

Three Drops from a Cauldron

Midwinter 2018



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Revontulet

Icy meadows of birch and nettle
wed with frigid streams

one thousand lakes softly settle
as all of Lapland dreams.

The reindeer and the arctic fox
emerge from lands uncharted

where long ago the equinox
in holiness departed.

Oh rune singers, pray the dawn
goddess grants her light

summon here on winter's eve
the sunrise of the night.

Steven Duncan

Sleep Softly Now, A Blessing for the Solstice

'Om Sohum Shanti, Sohum Prem' 'I am Peace, I am Love'

The wheel of the year makes its final turn
and we are tipped over into the waxing light.
The sun god is reborn, bringing the promise of peace.

The earth quickens.
We dance together in perfect balance,
surrendering ourselves to the new dawn.

What wonders lie before us we ask
as we close our eyes and sink into a soft slumber.
What will germinate in our lives?

How will we tend the new shoots?
All will be revealed when night turns into day.
Time now to sleep and dream.

Welcome the unseen forces,
they who walk with us on our path.
Sleep softly now and awake to a new beginning.

Raine Geoghegan

Handiwork

These winter nights lie heavy in my hands –
I find myself with fingers itching to
be worked. I fill a fine-nibbed pen and draw
the ink across the blankness of my life.
The fine black lines fill up the page, furl out
towards the unforgiving edge as clocks
run down and quiet gathers all around.

Tonight my patterns are resembling lace
drawn fine enough to blind a Belgian nun.
Pen as bobbin, ink as thread that twines
and knots as foxes settle in the
undergrowth. I spin the vixen's dreams.
I fancy that my hair is reddening.

Andrea Small

Seventeen Minutes Of Solstice Sun

Its sacred stillness paves our route, as
we head in darkness from Brú na Bóinne.

Winter solstice scent, moist-sweet air,
silence transmitted along ley line veins;

a frequency you sense from white quartz
and granite as we enter Newgrange—

kidney-shaped, domed megalith, cloaked
grey in morning mist, ringed by kerbstones,

symbol-engraved secrets older than
Stonehenge or the pyramids. Sunlight

pierces through blackness at 8.58am—
inflates roof-box lungs, breathes light

to flood the cavernous central chamber.
We watch its heart reignite, come

back to life for seventeen minutes—
a once-a-year wonder that etches

indelibly into memory as we stand,
lost in time, lost for words.

Paul Waring

First Frost

Her window is bewitched. Tiny fingers trace wintry tapestry – dahlias, ferns, snowflakes – innocent heat unpicking all she would save. The ice-rink linoleum, mysterious in the mermaid light of day, beckons. Cradled by beauty, immune to cold, she dances.

Marilyn A Timms

Song (A Solstice Poem)

The lingering darkness makes the moonlight show
more brilliantly, spilled out over the snow—
a maiden calling to a maiden; song
intoning peacefulness, sung in the long
dark of the solstice—a gentle lament:
Diane mourns Camila, body rent,
her life taken in war; the muted cry
of priestesses seeing a vestal die—
one of their number, voiceless, still, and lost
forever, gone in quiet and cold and frost;
a nun laid on her bier at Christmastide,
mourned by the other nuns gathered inside
her convent. A white arctic fox leaps through
a snowbank, pathway silent in the new
drifts that reflect the song the moon has sung.
Cold sky, still forest, voiceless carillon.

David W. Landrum

December's Tower



Claire Loader

Dead Winter

And the grey geese slowly flap their wings
to the horizon and cut the world
in half.

The soft clouds of night embrace us
reaching to join at the lonely point
in the sky

where the muted sun, barely yellow, sits
amidst the spectral mists
promising nothing.

Here noise is hushed, motion stilled,
it is bad news time, when the heart hurts
and blood is cold.

Now we prepare for that journey below
beneath the black damp earth where hope
only whispers.

Close the doors, curtain the windows,
dead winter is here and all we can do
is endure.

Amanda Bonnick

The Woman in the Woods

The stretch of highway Cal found himself stranded on, on Christmas Eve, was surrounded by dark, dense forest, the kind that Cal associated with horror stories and fairy tales; the old, strange stories his mom had told him and his brother when they were kids, stories of dark woods haunted by beautiful and evil creatures.

Not to say that Carl was scared. He was a grown man, not the type of guy who would be spooked by a bunch of trees, and definitely not the type of guy who should be thinking about fairy tales. Not a pansy.

He squatted down next to his front tire: the one on the left that had blown out when he took the last turn. He had barely been able to steer the car to the narrow shoulder between slick uneven pavement and snowy forest floor without ramming into a tree, no thanks to the shit two-lane highways in that area, barely maintained by the county and always covered in debris that could get caught under a car's wheels. He grunted and spat on the ground as he looked at his damaged tire. Completely busted.

He rose from his squat and rubbed his hands together, which lately always felt cold and stiff. It had started to snow again, in soft, chunky flakes that would have been cheerful and romantic in any other moment, but to Cal felt like a mockery.

"Fuck you," he said. To the snow, or the highway, or the tire, or the forest. Maybe to all at once, and to the spirit of the holidays along with it.

He walked to the back of his truck, grumbling, to fetch the spare tire he was sure was there, underneath the tarp he had haphazardly strapped over the truck bed before leaving his ramshackle red brick house, one of only about a dozen on the single lane road half an hour from where he was stranded. He wasn't disappointed to receive the call about the power grid, didn't mind the hour-long drive to reach it and didn't mind working on Christmas Eve, especially since the only plans he had that night were to drink a case of beer and play poker online.

"I'm sorry to do this, Cal," Warren said to him over the phone. Cal could hear his children screaming in the background over the grating sound of an upbeat Christmas song. "But I've been getting calls about folks losing power all night. Seems like its travelling to us, so I need someone to get to the grid before it's a total blackout for us and the next county."

Cal was fine with it, and he told Warren that: told him to get back to his brood and that he'd be expecting overtime pay for working on Christmas.

He was rifling through the bed of his truck, knocking aside a toolbox and some traffic cones, but couldn't find the spare tire. But he never went anywhere without one. To be sure, he ripped the tarp off the top of the bed, but no. No spare tire.

Perfect.

Cal let out a violent stream of expletives that broke the silence of the snowy night like gunshots. He was so small, standing there in the falling snow, a man on the man-made road with his man-made vehicle and man-made ire.

I thought of all the men I had seen before, men just like Cal, dual beings of loneliness and bitterness, with one constantly leading to the other in a prophecy of misery. I considered leaving him there for a moment, merely a victim of circumstance, but there was nothing for it.

It was Christmas Eve.

I made myself known to him slowly, purposely snapping a twig underfoot and letting my hand scrape along the bark of an old, thick pine tree. I let my lower jaw hang down slightly and emitting a low, growling sound, something between a wolf and a bear, but inverted and reversed, completely wrong. It was something I had been trying lately, picking up characteristics to see what would fit, what would add to the stories about me. I drew closer to Cal. He stood still at the back of his truck, head ticked slightly upwards, ears alert. I could hear his heart stutter and stop, then beat faster.

I allowed myself to be revealed between the trees as I walked down the gentle slope to the road, a figure blurred in the darkness and snow. Cal's hands, which I was sure were freezing by then, were stuffed

into his pockets. That was something the stories said about me, that I made the hands of those I watched closely freeze.

His eyes met mine and I smiled at him.

The face I wore at that moment was one that I knew was beautiful, with full lips and long dark hair. I smiled at Cal and felt his contrasting reactions of fear and arousal as palpably as tastes on my tongue. He had taken an aborted step towards me, wanting to draw closer, confused by his own desire.

But as I drew closer, nearing the edge of the wood, his gaze fell downwards, and stopped.

I knew he saw the hooves that peeked out from the bottom of my dress, but I continued to smile at him.

I almost said, *You know what I am, don't you Cal? You remember the stories about me don't you, the ones that tell boys to never go into the woods alone on Christmas Eve.*

I almost said, *I know who you are. I've been inside your head, Cal. I've used your voice. I've seen everything you've seen.*

I almost said, *You believe in fairy tales, don't you Cal?*

But no words were needed.

All that was needed was my extended hand, palm up, and Cal's came to meet it, his eyes dazed, mouth open dumbly.

I grasped his hand in mine.

