

# THE KLECKSOGRAPH

An International Review of Art and the Subconscious

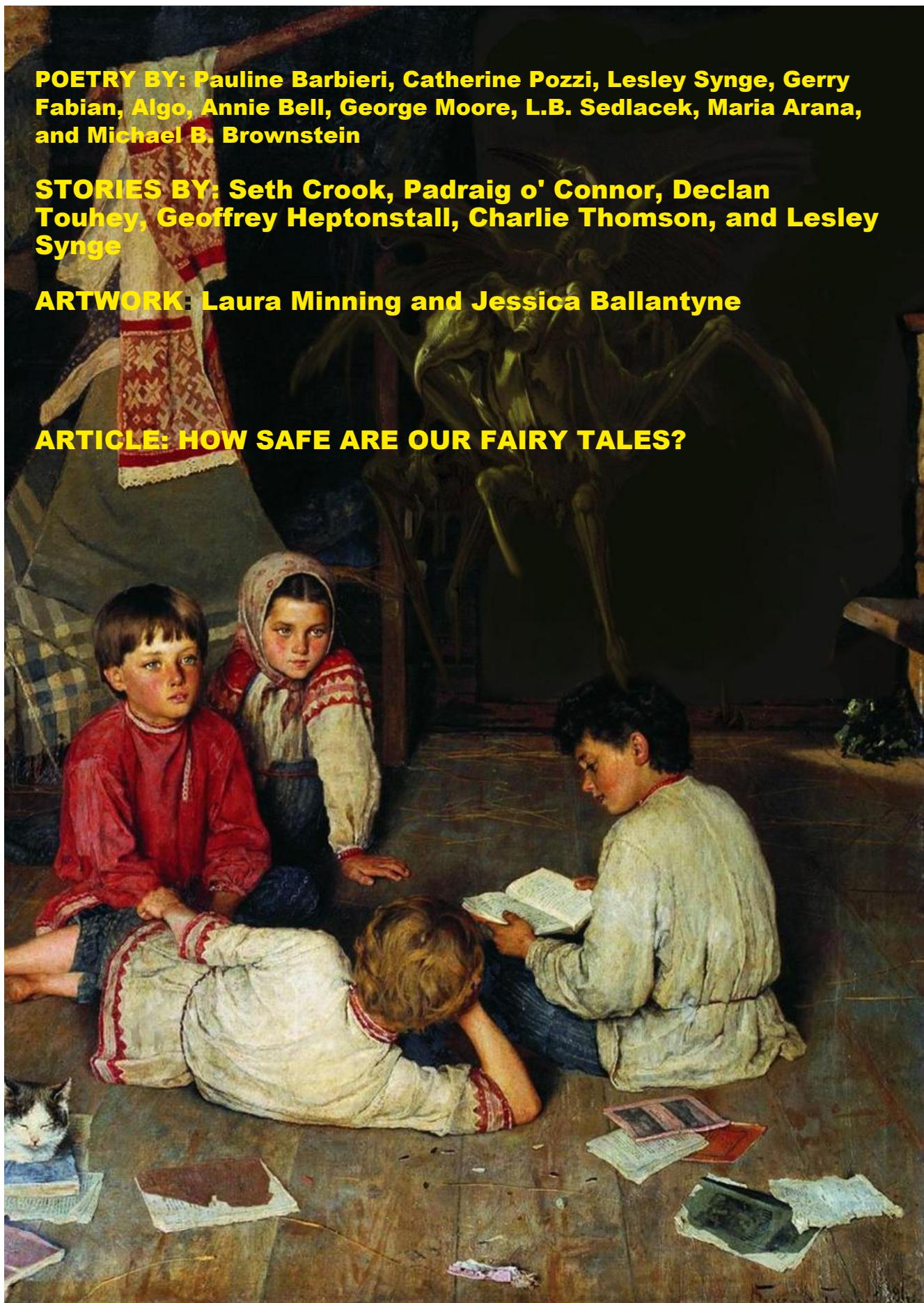
*Issue 2 May 2020*

**POETRY BY:** Pauline Barbieri, Catherine Pozzi, Lesley Synge, Gerry Fabian, Algo, Annie Bell, George Moore, L.B. Sedlacek, Maria Arana, and Michael B. Brownstein

