daylight.

He held the torn-off top of his bag.

But he wasn't unhappy;

in fact, he was grinning

—he'd grappled with a monster,

and emerged unbowed,

undefeated



## We Are Now Myth



I used to live in Atlantis.  
We'd watch TV, mow the yard,  
and make peanutbutter sandwiches.

Sometimes we were alive.  
Usually it was just inhale, exhale.  
Then stop.

We considered ourselves exceptional.  
How many other continents  
had shows where contestants  
giggled about sex?  
When the water wall came  
and we were busy clapping  
for whoever won a car that day,  
we said nothing will hurt us.  
We're forever.

Even when waves covered our lips  
and we screamed for help,  
we clung to a life preserver of beliefs.  
Surely God would save us.  
Everyone would hug and tomorrow  
would rattle the rafters.

We are now myth. Read about us,



Shannon Elizabeth



Día de los Locos

## The Window

I hadn't explored every corner of the house. I wasn't brave enough, nor well enough. It was drafty with a musty odor, and, try as I might, I could not overcome the dread of the unknown. I couldn't comprehend why we had moved into this dilapidated ruin; my family had always been wealthy, and never before had we lived in such conditions. Most of the furniture was covered with sheets. Dust and cobwebs lurked in hidden corners. In my brief time here, I had gotten to know the window inside my sickroom well. I stood and looked out for hours each day. The rattling of the wind against the panes, the cold glass against my forehead, and the unsurpassed view of the property made this my favorite place in the house.

I looked out across the vast landscape, and had no idea how much of the property my family owned. There had once been an orchard, now scraggly and overgrown. The most peculiar thing that I could see from my window was a cemetery. An old family plot, from what I could tell, not unusual for this region. What caught my attention was an old swing hanging from an oak tree in the center of the plot. I wondered why anyone would put a swing there. Surely it was no place for a child to play, idyllic though the landscape was.

Time passed. I wasn't sure how long, because the days blurred together. My cough had grown worse. I couldn't remember the last time my parents had visited my room. I couldn't blame them; my illness had driven a wedge of grief between them. I found myself still drawn to the window. I saw the swing billowing back and forth in the wind, and I wondered, *if I die, will they bury me in the plot outside, so that they can look out the window and see me?*

Spring came and the weather grew warmer. The sun shone down, lifting the dreary cloud that hung over the outside world. I saw through my window a patch of daffodils that sprouted, flaunting their bright hues and banishing the darkness of winter. It was on one of these warm spring days that I decided to venture away from my window, and explore the grounds for myself.

I walked through the cemetery, running my fingers along the headstones. Finally, I could read names and epitaphs left in memorial. Samuel, Isabelle, Douglas... these people must have lived here many years before. Inexplicably, I felt myself drawn to the center of the plot, the oak, and the swing. Though the rope looked ancient, I settled down onto the swing and began gliding to and fro. My toes brushed the ground, and I glimpsed a small tombstone:

Lydia Ravenshorn

1886 - 1897

"Loving and Obedient Daughter"

As I turned back toward the house, the hairs on the back of my neck rose. Standing in my window was the silhouette of a girl looking down at me. Suddenly I realized what the window had been trying to show me.

I hadn't just moved here. I had never left.