Natasha Grodzinski

Beira

Because we were born in the dark we know
that winter is a mother. Her loves touch is ice that feathers
skin and sets the heart's blood still
and she remembers her own

When the bricks weep and the walls spore black
if my cracked lips breathe out 'home'
would she be there
in a whisper?

Winter remembers her own. Do you
who were born in the sun, remember Nessa?
Sometime daughter, sometime maid

condemned for her flight to perpetual movement
to flow forever between the mountain and the sea
but even Nessa came to stillness in the end

sullen and secret in the peat dark depths
far from the sirens and the promises of spring.

Was I born in that same dark? Will I remember
as she remembers her own?

Douglas Jensen

Blackthorn

both my outstretched hands beseech
cupped in the homely image of a nest

reach into the blackthorn that
remembers the blackbird
and her clawed feet, the first flight
of her little ones, beyond the
safety of umber needles

my little one reminds gnarled blackthorn
of her young stars opening their bright faces
in stark winter wind she has nothing
but her tined memories for company

I feel her pin prick reminiscing
my hands cradle the history of the blackbird
that brown mother-bird gave her spit for this
wove a cautious Moses basket
wet the earth to sculpt it for her children
see her careful beak in every thorn

my daughter touches the moss
her fingers, slight blue eggs
I would plant blackthorn around her
as if she were a hatchling bird
soft bed hidden in thorns, until
she breaks for the sky and fledges

Susannah Violette

Bear, Wagon, Ladle

Star light, star
bright, with my own eye
I spy the northern sky,
the Big Dipper

spooning
pinpricked light
through the taut tarp
of night. Maybe

bear, maybe
wagon, a vessel
for gathering
stepping stones.

Kersten Christianson

The Fire Crackles

The fire crackles. We're back where we were,
or further. Defoliated dactyls loom, grasping
through the fog. But above, the stars are bright. A fox
calls. I scrape your shadow from the floor with my fist

and now as the day starts to fade, Herne
rides west. The heartsblood of the Highland stag
drips down into ponds, rivers. Black-mewled reflections
of charred-ember trees. Scarlet kisses. Mist rises.

I loved you. Really I did. The once-greenwood
tumbles to sleeping and I pale shiver with feathers.
Every step I take crackles more bones
into soil.

Birchwood. Bog asphodel. The frost-formed footprints
of a huntsman's boot, hundredweight hooves
(you wouldn't even believe my memories).
An orange-silver log has turned liquid in the flames.

Maya Horton

from *Standstill of Lands*

A coldest of days
forges a crystal palace
rule lasts a moment



Jeffrey Yamaguchi

Coyote Knows

your name
before
it became
mine
buried
blue drifts
of snow
define
night
coyote so
still upon
the frozen
lake
knows
the sound
of it feels
truth
flow thick
alive
beneath
her feet

Khadijah Lacina

The Creation of Death

One sunny day late autumn, God paid his visit to earth. He stood with the flowers and thanked them for their beauty and the magnificent use they had made of the summer's sun. He looked at the birds that fluttered already with longing for distance and wished them a splendid flight south. He found the bears and gave them warm dreams for the winter sleep, and he was just about to go and awaken the snow and the ice when he came across an odd thing he had never seen before.

It stood on the side of a hill, next to a rippling stream, shaded by patient trees. This isn't anything I created, God thought, startled, and went closer. It didn't move. Was it alive?

Suddenly something greeted him like an invitation calling him to come in. Come in! All this took place in the wordlessness of sympathetic silence with which God communicated with all creatures, and they in turn communicated among themselves.

He saw an opening in the mystifying thing, and when he entered, he found a man and a woman sitting on the floor eating grapes. The woman rose heavily to offer him some. He accepted a few and laid them on the floor like a handful of pattern.

What is this? he wondered.

Grapes, the woman indicated.

No, I mean this. He pointed to the thing around them.

A hut, replied the man with a smile of satisfaction on his face.

God tried to understand and seemed to succeed. It's pretty, he complimented them by glancing around once again with an approving smile. It's almost a pity that you've made it so large. Now you can't take it with you.

We aren't going anywhere, the man explained.

God was surprised. Didn't they have to seek shelter before the winter came?

No. The man's eyes gleamed. Don't you see, this is our shelter now.

Odd. God thought of the caverns strewn all over earth. He

thought of the man's legs and the woman's. Should he have given them wings?

The man touched the woman's round belly gently. She was pregnant. How could they manage to make a long and strenuous journey like that? So it had occurred to them to make a shelter where they were to begin with.

God understood everything then. He regretted their odd choice of time for a pregnancy, so close to winter. No other creature had yet disturbed his patterns like that. What if these two had not luckily happened upon such a novel contraption? Slowly God shook his head.

He was disappointed for them, unable to travel this autumn, unable to pass all the trees whose colors changed for their coming. But the following year they could easily be on their way again, together with the third one that would then be with them. God was pleased that he had so quickly found consolation for the unfortunate pair.

But the man shook his head excitedly. No, didn't God understand? They would stay here always, now that they had built this hut. It would be their permanent shelter. It would always belong to them, and to them alone.

How sad for them, God thought. They would never again see anything that way. It puzzled him. Had he not given them legs so that they could wander and their eyes so that they could see? For there was the earth and the heavens around them, large, beautiful. Hadn't he created them so they could go and see as he did? And who or what would see them again who were also beautiful? God pondered this for a very long time.

And when God found that death had become necessary, he created the mind.

It would make them wanderers again, never at home, and never young enough to rest. Knowing that they were strangers, set apart from the rest, and dreaming that they were not, they would find the world again somehow. Their dreams would be much like the wings he had not thought to give them.

God stood up to take his leave of them.

“Why don’t you stay a while longer?” the woman asked with a strange trembling which she later learned was called a voice.

All three of them stood frozen for a moment. Then God shook his head, clinging to one last silence. He had things to do yet. The sun was about to set.

“Will you return?” the woman asked.

“I will,” God said, giving in to language. “But you may not be here then.”

Then he went slowly along the rivers and up to the mountains to awaken the ice and the snow.

When the sun rose the following day, the birds who stayed for winter sang the brightness of their just discovered voices, and those already flying south spread their echo in the distance, for the silence of the world was forever broken.

Beate Sigriddaughter

Bruised

A sacrificed young
pregnant sow's warm
blood drips as a wish
that enough has been
done in the summer
for winter stores
to last till spring.

How many folk
you are close to
will die this season
and be put under earth?

Autumn is a grocer
garlanded.
Wishes are fruits
soon bruised.

Hawthorn is a blessing,
long sharp thorns
in its lobed leaves, safe place
for birds and small mammals
to munch on the red berries.

Blackthorn sloes, curses,
turn dusty blue. The dust
a yeast bloom attraction,
bitter taste eaten raw
by hawfinches and thrushes.

Sugar rich black berries hope
hoarded, butterfly sipped,
nibbled by squirrels,
dormice and deer.

Blackcaps, whitethroats,
pigeons, blackbirds pull off

slender stalks of effort.
Insects suck dropped,
bruised fruit of despair.
Elder bushes a feast of living.

Hedgerow sweet chestnuts,
wild strawberries, bilberries
and rowan berries ripen
laughter and forgetting.

What must be done now,
as later is too late?
Burst water pipe prevention
as light fades earlier
as frost ices mornings
heave up the metal lid
find the outside tap
turn the water off
staunch the consequences.

Paul Brookes

Mountain Ghosts

What happens after death to the mountain goat?
Some mountain goats believe like some humans
that what looks like wool of moulting double coat
rubbed against a rock is chance manifestation,
that large-hoofed mammals, even-toed and sure-
footed, ease their way along the cliffs without heart,
without meat, unseen by the sceptical but there
returning for some task unachieved at the start.
Reviving neck-bitten nannies, they turn afraid
at rustling sedge or conifers. Even mammals
like to spook themselves, bleating phantasmal fables
at salt licks or alpine openings as they graze
and their long horns betray their constant wonder.
Don't believe in ghosts, the mountain goats shudder.

Carl Griffin

The Snow Queen in Her Moment of Reflection

Winter solstice has struck my arteries / darkness overtaking the tracks
leading to my chambers / cold shadows stretch and reach through / chilled
veins, ice rivers that ripple beneath porcelain skin / as I bolt cold wrists to
my pointed throne / faint silver sprouts from under membrane / I trace
maps of royal life in my arms and / mourn the extinguished polar light

December Lace

Birth of the Snow Crone



Amy Alexander

Khione

You focus on your fear
of how I might
(if displeased)
turn your heart
to ice.