**STORIES BY:** Seth Crook, Padraig o' Connor, Declan Touhey, Geoffrey Heptonstall, Charlie Thomson, and Lesley Synge

**ARTWORK:** Laura Minning and Jessica Ballantyne

**ARTICLE: HOW SAFE ARE OUR FAIRY TALES?**



# THE KLECKSOGRAPH

**Editor: Peter Van Belle**

ISSUE 2

MAY 2020

In the mid-nineteenth century, Julius Kerner, published his book of "Kleksographien." Later psychologists used similar ink blots as a means to access the unconscious of their patients. The Klecksograph (Klecks is the official German spelling) is dedicated to exploring and celebrating the relationship between the subconscious and art.



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This magazine can be downloaded free from [www.kleksograph.be](http://www.kleksograph.be)

# *ABOUT THE MAGAZINE*

I've learned a lot about designing a magazine since I started The Klecksograph. For instance, the various ways you can make texts easier to read. On a dark background it's inadvisable to use fonts with serifs, for example.

One problem is that the more illustrations I use, the bigger the file gets. I try to keep the illustrations at a resolution that will allow the magazine to look good when printed (though printing messes with the arrangements of the pages), but this means the file rapidly hits the 10MB mark. If possible I'll still try to send it to you by e-mail, but otherwise I'll just provide a link to the download.

Since the publication of the first issue there's one phenomenon none of us has escaped from: the Covid-19 pandemic. I myself showed symptoms of the disease in early April and have been quarantined for three weeks. Luckily the symptoms were mild. A worldwide historical event such as this pandemic is bound to leave its mark on us, as the Black Death did on medieval Europe. Then it had certain beneficial effects, for instance, increasing the power of the common peasant. Yet now it could lead to increasing insularity, both on the private level as on the level of nation states.



painting by Frederic Leighton

# PAULINE BARBIERI

## Alice

(Alice Pullen 1859 – 1899)

As Faticida, you sit in Leighton's studio like a sibyl  
just peeled off the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel,  
with cream robes adjusted by Michelangelo.

But the Lord comes in with a fresh palette  
and allows your dress to gently slide  
off a naked shoulder. It is time to paint.

How does it feel to have him at your feet?  
It's not really what you wanted, is it?  
You want to act, not to pose.

But acting being a questionable profession,  
your loving patron, Lord Leighton, disguised you  
as a Pre-Raphaelite model, until you spoke.

Then how did the public see you, Alice,  
as the Roman goddess or a flower girl?  
Could you see the future in your glass,

know that with your cockney accent  
you would never be accepted as a lady,  
would never marry your lord?

Leighton puts down his brushes  
as you move the laurel on the floor to one side.  
Picking up a bunch of daisies

you leave for Covent Garden, to let  
George Bernard Shaw write you  
into our working class hearts.

*Ada Alice Pullen (stage name: Dorothy Dene) was a stage actress and model for the painter Lord Leighton, who became her benefactor. Shaw may have based his play Pygmalion on their relationship.*

# **SETH CROOK**

## **THE TOBERMORY SPECIESIST**

A puzzled man walked into the main street bakery carrying a question mark. "Excuse me, has anyone lost a question mark?", he asked. Everyone carefully checked their questions. Everyone shook their heads, politely, returning to their scones and bridies.

So the man returned to the busy main street between the bakery and the shoreline wall. Along the pavement he stopped passers-by and asked, "Excuse me, are you missing a question mark?" They checked, and checked again when he asked them to be certain. No luck. He kept on searching through the crowds, feeling increasingly desperate. He called at the café, tried the sporting goods shop, popped in at the small museum with the gold coin from the Spanish Armada.

Nobody was missing a mark. Not the shoppers, not the gossips, not the children on tricycles, not the man playing the double bass on the pier as if he was accompanying the sunshine. Everyone's questions were complete. Some people even had a few answers rather showily sticking out of their pockets.

He sat down on the stone seat under the town clock, like a man accepting his quest was over. He watched the seagulls circling the clock as if they were looking for stray chips from the fish and chip van. Then a gull looked up and waddled towards him asking, "Excuse me, but can we have our question mark back"

# CATHERINE POZZI

The title's an enigma to me. Scopolamine is a plant-derived, poisonous alkaloid, also used to treat motion sickness or as preoperative eye medication. Is the poem about poisoning oneself? It seems to be about escaping the earthly, travelling through the air, but also about escaping oneself.