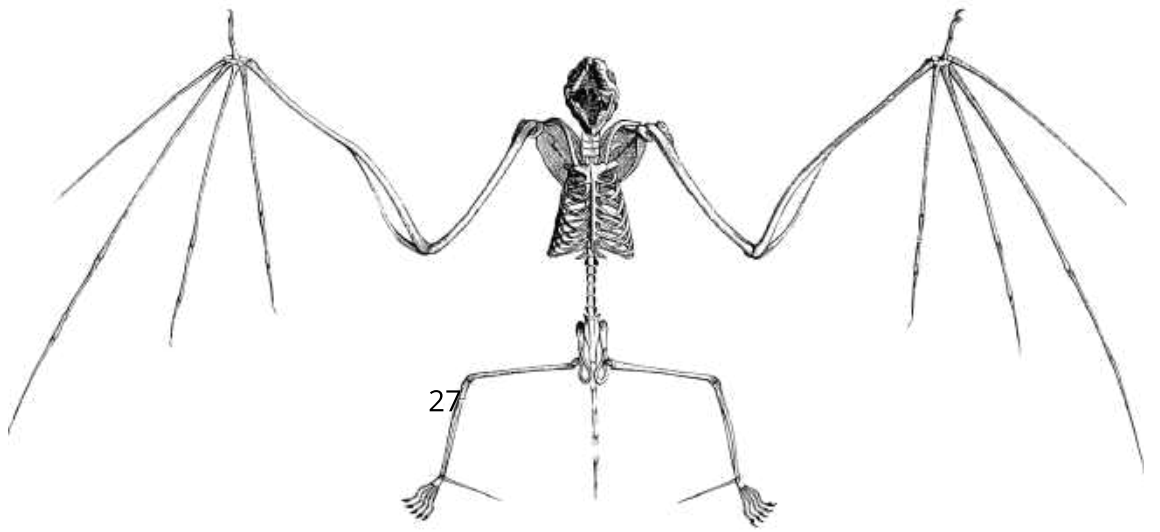
## Bat of the Underworld

The night was still a virgin when I became a moron,  
Empty of all expressions watching a bat of the underworld,  
Trying to steal my breath through a balcony of Lodge,  
Its mandible was a tower hundred feet above ground,  
Its legs of drill hung on my curtain in thick ropes of muscle,  
And its neck was a viper twisting magic;  
Its mouth gaped exposing a fence of teeth like dagger,  
Invoking life out of me.

From the breathing cage of my upper body,  
I became a living dead basking into a basket of casket,  
I tried singing Ogene to awoken the spirit of my ancestors  
To save my breath from being stolen,  
But they had all gone to the land of the deaf.

In the pocket of silence I watched my tears  
Flowing towards the river of damnation,  
With a rotten hope wrapped up in cat-skin.  
My eyes looked beside a corner of the lonely street,  
And saw how a young grave arose as slave in abjection  
Trying to kiss me into the prominence of death unexpected.

It was like a mirage when the only Being dwelling above,  
Landed with a speed of grace;  
Squeezing the bat beneath the grave,  
Then I heard my nose sneezed out a rancid,  
Following the injunction of a force pushing me back  
To the consciousness of a life stitched in shadows;  
I am just a mere mortal with an oiled skin.



## Haunted Hospital

I was pacing around The  
Valley again  
when I saw a hospital  
worker approach  
a patient who was talking to  
himself.  
I eavesdropped on their  
conversation.

She asked who he was  
talking to.  
He explained he was reliving  
times  
spent with his friends who  
weren't there.

She excitedly asked if he  
regularly spoke  
to ghosts and spirits of his  
dead relatives.  
It didn't seem exciting to me  
or appropriate  
for a mental health worker  
to ask a patient.

She said she was always  
interested  
in spirits that might be  
lurking.  
Lost souls walking the halls,

and visiting with patients.

But, maybe the dead were  
here  
before the hospital was  
built,  
and the living are the  
trespassers.

Perhaps, we are the spirits  
or the ghosts, wandering  
the corridors,  
hoping to get well and  
desperate to get out.



## Winter at the Girls' Asylum

I dream of asylums. Always, they are multi-tiered, shaky structures with tall, barred windows disrupting one's view from the inside. But there's no longer anyone to look out.

The grounds are bare, shrouded in perpetual bleak winter, trod upon only by the restless ghosts of former residents. Inmates, held under the guise of science, tortured in the spirit of cruelty. Ragged, ethereal, frosty girls sweep away snow, claw at frozen earth, rest porcelain cheeks on stiff moss. Faded pink satin chokers encircle their necks, cutting, searching futilely for lifeblood. These girls can no longer be wounded.

It is easy to imagine a different scene entirely. One in which beautiful, composed, pink-cheeked young ladies sit on green grass, white skirts tucked under legs, manners and bodies intact and vital. Nannies stand nearby, offering dainty morsels and unwarranted praise. In this reality birds sing, flowers bloom, well-bred blood courses through blue veins.