You've heard
I have the power
to sculpt
your fine physique
into frozen form.

I whisper syllables
soft as snowflakes -
entice you with my
raspberry-rippled
charmspeak.

Spangle McQueen

Escapade with Wolves

I almost looked through them
in the snow: the round tower,
a shadow of its stern self,
and at its feet, the pair of them,
rough-coated stone-griffin lookouts
with torch flame eyes.

In hindsight, the mythical guardians
follow my throat-maul fears
and dainty-pawed fantasies.
I'm no riding hood
but it's hard to shake
the silent howl, the thrill

of those twin silhouettes
watching the fairytale in me
retreat down slushy steps
to tarmac town.
Now I'm out of sight,
their bark is no worse

than any collarless grey dog.
My basket keeps such things secret.
I tighten my grip.

Sue Kindon

This Blood

This blood, my blood
drips onto the snow.
I can't clear it up
or wipe the stain away.
She shall have hair
as black as night,
lips as red as blood
and skin as white as snow.
And already I feel that pull
of fate, determinism,
or what I used to call the will
of God before my faith
faltered. I anticipate all
that she shall go through –
my daughter –
whilst I shall soon moulder
in a wintry grave beneath
bare trees and frost-packed
ground. My usurper
has her spells and her mirror;
will treat my girl
so cruelly. And I helpless, dead.
Look, the stain is spreading,
the future is being written
on this no-longer virgin covering.
The red words
skitter and spread –
the scarlet threads of our destiny,
frozen into place.

Allen Ashley

Stone Cold

Sian knew she should move. Her hands were frozen from operating the camera and were now wrapped tightly in her thick, padded gloves. She felt their weight as solid, brickish lumps in her pockets. Her feet, too, felt numb inside her boots now that she had been standing for a while on the crisply frosted grass and her legs were going to sleep as well. She knew she should head to the car soon to warm up.

She was reluctant to leave. This was the end of her project, the last stone circle she would photograph. She had managed to capture the silhouettes of the stones as the sun disappeared over the distant hills, the final time the days would shorten this year. She would like to have returned in the morning; see the sunrise the day after the solstice, feel the year turning towards the spring. *Perhaps*, she thought, *I could use a little optimism.*

Sian's project was her way of holding herself together after the harrowing loss of her husband to aggressive cancer two years earlier. She had photographed forty-eight stone circles – one for each year of Jake's life. Sian had avoided the bigger, more well-known sites and this last one was tucked away in a fold of the country, near a village that seemed to be fifty years behind the times.

When she had stopped for directions, the landlord in the pub had warned her to stay away. Not in a sinister, threatening, B-movie sort of way, but with kindness and an air of concern.

'Nay, lass. It's not a place to be mithered with. Don't go botherin' them.'

'Them?'

'The Widows.'

Not usually superstitious, Sian had felt a momentary fluttering in her stomach at the coincidence. She had shrugged it away. People liked to give names to their circles – sisters, dancers, apostles. They were still just stones.

Alone in the stone circle in the dusk, she could see how the stones' shapes sparked people's imaginations. It was easy to see that one

as a young woman, slim-waisted and long-haired, or that one as stooped over with age. The two she stood between in the ring were half turned towards each other, as if in conversation. Sian fitted perfectly in the gap between them.

Briefly, Sian wondered what difference there was between her and the figures in the circle. After Jake's death her emotions had turned to stone. She walked and talked and went to work and interacted with people, but she felt as hard as rock inside. The project had given her a purpose, but two years on she still felt her grief weighting her down. *And what next? What happens now the project is done? Can I end my grieving too?*

She made a decision. When she stepped out of the circle, she would begin living again. She would let go of the grief and bring herself back from stone to flesh. She closed her eyes. *One more minute here.*

A deep breath in; a plume of breath out into the midwinter night. *I'll go in a minute.*

At the very edge of her hearing, Sian heard voices. Soft ones, whispering gently.

'She will stay now, sisters.'

'We Widows welcome her.'

'She will feel the sunrise.'

No, thought Sian. *I am leaving in a minute. I will open my eyes and leave. I am ready.*

Her eyelids, weighted with quartz, stayed closed.

Penny Blackburn

I will make you

I will make you an arrow of mistletoe
so you can kill arrogant gods
even if you're blind

this is the mystical mistletoe
packed with leukins, viscotoxins
and more besides

mythical mistletoe growing up high
not of the earth nor of the sky
a parasite

opportunistic mistletoe
drawing subsistence deep from the tree
carried by slime

wiped from a beak symmetrical mistletoe
appears in a sphere balanced all round
whose berries might

make worlds of their own misleading mistletoe
not flimsy but sturdy creator of planets
each green inside

cellular mistletoe within the jelly
germinating embryo ready for an arrow
to inject life

so here is your arrow of magical mistletoe
to fire in the dark then after the slaughter
we will find light.

Richard Westcott

For EW whose chemotherapy nearly killed her

I left home

I left home on Christmas Eve
after my father told me his
truth about Santa

he said

you're old enough

he is not your future
nobody is waiting
to slip into your dreams
or fix them the way you'd like

oh
and son
beneath the snow lies the same old path

so take the soot displaced from the chimney
and the scratching of hooves on the roof
but leave the boxes well alone
leave the wrappers as intact
as skin before an autopsy,
you do not want to go there
you do not want to know the feeling
of getting something you did not earn
or earned only by believing a lie
by turning your back upon the cost to your soul

and maybe I might have waited
for the birth of his saviour
but I did that last year
and watched Him leave after lunch

so I asked my father this:

is it truth to deny the day
which hides behind the ear like a penny

or

is truth a rifle shot
before the reindeer is old?

Dom Conlon

Solstice

I see what they mean now
about reincarnation: life as a wheel,
as mother-of-pearl in the spiral of a shell,
that feeling you've been here before.

Youth,
arm's length at the end of a shout,
could turn to feathers, leaf,
could sling round a bell curve
over the nailed-up stars,
round galaxies so big light bends
like cupped hands.

And we try and grasp it.
Snowflakes, fingerprints, sunrise
sent reeling through a prism –
lightning above the clouds
and a matching handprint
on the wall of a cave.
June thunder.

Ian Harker

The Hermit's Guest

A cold man seeks the warm and I
fetch apple, bread, a wood-smoked
cheese pared thin as paper leaf,

as apple wrap, as pale gold
leaf tobacco, thin enough to roll
if anyone might smoke it.

My guest, gut to table leaf,
back to woodsmoke fire, turns
apple-red and sweats like cheese.

Linda Goulden

Barbegazi

rarely seen
you blend in well
we stand face to face
in the kaleidoscopic dazzle
of the distant silent slopes not
knowing but sensing warmth
of life benign intent radiating love
you white furred from top to toe your feet
obscenely large like built in snowboards splayed
in playful invitation the flash and gleam of icicles
dangling from your beard twinkle magical melodies
in my head I freeze can't look away your ice blue eyes
are all I see and now I understand you are my winter self
the homesick one it's time I set you free hide no more Barbegazi

Diana Devlin

Furrows



Paul Brookes

The Angels of the A629

And when it came, it came like ash,
heavy, dense enough to finish off Pompeii,
as prompt as a tax bill, or a Nidderdale milkman
in the nithering small hours, bang on time
for a bleak midwinter rush hour.

He got it wrong, like Michael Fish in '87.

A light dusting said that weather pixie on a string,
But it were much much much much worse than that,
not that you'd know by the bland rants
on an impromptu phone-in on Radio Leeds:

This is nowt. You should've seen it in '47!

We were stranded on a bus in Queensbury fer three days!

They had to bring the army in, or what were left of 'em.

*On the second night, I started on me own frost rotten hands
before I suppered on the paper boy. It took 'em six hours to fish us out!*

Aye, I shouted, over the racket of my Toyota Yaris heater.
*That may well be, but you didn't have temporary traffic lights
every fifty yards or 35 million cars on the roads. Did yer?
Eh? Eh? Eh? Eh? Eh? Eh? Eh?*

But you see all sides of humanity in a Yorkshire crisis.
Things came to a head on the road up through Denholme:.
Some *notobemessedwith* women of the Worth Valley
had been gridlocked, stuck, wheel-spinning since the school run.
They watched, bleary eyed, as snow morphed into angels,
who, once formed, looked a bit on the rough side,
burly upper-Bradford types, tipped out of the pub
by an altruistic landlord during *Happy Hour*.
They were armed with lengths of rope and double entendre:
*Pop yer window down, love, one said. I'll tie you up,
get you going in no time.* And they did.
They towed them all to safety one by one.