## Scopolamine

Le vin qui coule dans ma veine  
A noyé mon coeur et l'entraine  
Et je naviguerai le ceil  
A bord d'un Coeur sans capitaine  
Ou l'oubli fond come du miel

Mon Coeur est un astre apparu  
Qui nage au divin nonpareil.  
Dérive, étrange devenu!  
Ô voyage vers le Soleil –  
Un son nouvel et continu  
Est la trame de ton sommeil

Mon coeur a quitté mon histoire  
Adieu Forme je ne sens plus  
Je suis salué, je suis perdu  
Je me clenche dans l'inconnu  
Un nom libre de la memoire

The wine running through my vein  
Has drowned and dragged my heart away  
And I'll sail the sky  
Aboard a pilotless heart  
Where oblivion melts like honey

My heart is an appearing star  
Swimming a divine inimitable.  
Drift, strange, becoming thing  
Oh, depart for the sun  
A new continuous sound  
Is the thread of your sleep.

My heart has left my story  
Farewell, Shape I no longer feel  
I'm saved, I'm lost  
I seek myself in the unknown  
A name free of memories

translated by Peter Van Belle

# PADRAIG O CONNOR

## The Fridge

Buzz-a low buzz-a quiet buzz-a quiet low buzz-a constant buzz-a constant buzz buzzing-buzzing between the silence-buzzing in and around the silence-buzzing amongst the silence-What silence-never any silence now-not with the buzzing-certainly not real silence-not pure silence-not clear silence-and what would such silence sound like-it certainly shouldn't buzz-or contain a buzzing sound-or having a buzzing buried in it-

No-not quite buzzing either though-not buzz buzz-not all buzz buzz buzz-no-no buzz-no buzzing-never any buzzing-it couldn't be described as buzzing-it's more of a-

A humming-a hum humming-the buzzing is humming and the humming is coming from where-the humming I can't help but hear-the humming that won't stop humming-the humming that resembles buzzing but is in fact quite unmistakably just-humming-

And who is humming-or what is humming-and why is it humming-and why is it always humming-and why is it always audible humming-and why is it always apparently humming at me-

Or is it humming in me-

Or is it humming for me-

Or is it humming over me-

I can't decide-I can't be sure and on it hums-hum and hum-hum humming-more humming-yet more humming-yet where is the fucking humming coming from-

The place-where is the place-the place where-the place-the place where-the humming place-the exact place-the exact place of all this humming-

Hard to say really-hard to say for sure-hard to say with any real conviction-

There's not much here is there-not much here bar the fridge-not much here but the fridge-not much here except the fridge-not much here except for the fridge-

Then it must be the fridge-

It must be the bloody fridge that's buzzing-I mean humming-it's the fridge that keeps humming-

But where is the fridge-and why is it humming-buzzing-no humming-just humming-

Humming a gentle hum-humming a soothing hum-humming a musical hum-perhaps the only one of its kind-

On it hums-hum humming-sweet sweet humming-hum some more why don't you-hum again dear friend-keep humming-hum like a buzz but clearly just humming-

If only it would hum a little lower though-if only it would hum a little lower or hum a little less-or hum a little lower and a little less-or better still not hum at all-

I could hum along-I could try hum along with it-

Will I hum-should I hum-dare I hum-might I hum-

I will hum-I'm going to hum-about to hum-on the cusp of humming-

But how to hum-

How does one hum-

And how can I hum-and how can I possibly hum above the buzzing-I mean the humming-yes the humming-the humming from the fridge-the humming which isn't all that unpleasant-no the humming isn't so bad-I mean a little humming isn't the end of the world now is it-it's not like it's buzzing-it's not like it keeps buzzing-it's not like my ears are filled with buzzing-not like the fucking thing is incessantly buzzing-not like I can't hear myself think with all the buzzing-

No no no-no it hums-just hums-a nice pleasant hum-yes hum-yes hum-yes hum-not buzz-hum-not buzz-hum-

# **L. B. SEDLACEK**

## **Orchard Pennies**

Dancing across the desert with a needle and thread  
The former Girl Scout walks the garden path of her family home  
Merit badges dangling – most likely to succeed.