This reality, this lawn, is not the setting of my dreams though. My girls came later, after the deserted mansion became a girls' home, then the asylum where any small carelessness was enough to warrant a prison term and, eventually, a death sentence.

The building is boarded and thought to be vacant now, because no one takes into account the ghastly girls who cannot find a place of peace for which to leave this hell.

I try to help them and I cannot. I don't exist inside the dream.

They say if you die in a dream, your body dies. If you died in the asylum, you live on forever, frozen to that world like wet skin to ice.



## Serpentine Seas

Dewy crags beneath my feet become

Medusa's petrified victims,

And hint at the algid waters below.

I leap, but the fear lasts only a second.

Immersed, surrounded and

Numbed.

She hisses beneath me, and her

Emerald tresses caress my feet.

The icy womb of the serpentine sea cradles me.

She coaxes me deeper, yet

My mortal frame will not

Unleash me.

It is my sempiternal soul

That will remain below with the

Ophidian Goddess.

Violent splashes rise from the waves

As my body tries to emerge.

Sunlight is visible yet out of reach,

I grasp towards the surface.

But the serpent coils itself around an ankle

And at once the sunlight disappears.

Medusa, termagant, virago,

Witch.



Shannon Elizabeth



*Grave Dancer Dancing*

# The Erlking's Daughter

Noa ran a tired hand through her long mane of curly, dyed-too-bright maroon, hair and exhaled a heavy plume of smoke from her mouth. The club she was haunting had let out for the night, and she was standing across the street, watching the inebriated patrons make their sloppy ways home. One of her foster mothers had always gotten off by saying that nothing good ever happens after midnight.

Noa grunted at the unwelcome memory of Beth – her 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> foster mother – it was sometimes difficult to keep track of them all. The government referred to them as gracious for taking in a scrawny kid with a bad attitude, but according to Noa they could take ‘gracious’ and stick it where the sun didn’t shine.

Just then, a memory tried to claw its way out of the darkness of her mind where she kept everything unpleasant. A memory from when she was a teenager. Hot hands gripping the skin on her thighs; a crowd of strange looking people surrounding her, closing in; a deep, and haunting voice that dripped sweet honey into her soul. The bad thing.

Noa exhaled sharply through her nose and forced those memories back into the secret spaces of her mind. Instinctively, she fingered the little inked symbol on her wrist. It was a protection ward she had gotten as a teen, around the time the bad thing stopped.

She had just raised a tiny blunt and took another deep drag, relishing the burn, when she spotted trouble on wheels. Big, shiny Harley’s wheels, to be specific.

The bike’s owner was wearing big black boots with spikes on them over tight leather pants. As her eyes travelled upwards, she was liking the view more and more, that is, until she got to his face. The lips were thin, set into a smirk and the teeth behind them were slightly crooked. The eyes that lit up that face were devastatingly magnetic – one was baby blue and the other was hazel, both rimmed in heavy black eyeliner. There was something else in those eyes, sparkling behind those mismatched irises that spoke of old danger, unearthly confidence and even a little...familiarity.

Noa dropped the ghost of her cigar and kissed it into the ground with the heel of her boot. She raised her now free hand to the back of her neck where the hairs were standing on end. Assuming that this person had to be a past blackout hookup, Noa pulled her jacket close around her and headed in the opposite direction. She wasn’t the type of girl who played in the same pool more than once.

\*\*\*

Back in her tiny apartment, Noa had drawn a flowery bubble bath and was soaking to try and wash away the grime of the day. With her eyes closed, she rested the back of her head on the edge of the old, claw-footed tub she kind of liked. Across the bathroom, her iPod dock sat on a small shelf, crooning a 90s grunge rock hit. Noa felt all the tension she’d been holding in her muscles release at once.

There were herbs in her bath. The kind she used when she was in almost desperate need of a good sleep, a borderline coma. Valerian, Lavender, Chamomile and Rose petals floated dreamily around the curves of Noa’s body. She felt her eyelids grow heavy, heavier, closed.