They found a life guard from Huddersfield
In a flap of hysterics, skidding, traction-less,

hand-fanning his face to hold back teary deluge.
They soon calmed him down and got him safe.
Some tough blokes were rescued too,
exhausted, spent, yet stubborn.
Sort the womenfolk out first, an angel said,
but he was done, emasculated by Siberian snow,
no less vulnerable than other stranded victims were.

I was one of the last to be saved, gibbering
in the din of my own suffering.
Calm yersen down, lad, an angel said.
It's not that bad. Worse things happen in Halifax.

They made the front page of the *Telegraph & Argus*
and the sofas of *The One Show*, *Look North*, *Calendar*.
They were famous for days, these saviours of the Bradford hills,
the Angels of the A629, now enshrined in local folklore
for giving up their drinking time.

Mark Connors

Sugarplum Fairies Dancing in My Head

What depleting supply of dopamine my brain can generate
 drops like sugar cubes into a cauldron-sized punch bowl
 when obscure relatives feed me too much drink
 laced with alcohol I don't remember mixing
The flask I keep in my unraveling stocking perpetually
keeps me on Santa's naughty list

And so it goes, (year after year, minor serotonin spike):
 The electricity bills increase in an obscure aunt's house
 Burnt meal glued to stomach lining
 Calorie counting thrown out the frosted windows,
 My conversation levels collapse,
 And just when my uncle's megaphone voice
 triggers my migraines past the point of salvation

Discreet sugarplum fairies come to rescue me as quiet as snowfall
With silver wings and sharp noses
They whisper directions and weave dust through my nostrils
Until I have life and cheer again

They use my brain as a stage and reenact Tchaikovsky
I have balcony seats, they don't touch the floor

And I return to an unheated apartment, lie in cold sheets,
Settling my skull upon the pillowcase while
Visions of the valiant, rescuer sugarplum fairies
Dance in my buzzing, stark, throbbing head

December Lace

Loud Winter

Mine is not the winter of serenity: clean blankets of perfect crisp snow, a single red berry on a frozen bough. The winter of eradication when no single footprint untidies the ice, when cawing birds have learned to hold their beaks. The winter when no living thing speaks unless beneath the call of raging wind across flat land.

I want a winter for the broken ones, puddle-crust cracking under dirty boots, the stomp and the snowball, the slush and the spray. A winter of travelers huddling each night against the onrushing dark. A winter where we make our own light and color. A winter that remembers spring.

Kayla Bashe

Tracing Magic

In day time he jumps from hidden corners
to nip fingers, toes, then on he goes

until night falls under faraway stars. He slips silently into your room, skates
laced, glides

unseen to the bed, paintbrushes held in fingerless gloves and checks for
sleep.

In ice houses, he steals soft warm breath,
paints fragmented fissures, scratched out

ferns and roses on to windows; a mouth to mouth resuscitation of
forgotten dreams

his art reveals. Morning means you remember
their delicate beauty, trace their magic, shiver.

Caroline Johnstone

Shush

Sheriff Hutton Castle

December 1483

Snow hushes the castle. Fog spirals like children's breath. Mantle of the castle: to keep them out, to keep them in, to keep them within the spaces of walls.

Four children play in the snow. One of them, Edward of York, stops: a serious boy of thirteen with large, dark, studious eyes. His hair has a reddish tinge. He thinks the obtuse towers will fall on him. 'I need to go to the chapel. I'll join you later.' He walks sedately.

Two of the remaining children are ten, a few days between them. The girl is Margaret of Clarence, holding her father's name close like a relic. Her hair is luminous, a garnet half-hidden in opal ice. She says, 'Let's build a snowman.' The boy, Richard of Shrewsbury, Edward's brother, nods at Margaret. Richard's dark hair is mussed. He shies a snowball as they search for a place where they will begin sculpting.

The last boy has been left. He too is Edward, Plantagenet, Earl of Warwick, brother of Margaret. He tries to wade through drifting snow. When he falls snow scatters over his bear-brown hair. 'Wait for me,' he calls to Richard and his sister, but they are too far. The castle walls have closed his voice.

Edwin Stockdale

Oaks in Winter

Dawn will inevitably draw in.
You'll lift your fingers, one by one,

place your hand before your eyes,
and whisper a once-forgotten name.

*Nothing touches the thin-boned child.
Her smile outlasts her image.*

The oaks will be darker than the dark sky,
their silhouettes faintly pulsing.

Dawn will draw you in,
leaving you breathless and without leaves.

*Pale as the moon she flies
down an alley of the old port town.*

A star will slip away in a murmur.
Then, another.

*Nothing touches the thin-boned child
standing before the gate.*

You'll know she's listening to the rising tide,
that her key fits no door.

*Her heart flutters in stillness,
ears and fingers burning.*

You'll whisper a once-forgotten name.
She turns, looks straight in your eye,

*spins away in the ebbing night
like a moth with an injured wing.*

Scott Elder

The Holly King

When the season's getting colder
There's a madness that comes down
From an ancient murdered king
Whose corpse rotted
On the holly bough.
He was pierced right through the heart,
Atop his oaken throne
Then left hanged on a tree.

The Holly King,
His crown of leaves
Stained crimson
As he breathed his last,
He swore a dreadful curse of sorts,
To find his way back to the earth.

The Holly King, he found them all
One by One by One,
These traitors who had murdered him
His spirit found them as they slept,
Took their minds and led them hence.

They all ended like him,
Their bodies, naked,
On the bough,
On their heads a holly trim,
Their hearts pierced
Blood melding with the snow.

They call the madness of the Holly King
A curse for traitors all,
That they will dance naked
Out into the cold
Singing of their crimes

With nothing but a Holly Crown
Nestled upon their heads,
To their deaths they dance and smile
'Til they are merry dead.

Henry Thorpe

Gryla

You think I don't hear you
tuck your babies in;
frighten them to sleep.

That I don't watch your children
scamper home through streets
grown dim with winter.

I don't smell them,
fresh from baths, seasoned
with soap and talc,

their little minds open
for me to seep into;
meet them in their dreams.

You think I don't know
the names you've given me
to keep your daughters home

and now you're grown,
you think you don't know me; you do,
you've just forgotten me.

Gill Lambert

The Red Shoes

The red shoes
were your gift,
stolen from an icy corpse
just six days before Yule.
Her feet, you said,
were still warm,
warmer than her unclothed hands.
My feet, you said,
were still cold,
even here by our little stove,
and that you could not permit.
A kiss. A tear. My little feet,
shining red against the cold.

The red shoes
were my gift,
tossed into an icy river
just six days after Yule.
My feet, I said,
were still cold,
even wrapped in bloodstained sheets.
Your feet, I said,
were still warm,
even against my icy hands.
And that I could not permit.
A knife. A tear. The great river,
pulling you deep into the cold.

Mari Ness

Kalypso in Winter

Since you sailed
storms have dredged up my shore.
Waves pound through me like an irregular drum.
I long to take up the beat, to call you back.
I'd batter down these echoing cliffs
and run the seabed to your side.
Can you feel my urgency take hold
as you walk your stony island?

Your hearth is crowded with songs and laughter,
yet your brow is dark with unsaid words.
I pitch my tears into clouds
to be carried away by flocks of seagulls.
If I wrapped you in my cloak of spells
would you talk yourself free
or fly away on your ship's wings?

You will return to my isle without tricks,
your eyes will not drift homeward.
I send you my love
like a cold-sea kiss upon your wrist.

Gerry Stewart

Uninvited Guests

We've glimpsed at them last night.

Eyes shining in pits of light wide open,
sleek muzzles like cats or foxes.

Hiding.

Over the songs of forgotten lands
among fireflies and carnivorous flowers,
the children of the Hunger Moon stalk people
when the winter is coldest.

And they steal your dreams away,
before you realise you've fallen asleep.