The tree house long ago condemned  
With relentless bark grown over initials  
Or arrows going nowhere – splitting hearts.

Running through the reeds with a baseball and bat  
She cherished that Tomboy moniker  
Genetically willing it to her own girls – nothing like her.

The orchards long ago withered  
With rotten fruit as spoils of war  
Tanks lost in a sandstorm – radar failures.

Meandering along the meadow with a stick for a cane  
The old woman throws pennies on the ground  
With her head hung low – weighted by years.



Hansel & Gretel, Arthur Rackham, notice he's given the witch crutches

# PETER VAN BELLE

## **How Safe are our Fairy Tales?**

As adults we may think we outgrow fairy tales, but they are still within and around us. At the mention of the word, we think of our favorites, or at least those that left an emotional imprint upon our minds. At the same time, our parents will have presented us with their favorites, and so will the culture we grew up in.

For this article I'll use the following definition of fairy tales: stories for children containing supernatural elements. The Arabian Nights (also called A Thousand and One Nights), as well as the folk tales collected by compilers like the Brothers Grimm, were not originally meant for children, but became fairy tales in a sanitized form.

Little is known about the origin of fairy tales, however, but through analysis of their features we can get an idea of what sort of people devised them. One common feature of nearly all fairy tales is their compensatory nature. They are about people low on the social ladder, yet who attain a high status, either through a revelation of their true origins, or through cunning or outside help.

In many tales the hero is the youngest brother or sister, so the one expected to do the most menial work, and the one unlikely to inherit much. Through tests and hardships, the hero attains a position far higher than that of his or her siblings, who often end up punished as well.

Such compensatory stories can have a healing effect, not just on the individual, but also on whole communities. Look at the tales of Brer Rabbit in the African-American community in the US, for example. Such compensatory tales also occur in mythologies, such as the stories in the Old Testament about the destruction of enemy cities and tribes.

As I'll explain later on, the compensatory nature of fairy tales are a key ingredient of mass media entertainment, for a very particular reason. First I want to look at some of the main story sources in Western culture, and then compare stories across different cultures, and look at certain subconscious elements.

## **The Artists**

### Perrault the Polite

Charles Perrault (1628-1703) became a high-ranking civil servant in France during the reign of the Sun King, Louis XIV. He purchased the lucrative office of tax collector in Paris, and later became secretary to the Minister of Finance, until replaced by the minister's son.

He's seen as the inventor of the genre of fairy tale, yet he's not the first one to use the term (in French: conte de fée). This was first used by Marie-Catherine Le Junel de Barneville, whose stories, alas, are now largely forgotten. Perrault's intention about the function of his stories is clear from the title of his first volume: Tales and Stories of the Past with Morals. In their original versions, the tales all end with one or two sayings. The one at the end of Little Red Riding Hood, for example, warns girls of seducers, some of whom may seem mild-mannered, but are actually wolves in disguise. From the sayings and the main characters we can assume the stories were mainly aimed at girls, telling them to be clever, but also polite and sweet. This was particularly important at the European courts of the time, as politeness and refinement were a prerequisite for girls to get a suitable husband.

He invented only a few fairy tales himself. Some of the stories he took from other writers were a lot harder to fit morals to. Take Puss in Boots, for example, a story by Giambattista Basile. The cat, clearly the real hero of the story, is a trickster and liar. The boy of the story takes over a castle and marries a princess, these are the compensatory elements of the story, but he's more an object rather than an active element. The cat, on the other hand, is active, smart, and enterprising. On a psychological level he could stand for the animal, subconscious, and therefore unselfconscious, aspect of the timid boy.

### The Grimm Brothers

The Brothers Grimm lived during the first half of the nineteenth century. They both studied at the University of Marburg, where they started their research into the German language and culture. They became librarians, and because of their contributions to German linguistics, were given positions at the University of Berlin, and were even elected to the Prussian national assembly. Though internationally mainly known because of their compilation of fairy tales, their contribution to German culture and the science of linguistics shouldn't be underestimated either.