The iPod crackled with white noise, and Noa’s eyes snapped open. A soft chuckle could be heard just behind the static. The water didn’t feel hot anymore, there was ice in Noa’s veins. The laughter grew louder and was now a harsh, angry sound.

Her wide eyes were on the open door and as she watched, long, slender fingers curled around door frame. A pair of luminescent eyes blinked back at her from the darkness beyond the bathroom.

Noa scrambled out of the tub, huddling soaking wet and shaking in the corner. This was everything she had ever run from, here now in the flesh. There was nowhere she could run.

The pale hand withdrew and in walked that mysterious motorcycle rider from outside of the club. Familiarity struck Noa again like a knife to the chest, and the memory came back with much more clarity. She was lost in it, drowning helplessly on her



bathroom floor.

Surrounded by strangers in masks, a much younger Noa was on her knees with her hands tied behind her back. Before her stood a tall, devastatingly handsome man. His teeth were slightly crooked, and one of his eyes was baby blue... the other hazel.

"Who am I?" He asked her, his voice deep and silky.

"The Erlking," answered Noa. Her lower lip trembled.

"Did you come with me willingly?"

"Yes, but-", Noa protested before The Erlking cut her off.

"You called to me when you were at your loneliest. Very clearly, you said, 'Someone please take me away from here,'" he said.

Noa's shoulder's slumped in defeat. "Yes, I came with you willingly."

He brandished an ornate knife and smiled wildly. "Your body, your soul and your blood now belong to me."

Cries of surprise rang out behind her, and Noa felt hands grab the rope binding hers roughly. Then all at once the ropes were gone. She smelled cloves and a girl's voice in her ear said, "Run, Noa."

"Yamiyah, what the hell are you doing?" The Erlking growled at his daughter.

But Noa had run.

She came slowly out of the memory and blinked hard at the figure standing by her sink, looking at her anxiously. The person every reflex in her body had told her was the Erlking, but was really-

"Yamiyah," whispered Noa, reaching out her hand.

Yamiyah came to her and held her face gently in her hands.

"The Erlking is dead, and I've come to take you home with me. You don't have to run anymore."



## Not Son of Sam

A few years later the Yanks would have their knickers in a twist about Son of Sam, but we had Sam himself.

Sam Hain, papers called him, because after the first murder, in early October, he wrote some rubbish in blood on the sidewalk about being the Druid Lord of Darkness, celebrating early the Gaelic festival marking the end of harvest and start of winter. And going to keep celebrating, he promised.

“Four liters of blood by the size of her,” Chief Inspector Redmond said. “Lucky for Sam, him wanting to write *War and Peace*.”

Easy to say “Only kills tarts, I’m all right Jack.” But can he always spot a tart, know who is and who isn’t? And sure he’ll stick to tarts anyway? Not signed a contract. If the pleasure’s in the killing, why not try something different? Bird kept her cherry dies same as a tart.

Coppers started looking for a little chap because the third tart got away and noticed that much about him. Not tiny, mind, big enough to kill that first tart, lass of ten stone. But ten-stone bloke would be stronger, and that’s still small for a bloke.

Tart that got away said “By the grace of God.” To which Harold Morton, most useless Detective Inspector in Brixton Station and like Redmond another sodding comedian, said “Now we know God gives a monkey’s what happens to a tart.”

Detective Inspector Ellen Flay ignored that. But then C.I. Redmond said Flay had volunteered to play a tart, act as bait.

“Reverting to her true nature,” twat Morton piped up again.

Flay glared at him.

But she didn’t glare at Redmond when he said D.I. Morton would be her cover. Redmond didn’t take to hard looks from subordinates.

She waited for her colleagues to clear out. Inferiors all, she thought, but with testicles you can get by. Colleagues and their testicles not hanging around anymore—so to speak—she could have a word with the Chief.

Redmond spoke first. Had read her mind.

“Can only spare Morton. Darkies on the warpath, nastier business than a chap killing tarts.”