Russell Hemmell

Mari + Verna



Sarah Peploe

Nerina

Pale skinned, with dungeon-dark hair,
a raven among doves, Nerina
was pregnant with mystery.

Her many rings flashed and sparkled
in the light, speaking silent magic.
Children watched, transfixed,
her dark eyes twitter in tune
with her tiny lips, casting secret spells
on the unwary.

Nerina was from Trieste,
watery city of the distant North
that once burned her kind,
a world removed from cosy Tuscany.

Unbeautiful in her blankness,
she slid silently among us like a veil,
whisper light, evading capture.

Was she Bora, the Lady of Trieste,
blowing icy havoc and destruction
on those who'd put her powers to the test?

Or was she just a woman with pale skin
we used to call Nerina?

Diana Devlin

Aer

They yell towards Ventus
gnashing.
Silently. He graces their cheeks
Presently. Yet never recognized

feelings. Overcomes all,
suffocating. Lungs.
Quickly. He pries it
Blowing. Breaths gasped

there is no path!
Squatting. Sloth sovereignty.
Gently. He makes his way
Passing. A push in motion

pounding chest to stop
fearing. Wolves at gate.
Brutally. He the hurricane
Sweeping. No mercy

Only few saw
catching. Ventus.
Favoring. His eyesight beholds
Wrapping. Them

Julia Burke

Snowfall, November 1918

Flakes flutter to the woodland floor, melt on skeletal leaves shed last autumn. Once they hid birds' nests in safety, later in brisk winds, they fell. Now, the tree stores strength deep inside and waits to rise. Air freezes further, snow traces chalk lines along dark branches. Scrawny arms, up-lift in praise.

A woodsman tramps, stamps. Stops. Calm until he starts, and chainsaw teeth saw the air. He fells the ancient beech. A headless stump remains amid a fret of amputated limbs cast wide and randomly around. Snow falls thicker now, hides dismembered evidence of slaughter.

Four o'clock, school's out. Children cascade over snowfields in boots and woollen mittens, scarves and hats that stink when wet. One, a girl, the youngest, finds a twiggy hand severed from its branch, knots and knuckles dead as doornails. She sinks down, red-eyed, buries it deep, under drifts of crystals. Packs them down hard, decent and says a child's mourning prayer. Too young, she marks the fallen with her cross of holly berries.

Ceinwen E Cariad Haydon

O Tannenbaum

The Tannenbaum towers above all the other trees of the Boreal Forests as a giant stands pygmies, stretching up and up until it seems like a pillar of the sky. In the few dim hours of daylight that reach these northern latitudes, strange frost sculptures glitter and gleam across its boughs; in the long cold nights those boughs gleam again with thousands of faint glimmering lights, long theorised to be the production of an arboreal glow-worm as yet unknown to science. The Tannenbaum has stood in the heart of the forest since before the beginning of our recorded history, and legend tells us that were some unimaginable cataclysm to topple the tree from its stump, the rings at its base, like the strata of an unimaginable abyss, would chronicle the age of the earth itself.

Dreamers, explorers, poets and madmen have set out into the forest, bent upon ascending to the summit of the Tannenbaum and claiming whatever reward may there be found, but few have returned and none have succeeded. White bears and wild wolves, and other stranger things prowl the forest, feasting on foolhardy adventurers. As far as our most advanced telescopes can determine, no expedition has even reached the lower boughs of the tree, far less ascended towards the upper reaches; the lonely perch where the Angel of the Tree resides, her vast wings of shimmering ice streaming out to either side and her eyes staring unblinkingly into the bitter gale, as they have done and will do for centuries beyond count.

Wild theories abound as to what she will grant to the first man to ascend the Tannenbaum. Perhaps, he will prove entirely beneath her notice; perhaps he will evaporate in her sight like a thought flitting through the mind; or perhaps, as in the legend the treasure-seekers dearly love to dwell upon, she will grant the truest wish of his heart. The only thing that all who study the Tannenbaum agree upon is that it is not good to look upon her face too long, lest the watcher be driven mad by beauty and terror, and the hopeless longing for what can never be attained.

Thomas Tyrrell

The Christmas Cat (An Icelandic Legend)

When yuletide comes, you will receive a gift of new clothing. Be sure, before the night has waned too many hours, that you shift what you are wearing and, by candlelight, put on those garments; then, after you do, stand by a window, all dressed up and clean. The Christmas Cat is lurking, watching you—and you had best be certain you are seen by him or he will yowl, break down your door, and fall on you, his eyes blazing like fire, teeth bared and claws extended, hissing for your blood—huge, fierce, and ready to devour your careless soul so empty-headed that you did not dress up for the Christmas Cat.

David W. Landrum

Kaamos – Polar Night

folds over us,
creasing the year
with sharp edges
of frozen granite
and skeletal trees.

I fall, wings torn back,
a sudden descent
into this other-world,
all colour and warmth
leached away.

Stripped to the bone
by the black cold,
I bathe in icy stars
and the splintered moon,
walk the miles
to taste raw memories.

Gerry Stewart

Paris Pavements d'Or #1



Jude Cowan Montague

Midwinter's Hall



Claire Loader

Melchior's Tribute

'Lo, the star he saw in the east went before him.'

The ancient kingmaker sighs on arriving at the spot.
He lays down his scimitar, smooths his beard, kneels.

Reaching from the painting, his hands bowed low,
the pilgrim offers an apple of solid gold.

It's an acquisition from Alexander's treasure trove,
now gift for the King of Kings, a babe swaddled in poverty.

This is the old man's reward as cartographer of the stars,
philosopher of Persia. He slips into everlasting legend.

Maggie Mackay

inheritance

my mother does not teach me / how to bake bread / make a home in
pockets of air / or crisp crust / the savory delight of window panes / and
front doors / instead / she tells me stories of gumdrop cottages / a
honeyed childhood temptress / starvation warnings / wilderness neglect /
and mama's stale crumbs mingle / with dry autumn leaves / the crunch of
footsteps / a kind of deception / the song she sings / makes promises /
hollow as Italian loaves / but oh / they taste so good / good enough to
forget / what she hasn't / taught me / yet

Alexandra Corinth

Nativity

The little humans were graded by size and behaviour
in the small assembly hall decked out
as the Large Hadron Collider.

Walls were plastered with tin foil and draped
with copper tinsel. Accurate? Who knows,
but Mrs Boyle never had so much fun.

Today we'll be hearing about the detection
of the Higgs Boson said the headmistress. The God Particle
was Martin's cue to begin: *And it came to pass*

that the parents were trying hard to follow the story,
but it was so long since any of them had studied
particle physics that they couldn't remember exactly

who had annihilated who, which gifts the protons
provided and what flavours the quarks were.
It colder in the collider than outer space,

but this, sang Year 6, is how it all began.
Each kid waved a magnet in the air
(the parents joined in with their smartphones)

and the consequence of a billion collisions
were repeated as Gospel. Even Gospel has different versions.
So when Lindsay came on as antimatter

in a tea towel he was booed like a pantomime villain.
No-one could remember if this was appropriate
and the Supercomputers continued on glockenspiel

until the announcement that Higgs boson was found.
By the time the He had been wrapped
in swaddling clothes and placed in a manger

He had already disintegrated.
With a lifetime of 1.56×10^{-22} seconds
we keep faith the data proves He really exists.

Gillian Mellor

The Three Kings

Buzzing, wired children waiting,
nodding heads at 'Cockerel' Mass
stuffed with 'Noche Buena' dinner,
counting coins from the aunties,
dressed up trail of family visits,
clicking crystal glasses,
pinching almond pastries while
Father Christmas flies on past.

No wrapped December toys,
two weeks of boring home,
no bikes, no skates, no balls,
just the long, long wait,
frustrating expectation,
Santa cultural invasion,
counting days on fingers for
the Night of the Three Kings.

Parading from the 'Plaza'
to the blare of village brass,
sat on cushioned thrones
in jewelled, satin robes,
glowing children kneeling
to receive the Kings' gifts,
racing back with just one day
left to play, until school.

Jacqueline Knight

Julie

You know the winter is too harsh when you start having bad dreams about Julie Andrews.

In this one, the white wolves are enraged by her singing. They despise “My Favorite Things” and “Edelweiss.” When they hear “The Lonely Goatherd,” they feel as if each note is a dentist’s drill in their brains.