Their studies were, in part, inspired by the work of the philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder. He stated that, unlike what Enlightenment thinkers wrote, an individual's behavior isn't primarily determined by rationality, but by his or her historical and geographical position. In view of this, Herder championed what he saw as the 'natural' creative outpourings of the people (in German: Volk) and the emotion-driven art of the individual genius. He also published a collection of folk songs (Volkslieder).

In the early nineteenth century, many of the German states were occupied by the French. The ideas of Herder, and later Fichte, formed the basis for a campaign of intellectual resistance against Napoleon, and the ideas of the French Revolution. Everything seen as pure German, especially if it came from the common people, was to be exalted. Consequently, everything international or overly intellectual was viewed with suspicion. Later in the century, and even more so in the twentieth, this gave rise to the Völkische Bewegung (Popular Movement), a collection of ultra-nationalist, and often anti-Semitic, organizations.

Ironically, many of the stories compiled by the Grimm Brothers were told to them by women of French, often Huguenot, descent. Though published under the title Kinder- und Hausmärchen (Children's and House tales), many of the stories retained their original violent content. Their friend, the writer Carl von Arnim, advised them to cut out the sexual and cannibalistic elements, but, as the story of Hansel und Gretel shows, they didn't always follow his advice.

They did cut out obvious sexual elements, but missed the symbolic ones. In The Frog Princess, for instance, the girl loses a golden ball in a pond. A frog offers to retrieve it, on condition he can live in the palace with her. Later he cajoles her into letting him into her room, then into her bed. When he touches her, she is so disgusted she hurls him against the wall, whereupon he turns into a handsome prince. Obviously the story is about overcoming sexual disgust: the change in the girl's attitude is here symbolized by the change in her suitor's appearance. In later versions the violent act of hurling the frog against the wall is replaced by a kiss, which somewhat undermines the original meaning of the story.

### Andersen the Stern

Hans Christian Andersen (1805-1875) moved to Copenhagen in his youth to become an actor and singer, instead he became an internationally renowned author of poetry, short stories, novels, plays, and fairy tales. He was a complicated person, a devout protestant, yet prey to strong sexual urges for both men and women, all of them unrequited. Possibly he wasn't pleasant company, as his stay at Charles Dickens's home was cut short, and Dickens refused to answer his letters from then on.

Andersen's first volume of fairy tales was published in 1837, and contained The Little Mermaid. In 1845 he published the second, which contained his longest fairy tale, The Snow Queen. Many of his tales deal with frustrated love. In The Flying Trunk, a boy, on the eve of his wedding to a princess, finds his flying trunk, which he used to visit the princess, destroyed by fire. Both lovers are left to pine away for the other. In The Rose Elf, a jealous man beheads a boy because a girl loves him.

Many of his stories are cruel, and not just to the characters, but also to the readers. In The Rose Elf, the elves living inside flowers suffocate the boy's murderer, but Andersen ends the story by telling children each flower holds such an elf which watches them. In The Little Red Shoes, a girl is punished for dancing on a Sunday by never being able to stop. In the end she has her feet cut off. The cruelty reaches a climax in The Little Mermaid, who has her tongue cut out, her every step on land feels like walking on knives, and at the end she turns to foam. Not that this is the end of her suffering. Her soul goes into a purgatory, and every time a child misbehaves, she has to stay a day longer and weeps. Talk about heaping guilt on children.

His later story, *The Snow Queen*, is more complicated, and has a strong female character in Gerda, the hero of the tale. It was used by the critic Harold Bloom to prove that Andersen is one of the great short story writers in literature. I'll summarize it below.

In a prologue, the Devil makes a mirror which only reflects the bad to the onlooker. As his trolls take the mirror up to Heaven, it slips from their grasp and shatters, scattering billions of splinters across the Earth. When such a splinter lodges itself in a person's eye, they can only see the negative of what's around them and their hearts turn to ice.

In the second part we meet two innocent children, a boy, Kay, and a girl, Gerda. For some reason Andersen stresses that they're not siblings, though they're brought up by an old woman who's called Grandmother. We first meet them in Summer. In Winter they pass the time heating coins in the fire which they press to frosted windows to make little peepholes. Meanwhile the grandmother tells them about the Snow Queen, who, when she looks into a window, causes ice flowers to cover the glass. Kay tells the grandmother he's not afraid of the Snow Queen, but that night, as he looks through a peephole, he sees snowflakes take the shape of a woman, beckoning him.