“Because they’re tarts?”

“He kills a university lass,” Redmond sighed, “darkies go on the back burner.”

“Or he kills a woman D.I. because the bloke meant to cover her’s useless?”

“Make sure that doesn’t happen,” Redmond said in his conversation-over voice.

#

Week until Halloween. Freezing her fanny off on Maplethorpe Road, center of the pattern formed by the sites of the attacks, one that failed included. No real tarts in sight. Tart can read a map too. So if Sam did the same, went to the center, Flay would have no competition.

Flay looking for a little chap like the tart that God gave a monkey’s about had said, telling herself little chap’s less

scary. But twat Morton with his yellow-teeth grin says “Still likely bigger than you, Ellen, kill you fast. I’ll play hero, gun him down. But too late for you.”

Flay thought *Not sure what I want gone more, Sam or your yellow teeth.*

Ginning up a bit of warmth pacing in sodding six-inch heels. Wondering how the tarts did it night after night.

And wondering something else on her pass by twat Morton. Plan was he’d ask how much and she’d say piss off. They’d have a moment to add more.

Hers was “Won’t Sam think something’s fishy, I say no to every bloke?”

Morton said “You want to say yes, don’t mind me. Starved for entertainment tonight.”

“Twat,” she said.

Freezing her fanny off. Not seen many blokes to say no to, even blokes staying in with no birds about. Poofers staying in too, thinking Sam’d do me if he can’t find a tart.

Then—hello—little sod pops up at the corner with Saxon Road.

She looked for Morton. Knew where he was five minutes ago. If twat’s having a wank, better finish fast. Worse, he’s nipped two streets over to Hartlepool Road, maybe find a real tart brave enough—stupid enough—to be out, have a quick one. Twat’s the sort to go too fast, leave a bird hanging. But maybe not fast enough if little sod’s Sam.

Mustn’t walk toward him, Flay thought. But too fast the other way, he’ll know something’s up. Walk away the tiniest bit slower than him, let him catch up slow. Give Morton time to shoot his wad then get back here. Don’t like being the damsel in distress, Flay thought. But need twat, and need him at his feeble best.

But get to the corner with Brockhurst Close and Sam’s gone. Where? He rent a bedsit above the shops?

She walked back toward Saxon Road. Light goes on above a shop, somebody draws the drapes. Little sod wasn’t Sam.

But where’s Morton?

Flay thought Hartlepool Road’s the ticket. Any tart out and about would go there because of the traffic, and Sam would go where the supply is.

She continued to the corner and down Saxon Road. Then had second thoughts. Suppose Morton’s not gone to Hartlepool Road. He’s on Maplethorpe, I’m on my own. Bloody hell.

She heard something. Alley up ahead. Coming from there.

She took off her heels. Filthy walking, but best not to make noise. Feels better too.

Turns into the alley and a dark shape’s in her face. She thought later how lucky she was he’d earned the six-inch heel she sunk into his eye not even thinking. Could have been some poor sod taking a slash. Popular spot for it, whole alley stinking like piss.

He dropped to the ground screaming. Then Flay saw another shape: D.I. Harold Morton, the life carved out of him.

Chap whose eye she’d put out confessed to the Sam Hain murders.

And Flay thought *Blessed October twenty-fourth that was, got two for the price of one.*

# Meet the Contributors

## Martina Rimbaldo

Martina Rimbaldo is a 29 year old women who lives and works in Croatia . She always wears a pen and a notebook in her purse in the case of a sudden inspiration in order to write it down . Her poem is published in Nightingale & Sparrow and her artwork is published at weekly blog of Royal Rose Magazine and Bleached Butterfly , her photographs are waiting for publication in Anti heroin chic .Loves to paint abstract paintings , read religious books ,watch horror as well as old movies with Audrey Hepburn ,Sharon Tate ,Brigitte Bardot who happens to share her birth date and (over)thinks specially about death ,what some people find morbid, but not her ,it is a part of life too. Her goal is to live according to the Golden Rule

## Joan Mc Nerney

Joan Mc Nerney's poetry has been included in numerous literary magazines such as Seven Circle Press, Dinner with the Muse, Poet Warriors, Blueline, and Halcyon Days. Four Bright Hills Press Anthologies, several Poppy Road Review Journals, and numerous Kind of A Hurricane Press Publications have accepted her work. Her latest title, The Muse In Miniature, is available on Amazon and she has four Best of the Net nominations.