In retaliation, they have captured Julie and are holding her hostage in her well-appointed home; “my widow’s pad,” she was once quoted as calling it with her scrubbed-cheek pluck.

On the news, you now see a close-up of her captive face. Julie is crying. You try not to watch. You keep watching.

They also show a clip from her most famous movie. When you were 10, you saw that film on the big screen – the blue sky, the guitar perched on her knee. “I want to be an actor!” you burst out, sobbing. Translation: you wanted to sing on a hill, to swing from a tree.

In your dream now, the wolves are circling, ice crystals sparkling on the tips of their fur like diamond shards. Julie, in her snowy nightgown, is clutching knees to chin, shrinking, as one of her captor approaches, baring his red-stained teeth. “Berries,” Julie tells herself before she screams.

Last night you also dreamt your molars started tumbling into your palm. When you asked the dentist to put them back, he cried, “*C’est impossible!*”

In Shakespeare’s dreams, order is restored with a kiss and a dance. No, that’s not true: Think of Malvolio, alone with his yellow stockings and the cold laughter coming from the other characters – a mirth so familiar it’s almost comforting.

Nothing has changed. Pranks are still played on the oddity who’d rather bobble through the clover than join the class for a round of kickball; little princes are still held prisoner in stone towers while disgruntled taxpayers shop for new SUVs with heated seats and video screens.

In your dreams, you want us all to stand in a circle with our fingers linked,
the firelight flickering on our cheeks.

You want to believe you could climb every mountain.

You think you could be the one to touch the wolf's glittering fur and plead
for Julie.

But you keep waking in the snow with your tongue swollen and numb and
your ears pricking.

Linda Ferguson

X-Examination

Someone ate the mince pie,
and someone drank the sherry,
and someone took a bite from the carrot.

But no-one broke the tripwire
that I'd placed in the chimney,
or the ones on the doorsteps, front and back.

I don't think it's possible
to come in through the window
from outside, without breaking the glass.

So tell me, Santa Claus,
where were you on the night
of December the twenty-fourth?

Joe Williams

Apocalypse Party

On New Year's Eve,
cobras fell from the
sky at midnight,
twisting and spitting
venom that turned to ice,
the caramel-poison
droplets shattering
on the pavement.
No one thought
much of it,
reasoning that
maybe cobras fall
from the sky
every midnight.
It's just that no
one's there to see.

Vivian Wagner

For Joy

Today, there are more magpies in my back garden than there are words to count them.

All month I've been seeing single magpies. One for sorrow. Another one for sorrow. Every street, every tree, every park a new sorrow. They're supposed to go around in pairs, that's why one on its own is unlucky. It's lost its mate. Sorrow.

But today they're all here. All the magpies, all the odd and lonely ones, they've all come to the same place for the turn of the year. They're squabbling in my apple tree, digging in my flower beds, a black and white cloud of chaos and mischief. The lawn was brittle with frost but now it's all shit and feathers, it couldn't be more alive.

It's only half past three and it's getting dark already. Stars are fighting to be seen, in an hour they'll be as bright against the night as a white flash on a black wing. This time yesterday I was alone. And soon I will be again.

I'm standing at the kitchen window trying to count the dark wicked heads, but they won't keep still. The one pulling insects from the ivy turns and looks right at me. "Turn" it says, and goes back to its meal.

It really sounded as though it said the word "turn". This must be how I go mad.

But now there's a different sort of movement. They were just magpies. Hopping and pecking and flapping. They're not doing that any more. It's something else. Something that looks like it's on purpose. They start to fly away. Two by two. Two for joy. Two for joy. Two for joy.

The garden is empty.

The new year will be better.

Cindy George

Chinese Trees (detail)



Judith Westcott

Artists

A.B. Cooper has work published online and in print and works as guest editor for Paper Swans Press. Her novella *Lykke and the Nightbird*—a Swedish fairytale—is scheduled for publication with *Three Drops Press*. Working on her first novel, a ghost story for adults, she enjoys life on the dark side. Carpe Noctem.

A writer and photographer, **Claire Loader** was born in New Zealand and spent several years in China before moving to County Galway, Ireland. Recently published in *Tiny Flames Press*, *The Sirens Call* and *Three Drops From a Cauldron*, she spends her days seeking enchantment in ruins. You can find her work here: www.allthefallingstones.com

Judith Westcott is a printmaker, making relief prints from wood or lino. Alongside and complementing her own work, she is one of the four artists who constitute Pine Feroda – www.pineferoda.co.uk – the maker of large woodcuts which have been exhibited at the Royal Academy, and who won an Arts Council Award in 2017, enabling the artists to travel to China to broaden their knowledge and approaches to the ancient practice of woodcut printmaking.

Jeffrey Yamaguchi creates projects with words, photos, and video as art explorations, as well as through his work in the publishing industry. His writing has been published by former cactus, Spork Press, Quick Fiction, The Morning News, Alternative Press Review, Clamor, Fortune, The Glut, Pindeldyboz, The Hungover Gourmet, Word Riot and more. His first book was *52 Projects*, and he recently released the short film *Body of Water*. @jeffryamaguchi (<https://twitter.com/jeffryamaguchi>) | jeffreyyamaguchi.com

Amy Alexander is a writer and artist who lives in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, near the Mississippi River. She is the co-founder of Animal Heart Press. Her work has appeared in *Memoir Mixtapes*, *Ghost City Review*, *Cabinet of Heed*, *The Mojave He[art] Review* and several other brilliant publications. She is the creative nonfiction editor of *Anti-Heroine Chic Magazine*. Look for her art and poetry book, *The Legend of the Kettle Daughter*, in 2019 from The Hedgehog Poetry Press. Follow her on Twitter @iriemom.

Sarah Pelploe's short stories have appeared in Snowbooks' *Game Over*, Three Drops Press's *A Face in the Mirror*, *A Hook on the Door*, and the online horror/erotica journal *Body Parts*. She has illustrated several poetry collections for Manchester-based performance poet Anna Percy, and she also produces comics as part of Mindstain Comics co-operative. She lives in York and tweets @peplovna.

Jude Cowan Montague is an award-winning printmaker who worked for Reuters Television Archive for ten years. Her album *The Leidenfrost Effect* (Folkwit Records 2015) reimagines quirky stories from the Reuters Life! feed. She produces 'The News Agents' on Resonance 104.4 FM and writes for Artlyst The Quietus. She is an occasional creative writing tutor for the Oxford University Continuing Education Department. Her most recent book is *The Originals* (Hesterglock Press, 2017).

~

Writers

Steven Duncan is a Utah Valley poet, now studying as a medical student in Dallas, Texas. His poetry has been featured by *Silver Birch Press*, *Ink & Nebula*, *Tuck Magazine*, *Prolific Press*, *Rock Canyon Poets*, *New Reader Magazine*, *Weird Reader*, and others. You can view more published work by visiting stevenduncan.tumblr.com/poems.

Raine Geoghegan, MA lives in West Sussex. She is half Romany with Welsh and Irish ancestry. Her poems and short prose have been widely published and her debut pamphlet, 'Apple Water – Povel Panni' is due to be published by Hedgehog Press in November 2018. It was previewed at the Ledbury Poetry Festival in July. Her work has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize and the Best of the Net 2018. Her poems were also featured in the film 'Stories from the Hop Yards.' One of the poems was made into a film by Wellington Primary School.

Website: rainegeoghegan.co.uk

Andrea Small lives in Sheffield. She is a member of a women's writing group and is currently engaged in a poetry MA at Manchester Metropolitan University. She runs singing groups for all sorts of people,

believing that we all can – and should – sing. She is at the beginning of her submissions career and is honoured to be selected by Three Drops.

Paul Waring is a retired clinical psychologist who once designed menswear and was a singer/songwriter in Liverpool bands. A 2018 Pushcart Prize nominee, his poems have appeared in a range of print journals, anthologies and e-zines including *Three Drops From A Cauldron*, *Bonnie's Crew Anthology*, *Prole*, *Atrium*, *Algebra of Owls*, *Amaryllis*, *Riggwelter*, *Clear Poetry*, *High Window*, *Ofi Press*, *Marble Poetry* and others.