The following Summer, a splinter from the mirror lodges in Kay's eye. He's no longer a nice boy, but teases his grandmother and ignores Gerda. The following Winter he goes sledding and ties his sled to a white sleigh that rushes through the city, the sleigh of the Snow Queen. She takes him into her sleigh, shares her bearskin with him. She then kisses him twice. At the first kiss he forgets the cold, at the second, he forgets his past. She tells him a third would kill him. From then on Kay is only interested in mathematics (a strange twist) and sleeps at the foot of the Snow Queen's throne.

Now we get to Gerda's story. She grieves for Kay, but the sunshine and birds tell her he's still alive. She throws her shoes into a river, begging it to give Kay back. Then she steps into a boat which takes her to an old lady who lives in a flower garden where it's always Summer. The old lady is somewhat like the Snow Queen: after she hears out Gerda, she combs her hair with a magic brush in an attempt to make her forget Kay. She hides the roses in her garden, because they would remind Gerda of Kay. The other flowers tell irrelevant stories to Gerda. Her tears, however, bring the roses back to the surface, who tell her of Kay's survival. When Gerda runs away from the garden, she notices Autumn has set in.

Gerda meets a crow, who tells her he found Kay through his wife, a crow living at the palace. He tells of the princess, who only wanted to marry a fearless boy, and how such a boy turned up. He smuggles Gerda into the palace one night, as dreams sweep through the corridors. She sees the prince and the princess together and realizes the prince is not Kay. When the couple wakes up, they reward the crows and give Gerda a coach to continue her quest.

The tale takes a savage turn when the coach is held up and the coachmen murdered. The robbers take her to a cannibalistic crone. The

crone's daughter, jumps on the crone's back and bites her ear: she wants Gerda as her playmate. She tells Gerda though, that she'll be butchered if she ever crosses the robber girl. Gerda has to share her bed with the girl, and her pet reindeer. The robber girl likes to terrify the reindeer by running her knife along its neck. Pigeons in the hideout tell Gerda they've seen Kay, while the reindeer longingly tells her about Lapland. Eventually the robber girl allows Gerda to escape with the reindeer.

In Lapland they watch the Northern Lights and are sheltered by Lapps and Fins. A Finnish woman tells Gerda about the fragment of mirror in Kay's eye and how she can unfreeze his heart. She tell her Kay will never become a man unless the fragment comes out, and how Gerda has the gift of innocence, which makes everybody and everything, people, animals, flowers, and even sunshine, come to her aid.

The reindeer brings Gerda to the Snow Queen's garden. She's attacked by an army of snowflakes, but Gerda starts to pray and her words become angels which defeat the snow flakes. Inside the Snow Queen's palace is her throne which stands on a frozen lake called The Mirror of Reason. There Kay sits on the floor, trying to solve a puzzle: he must form the word Eternity with pieces of ice. If he solves the puzzle, the Snow Queen will give him the world. When Gerda reaches him, her tears melt his heart and he starts to weep. With his tears the splinter comes out and the ice fragments form the word Eternity. Note here that children's suffering seems to be the solution to the problem.

Kay and Gerda leave the palace, are fed by reindeer, meet the robber girl who has set out on her own into the world. They reach home as grown-ups, but are still children at heart. The story ends with the grandmother reading from the Bible.

It's been speculated that the Snow Queen of the story was based on the opera singer Jenny Lind, also called the Swedish Nightingale. She rejected Andersen's advances and in a letter wrote that she 'could only love him as a brother.' At the same time the story seems also about the rejection of reason and science in favor of religion and innocence. Clearly there's a parallel between the mirror in the prologue and the Mirror of Reason.

In his public persona, Andersen often posed as romantic and child-like, but many of his fairy tales are moralistic (sometimes, as in The Emperor's New Clothes, satirical), and cruel. This seems to point to hidden aspects of his personality.