## Samuel J. Fox

Samuel J Fox is a bisexual poet and essayist living in the Southern US. He is poetry editor at Bending Genres LLC and has been published in many online and print journals. Find Samuel on Twitter (@samueljfox) or at a coffee shop, graveyard, dilapidated place in Statesville, NC.

## Richard Stevenson

**Richard Stevenson** retired from a thirty-year gig teaching English and Creative Writing courses for **Lethbridge College** in 2015. He is the author of thirty-two books and holds a Masters in Creative Writing from the University of British Columbia (1984) and an honours Bachelor's degree in English (1974) and Diploma in Secondary Education (English, 1977) from the University of Victoria. His most recent books include a long poem sequence on serial killer Clifford Olson, **Rock, Scissors, Paper** (Dreaming Big Publications, 2016) and a haikai collection, **A Gaggle of Geese** (Alba Publishing, UK, 2017). A children's poetry collection, **Action Dachshund!** is forthcoming from Ekstasis Editions in Victoria, BC, Canada.

## Tucker Lieberman

Tucker Lieberman, the author of *Painting Dragons*, has walked on fire. His photos are in *Crack the Spine*, *L'Éphémère*, and *Impossible Task*. He lives in Bogotá, Colombia. [www.tuckerlieberman.com](http://www.tuckerlieberman.com)

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## Larry D. Thacker

Larry D. Thacker's poetry is in over 150 publications including *Spillway*, *Still: The Journal*, *Valparaiso Poetry Review*, *Poetry South*, *The Southern Poetry Anthology*, *The American Journal of Poetry*, *The Lake*, *Illuminations Literary Magazine*, and *Appalachian Heritage*. His books include three full poetry collections, *Drifting in Awe*, *Grave Robber Confessional*, and *Feasts of Evasion*, two chapbooks, *Voice Hunting* and *Memory Train*, as well as the folk history, *Mountain Mysteries: The Mystic Traditions of Appalachia*. His MFA in poetry and fiction is earned from West Virginia Wesleyan College. Visit his website at: [www.larrydthacker.com](http://www.larrydthacker.com)

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## Shannon Elizabeth

**Shannon Elizabeth Gardner** is a graduate from the University of Wisconsin - Stevens Point with a Bachelors in Studio Art and a Minor in Art History. Her interest in horror and the macabre came about while exploring nature and the paranormal. The work explores the natural and organic process of death, evoking empathy for decay. She believes life is beautiful when left to fate, leaving art to chance assists the viewer to witness beauty hidden within imperfections. Her process appreciates nature's process and discovers the earth's imperfect beauty. The ethereal mood of her work reaches the extreme and address the taboo.

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## Ceinwen E. Cariad Haydon

Ceinwen writes short stories and poetry. She is widely published in web magazines and in print anthologies. Her first chapbook was published in July 2019: 'Cerddi Bach' [Little Poems], a Stickleback by Hedgehog Press. She was a winner in the Nicely Folded Paper Pamphlet Competition July 2019 and her first pamphlet is due to be published 2019/20. She has an MA in Creative Writing from Newcastle University, UK (2017). She believes everyone's voice counts.

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## Kevin Densley

Kevin Densley is an Australian writer. His poetry has appeared in Australian, English and American journals. Densley's latest poetry collection, his third, *Orpheus in the Undershirt*, was published by Ginninderra Press (Port Adelaide, South Australia) in early 2018.

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## Kenneth Pobo

**Kenneth Pobo** has a new book out from Duck Lake Books called *Dindi Expecting Snow*. His work is forthcoming in: *North Dakota Quarterly*, *Switchback*, *Paris Lit Up*, and elsewhere. He and his husband enjoy watching birds from their porch. He teaches English and creative writing at Widener University in Pennsylvania.