<https://waringwords.wordpress.com>

Marilyn A Timms is a published writer and artist living in Cheltenham. She is delighted to have been chosen as runner-up in both the poetry and prose GWN 2018 competitions. She read both pieces at the Times and Sunday Times Cheltenham Literature Festival in October. Her first collection, *Poppy Juice*, was launched at the 2018 Cheltenham Poetry Festival. Her poetry ranges through time and place and has been described by Alison Brackenbury as 'a collection of brave and unexpected adventures, with intoxicating, sometimes threatening colours.'

David W. Landrum lives and writes in Michigan, USA. His poetry and fiction have appeared widely in journals in the US, UK, Canada, Europe, and Asia. His latest novella, *The Court of the Sovereign King*, is available through Amazon.

Amanda Bonnick is a poet, children's author and actor and lives in the beautiful Cathedral city of Worcester. She also runs the theatre company, Melting Pot.

Natasha Grodzinski is a Canadian writer currently living and studying in Edinburgh, completing her Master's in Creative Writing. She is particularly fond of animals, naps, and anything a little bit strange. You can find her on Twitter @TashGrodzinski.

Douglas Jensen is a poet and short story writer, originally from Fife in Scotland. He now lives and works in Sheffield. His story 'When Last We Spoke' was highly commended in the TSS Flash 400 Autumn competition and he has also written and drawn a number of self-published comics and zines. He can be found on twitter @thatdougjensen

Nature is the blood of **Susannah Violette**'s work. Animals both within us and outside of us fascinate her and her poems become liminal spaces where the edges of these worlds blur. She was recommended in the Westival International Poetry Prize, shortlisted for the Frogmore poetry prize and has appeared in various publications

Kersten Christianson is a raven-watching, moon-gazing, high school-English teaching Alaskan. She is the author of two collections of poetry, *Something Yet to Be Named* and *What Caught Raven's Eye*. Kersten also serves as the poetry editor of the quarterly journal *Alaska Women Speak*. When not teaching, she can be found somewhere in the Yukon.

Maya Horton is an artist and writer based in South East England. She is the editor of *Until the Stars Burn Out*, and her work has appeared in numerous print and online journals. She has written several poetry collections, and is currently on a writing residency in Northern Iceland, in order to finish her first novel. She is also working on a PhD in physics.

Khadijah Lacina grew up in Wisconsin's Kickapoo Valley. As a young mother, she graduated from the University of Wisconsin Eau Claire with a degree in English and Theater Arts. She and her family lived Yemen for ten years, until stirrings of war brought them home. She now lives on a homestead in the Missouri Ozarks with her children and various animals. Her writings have appeared in various anthologies and many internet venues. *A Slice of Sunshine: The Poetry of Colors*, was published in 2012, and her chapbooks *Nightrunning* and *Under the Sky* have been published by Facqueesol Books.

Beate Sigriddaughter, www.sigriddaughter.net, is poet laureate of Silver City, New Mexico (Land of Enchantment). Her work has received several Pushcart Prize nominations and poetry awards. New books out in 2018 are *Xanthippe and Her Friends* (FutureCycle Press) and *Postcards to a Young Unicorn* (Salador Press).

Paul Brookes is a shop asst. Lives in a cat house full of teddy bears. His chapbooks are *The Fabulous Invention Of Barnsley* (Dearne Community Arts, 1993), *The Headpoke and Firewedding* (Alien Buddha Press, 2017), *A World Where* and *She Needs That Edge* (Nixes Mate Press, 2017, 2018),

The Spermbot Blues (OpPRESS, 2017), *Port Of Souls* (Alien Buddha Press, 2018) Forthcoming *Stubborn Sod*, illustrated by Marcel Herms (Alien Buddha Press, 2018), *Please Take Change* (Cyberwit.net, 2018)
Editor of Wombwell Rainbow Interviews.

Carl Griffin is from Swansea and has had poems published in *Cake*, *Magma*, *Poetry Wales*, *Ink sweat and tears*, and the *Cheval* anthology series. He has reviewed collections for *Wales Arts Review* and was recently long-listed for the *Cinnamon Pamphlet Poetry Prize* and *Eyewear's Melita Hume Prize*, and commended in the *Geoff Stevens Memorial Prize*.

December Lace is a former professional wrestler and pinup model. She has appeared in the *Chicago Tribune*, *the Chicago Sun-Times*, *Pro Wrestling Illustrated*, *TPG*, *Empower Magazine*, *The Molotov Cocktail*, *Pussy Magic Lit*, *Lonesome October*, *Erie Tales*, and *Awkward Mermaid* as well as the forthcoming *Ghostlight*, *The Magazine of Terror*, *24 Unread Messages*, *The Cabinet of Heed*, and *Rhythm & Bones YANYR Anthology*. She loves *Batman*, *burlesque*, and things that go bump in the night. She can be found on Twitter @TheMissDecember, <http://decemberlace.blogspot.com> or in the obscure bookshops of Chicago.

Spangle McQueen is a happy grandma and hopeful poet living in Sheffield. She is proud and grateful to have work accepted and/or published by *Three Drops Press*; *Picaroon*; *Lonesome October Lit*; *Bonnie's Crew*; *Burning House Press*; *Dwell Collective Zine*; *Strix*; *Awkward Mermaid*; *I am not a Silent Poet*; *The Writers' Café*; *Foxglove Journal* and *Sad Girl Review*.

Sue Kindon lives and writes in The Pyrenees, where she co-runs *Valier Illustrated Books*. Her first pamphlet, *She who pays the piper*, is available from *Three Drops Press*.

Allen Ashley's latest book is as co-editor (with Sarah Doyle) of *Humanagerie* (Eibonvale Press, UK, 2018) – an anthology of human-animal liminal stories and poems. His flash fiction "Towards A White Wedding" was published in *Three Drops' "Midwinter 2015"* issue.

Penny Blackburn lives in the North east of England and writes poetry and short fiction. She was the winner of *Story Tyne 2017* and runner up in the *Reader's Digest 100-word story competition 2018*.

After a lifetime as an NHS doctor, **Richard Westcott** finds his poetry often suffused with medical over – or should it be under? – tones. His pamphlet *There they live much longer* came out earlier this year with warm commendations from Philip Gross and Carole Bromley <http://www.indigodreams.co.uk/richard-westcott/4594230918> He blogs at richardwestcottspetry.com and he's been pleasantly surprised to win a few prizes, including the Poetry Society's Stanza competition.

Dom Conlon's poetry has been broadcast on radio and published in anthologies over the past few years. Primarily writing for children, his approach takes science and mythology to create poems which inspire and challenge the imagination. His first collection, *Astro Poetica*, was considered "insightful, thought-provoking and fun" by multi-award-winning author Nicola Davies, as well as "ingenious, engaging and charming" by the comedian, Jon Culshaw. Follow Dom's Twitter on @dom_conlon where he regularly shares poetry, stories, and the occasional outburst of love for crumpets.

Ian Harker's debut collection *Rules of Survival* was published by Templar Poetry in 2017. Most recently he's been poet in residence at the Henry Moore Institute and runner-up in the BBC Proms Poetry Competition. He's co-editor of *Strix* magazine, which was shortlisted for a 2018 Saboteur Award.

Linda Goulden is a Derbyshire poet whose work has appeared in, amongst other places, *Three Drops From A Cauldron*, *Magma Poetry*, *Riggwelter*, *Words for the Wild*, anthologies from The Emma Press and *Beautiful Dragons*, competitions from *Poets and Players* and *Nottingham Poetry*, woodland display and choral singing.

Diana Devlin is a Scottish-Italian poet who has worked as a translator, lexicographer and teacher but now writes full time. Her poetry has been widely published online, in anthologies and in print. She runs a writing group in Dumbarton and is working on her first collection. Her home near Loch Lomond is full of music, laughter, books and cat hair, just how she likes it.

Mark Connors is a poet and novelist from Leeds. He's had over 120 poems published in magazines and anthologies. His debut pamphlet, *Life is a Long Song* was published by OWF Press in 2015. His debut collection, *Nothing is Meant to be Broken* was published by Stairwell Books in 2017.

www.markconnors.co.uk

Kayla Bashe is a graduate of Sarah Lawrence College. Her fiction and poetry has appeared in *Strange Horizons*, *Liminality Magazine*, *Mirror Dance*, and *Cicada Magazine*. Find her on Twitter at @KaylaBashe.

Caroline Johnstone grew up in Northern Ireland, but now lives in Ayrshire where she dares people to be happier all around the world. An author and a storyteller poet, she's been published in the US, UK and Ireland. She's a member of the Scottish Poetry Library's Advisory Board, is the social media manager for the Federation of Writer's (Scotland) and is an active member and supporter of Women Aloud NI, Scottish Pen and the Association of Scottish Artists for Peace.

Edwin Stockdale has an MA in Creative Writing from the University of Birmingham with Distinction. Two of his pamphlets have been published by Red Squirrel Press: *Aventurine* (2014) and *The Glower of the Sun* (2018). Currently, he is researching a PhD in Creative Writing at Leeds Trinity University.

Since 2014 **Scott Elder**'s poems have appeared or are forthcoming in several magazines, including *The New Welsh Review*, *Southword Journal*, *The Moth*, *Orbis*, *Poetry Salzburg*, *Cyphers*, *Cake*, and *Crannog*. He was runner-up in the Troubadour International Poetry Prize 2016, among the winners of the Guernsey International Poetry Prize 2018, highly commended in the Bristol Poetry Prize 2018, the Poetry on the Lake Prize 2018, Buzzwords Poetry Competition 2018, and shortlisted in both the Fish Poetry Prize 2017 and the Plough Prize 2017. Publications: *Breaking Away* (Poetry Salzburg, 2015), *Part of the Dark* (Dempsey & Windle, 2017).

Henry Thorpe is a York based poet, originally from Somerset. He generally writes folk tales, ghost stories and fantasy inspired by real folklore and the countryside. He is half of the BeSpeak spoken word team in York, running monthly spoken word open mics. He's quite fond of cats and likes vast quantities of tea (and probably eats too many biscuits). Henry has

previously been published in the University of York anthology *The Looking Glass* and performs on a regular basis as a spoken word poet.

Gill Lambert is a poet and teacher from Yorkshire. She won the Ilkley Literature Festival open mic competition in 2016 and her pamphlet 'Uninvited Guests' was published last year by Indigo Dreams. A full length collection will be published next year.

Mari Ness lives in central Florida. Her fiction and poetry have previously appeared in *Tor.com*, *Clarkesworld*, *Lightspeed*, *Fireside*, *Uncanny*, *Apex*, *Daily Science Fiction*, *Nightmare*, *Strange Horizons*, *Mythic Delirium*, *Polu Texni*, and multiple other publications. Her poetry novella, *Through Immortal Shadows Singing*, released by Papaveria Press in 2017. For more, see her blog at <https://marikness.wordpress.com/> or follow her on Twitter at @mari_ness.

Gerry Stewart is a poet, creative writing tutor and editor based in Finland. Her poetry collection *Post-Holiday Blues* was published by Flambard Press, UK. Her writing blog can be found at <http://thistlewren.blogspot.fi/>.

Russell Hemmell is a French-Italian transplant in Scotland, passionate about astrophysics, history, and speculative fiction. Recent poetry in *Argot Magazine*, *The Grievous Angel*, *Star*Line*, and others. Find them online at their blog earthianhivemind.net and on Twitter @SPBianchini.

Julia Burke, a student at Palm Beach Atlantic University, and is currently pursuing a degree in cross cultural studies and creative writing. Langston Hughes and Emily Dickinson are her favorite poets, but most of her poetry is inspired by William Blake.

Ceinwen E Cariad Haydon lives in Newcastle upon Tyne, UK, and writes short stories and poetry. She has been widely published in web magazines and in print anthologies. She was Highly Commended in the Blue Nib Chapbook Competition [Spring 2018] and won the Hedgehog Press Poetry Competition 'Songs to Learn and Sing' [August 2018]. She graduated with an MA in Creative Writing from Newcastle University, in 2017 and is now developing practice as a creative writing facilitator with hard to reach groups. She believes everyone's voice counts.

Thomas Tyrrell has a PhD in English Literature from Cardiff University. He is a two-time winner of the Terry Hetherington poetry award, and has achieved the Kate Garrett trifecta of appearing in *Picaroon*, *Lonesome October*, and *Three Drops From A Cauldron*. His lesbian werewolves in NASA story, 'Hidden Ferals', is published online at VampCat mag.

Maggie Mackay has a fascination for family history which informs much of her work online and in print, including a poem in the *#MeToo* anthology and one commended in the Mothers' Milk Prize, 2017. Her poems have been nominated for The Forward Prize, Best Single Poem in 2017 and 2018 and for the Pushcart Prize last year. Her first pamphlet 'The Heart of the Run' was published this year by Picaroon Poetry.

Alexandra Corinth is a disabled writer and artist based in DFW. Her work has appeared in *SWWIM*, *Glass: Poets Resist*, *Mad Swirl*, *Thimble Literary Magazine*, and *Atticus Review*, among others. She is also an editorial assistant for the *Southwest Review*. You can find her online at typewriterbelle.com.

Gillian Mellor helps to run The Moffat Bookshop and has recently had poems published in *Domestic Cherry*, *Be Not Afraid* (a tribute anthology to Seamus Heaney) and *Laldy*.

Jacqueline Knight has lived in Spain for 29 years. She is a writer, mother of 4, committed activist for environmental protection, gender equality and voting rights and Deputy Mayor of her small village. She has had poems published in various anthologies and online journals and in her poetry blog. <http://blog.healingwordspoeetry.com/>

Linda Ferguson has won awards for her poetry and lyrical nonfiction and been nominated for a Pushcart Prize for fiction. Her poetry chapbook, *Baila Conmigo*, was published by Dancing Girl Press. As a writing teacher, she has a passion for helping students find their voice and explore new territory.

Joe Williams is a former starving musician who transformed into a starving writer and poet in 2015, entirely by mistake. He lives in Leeds and appears regularly at events in Yorkshire and beyond. He has been published in numerous anthologies, and in magazines online and in print. His debut

poetry pamphlet, 'Killing the Piano', was published by Half Moon Books in 2017, followed by the verse novella 'An Otley Run' in 2018. He won the prestigious Open Mic Competition at Ilkley Literature Festival in 2017 and was runner-up the following year.

www.joewilliams.co.uk

Vivian Wagner lives in New Concord, Ohio, where she's an associate professor of English at Muskingum University. She's the author of *Fiddle: One Woman, Four Strings, and 8,000 Miles of Music* (Citadel-Kensington), *The Village* (Aldrich Press-Kelsay Books), *Making* (Origami Poems Project), and *Curiosities* (Unsolicited Press).

Cindy George is an author, journalist and poet living in Coventry. She worked for many years in radio advertising, with brief spells as a romance writer, a music journalist, and a farmhand on a banana plantation. She has an MA in Writing from Warwick University, and is working on her first novel.

Previous Publication Credits

'First Frost' by Marilyn A Timms was first published in *Bangor Literary Journal*.

'The Creation of Death' by Beate Sigriddaughter was first published in (the now-defunct) *Thirty First Bird Review*.

'Oaks in Winter' by Scott Elder was first published by Poetry Salzburg and Dempsey & Windle.

'Nerina' by Diana Devlin was first published in *Halloween* (Amazon, 2018).

Featuring poetry, flash fiction, and art by

A.B. Cooper, Claire Loader, Judith Westcott, Amy Alexander,
Jeffrey Yamaguchi, Sarah Peploe, Jude Cowan Montague,
Steven Duncan, Raine Geoghegan, Andrea Small, Paul Waring,
Marilyn A Timms, David W. Landrum, Amanda Bonnick,
Natasha Grodzinski, Doug Jensen, Susannah Violette, Kersten
Christianson, Maya Horton, Khadijah Lacina, Beate
Sigriddaughter, Paul Brookes, Carl Griffin, December Lace, Sue
Kindon, Spangle McQueen, Allen Ashley, Penny Blackburn,
Richard Westcott, Dom Conlon, Ian Harker, Linda Goulden,
Diana Devlin, Mark Connors, Kayla Bashe, Caroline Johnstone,
Edwin Stockdale, Scott Elder, Henry Thorpe, Gill Lambert, Mari
Ness, Gerry Stewart, Russell Hemmell, Julia Burke, Ceinwen E
Cariad Haydon, Thomas Tyrrell, Maggie Mackay, Alexandra
Corinth, Gillian Mellor, Jacqueline Knight, Linda Ferguson, Joe
Williams, Vivian Wagner, and Cindy George.