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## Holley Cornetto

Holley Cornetto was born and raised in Alabama, but now lives in New Jersey. She is a librarian by day and a writer by night. Her fiction has appeared or is forthcoming in *Flash Fiction Magazine* and *Collective Realms*. She can be found on twitter as @HLCornetto.

## Ikechukwu Obiorah

Ikechukwu Obiorah is a Nigerian Writer, a Prolific Poet and Novelist. He studies B.A (Hons) English at the Benue State University, Makurdi. He is a member of Writers' League (BSUM) and also a member of Association of Nigerian Authors (ANA Benue Chapter). He is the Ambassador of Student Poets in Nigeria (PIN). His poem "The Oracle Bard" has been published in "POETICA 2019" by Clarendon House Publications, England, UK. For a decade Poetry has been his sweet heart.

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## Micah Bauman

Micah James Bauman has had his poems published in Word Fountain, The Electric Rail, and the Blue Nib, among other places. He has read his poems at local art galleries, libraries and coffee shops. Micah's first published work was in The Lock Haven Express, his hometown newspaper, in the form of reviews of young adult literature for the Annie Halenbake Ross Library.

## Jill Kiesow

Jill Kiesow: Jill Kiesow won the Lakefly Writers Conference short story award in 2018, and has pieces in several Clarendon House anthologies, *The Matador Review*, *Lunch Ticket*, and more. Her novel, *Wet Wings*, is available now.

Jill is a Reiki practitioner, vegan, and animal advocate, has worked at a shelter, and volunteers for two dog rescues.

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## Cara Bovaird

Cara Bovaird is a Masters student studying English literature in Coleraine, Ireland. She spends a lot of time by the sea, both reading and writing poetry. October is her favourite month, and Fall is her favourite season of the year.

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## Don Stoll

Don Stoll's fiction is forthcoming in THE BROADKILL REVIEW, XAVIER REVIEW, THE MAIN STREET RAG, WILD VIOLET, NORTHWEST INDIANA LITERARY JOURNAL, HEART OF FLESH, COFFIN BELL, BETWEEN THESE SHORES (twice), PULP MODERN, YELLOW MAMA (twice), FLASH FICTION MAGAZINE, and FRONTIER TALES, and recently appeared in PUNK NOIR ([tinyurl.com/y5o2x5fz](http://tinyurl.com/y5o2x5fz)), THE GALWAY REVIEW ([tinyurl.com/y6nxt9nv](http://tinyurl.com/y6nxt9nv)), GREEN HILLS LITERARY LANTERN ([tinyurl.com/y2lfxysm](http://tinyurl.com/y2lfxysm)), THE AIRGONAUT ([tinyurl.com/y67mzfmv](http://tinyurl.com/y67mzfmv)), CLOSE TO THE BONE ([tinyurl.com/y38ac6jv](http://tinyurl.com/y38ac6jv)), HORLA ([tinyurl.com/y3k6eewx](http://tinyurl.com/y3k6eewx)), YELLOW MAMA ([tinyurl.com/y5zt5loj](http://tinyurl.com/y5zt5loj)), DARK DOSSIER (four times), A NEW ULSTER, THE HELIX, SARASVATI, ECLECTICA ([tinyurl.com/y73wnmgq](http://tinyurl.com/y73wnmgq)), EROTIC REVIEW (twice: [tinyurl.com/y8nkc73z](http://tinyurl.com/y8nkc73z) and [tinyurl.com/y36zcvut](http://tinyurl.com/y36zcvut)), CLITERATURE ([tinyurl.com/y5m8arzn](http://tinyurl.com/y5m8arzn)), DOWN IN THE DIRT, and CHILDREN, CHURCHES AND DADDIES. In 2008, Don and his wife founded their nonprofit ([karimufoundation.org](http://karimufoundation.org)) to bring new schools, clean water, and clinics emphasizing women's and children's health to three contiguous Tanzanian villages.