Later children's writers mainly followed in Andersen's footsteps. The English writer C.S. Lewis even had his own Snow Queen in The Chronicles of Narnia. He also took his heroes from modern society and dropped them into a feudal world. His dislike of the modern world is especially explicit in The Silver Chair, which starts with a thinly veiled attack on comprehensive schools in Britain.

Of course I can't pass by the publishing sensation of recent decades: the Harry Potter cycle by J.K. Rowling. In it, many elements from fairy tales

are included: the humble starting point, the ill-treatment by step-parents, typical Cinderella-elements. The compensatory element of magic is also typical of a fairy tale. The death of the biological parents gets a more complicated treatment, more akin to that in mythologies. On the one hand it uproots the hero; on the other, it frees him from the emotional choice of identification we often have to make with our parents. The presence of powerful enemies persecuting the hero is also closer to mythology than to the fairy tale. The danger of revealing that the hero was special from birth, a common element in fairy tales, mythologies, and fantasy literature, is that it harks back to feudal society, where one's social status was determined at birth. In this way an outmoded way of thinking could be (inadvertently) perpetuated.

## **The Eternal Cinderella**

The paradigm of compensatory fairy tales, it also has the oldest origins. In Ancient Greece, Strabo wrote down a story about a slave girl whose sandal was stolen by an eagle. It took it across the sea to Egypt, where it dropped it in the pharaoh's lap. The pharaoh went in search of whoever fitted the sandal, and eventually married the slave girl.

Cinderella is given impossible tasks by her stepmother. In several versions, like Askepu del (the version recorded by the Brothers Grimm), she is helped by animals instead of a fairy godmother. This is similar to part of the story of Amor and Psyche, as recorded by the Roman author Apuleius. Amor's mother, the goddess Venus, tasks Psyche with sorting three kinds of grain from one heap. Psyche despairs, but the task is fulfilled by an army of ants.

One fascinating variant of the Cinderella-tale is the Russian fairy tale Vasilisa the Fair. Here there's no fairy godmother, but a wooden doll, given to the girl by her mother on her death bed. So Vasilisa's mother was a witch, who gave the source of her power, a small idol, to her daughter, making her a witch in turn. Vasilisa is sent by her stepmother to fetch fire from Baba Yaga, the cannibalistic witch who lives deep in the forest. What follows is a tale of such symbolic richness, that I'm including it in its entirety in this issue.

The simplest reason for similarities in fairy tales across cultures is migration, both of the tellers and the stories themselves. Within each culture the stories receive a new context and are combined with elements from other stories, or have elements removed that would offend the receiving public.

Migration is a less plausible explanation where the distance is greater in time and space. In that case, common psychological elements are the likelier explanation. In 860 AD the Chinese writer Ye Xian wrote The Pretty Little Calf, a fairy tale with marked similarities to Western examples.

A man with three wives leaves home to take up a government post. His

youngest wife promises him a son when he returns.

During the man's absence she does indeed give birth to a son, but the other wives are determined to kill him. The eldest throws the child in a pond, but it floats unharmed on the surface. The second wife wraps it in grass and feeds it to a water buffalo. Upon the man's return they claim his youngest wife gave birth to a shapeless lump of flesh. She is relegated to grinding rice.

The water buffalo then gives birth to a calf with a golden hide. It responds to the youngest wife as if it were its mother. The other wives suspect the true identity of the calf and feign illness, telling the man the only thing that can heal them is the flesh of the pretty little calf. The man, however, is fond of the calf and releases it, bringing the wives the meat of another calf.

One day a maiden in the village wishes for a husband. She throws a ball from her window and says she'll marry whoever catches it. The young bull with the golden hide catches it. True to her promise, she hangs wedding robes on the bull's horns. The bull runs off, but returns as a young man, wearing the wedding robes. He tells everyone the truth of the matter, whereupon the other wives are punished and the youngest given place of honor.

You'll note that here the competition is between wives, not sisters. Equally, a stepmother tends to be irrelevant in a polygamous setting.

Other examples I'd like to mention are a collection of Papuan fairy tales collected by Annie Ker. In one story, a young woman is magically entangled in a tree by her mother-in-law (somewhat similar to what happens in Sleeping Beauty). She gives birth to a son who hesitantly returns to civilization and eventually reaches the woman's home village. Her tribesmen gather around the tree and free her. This is no compensatory tale, however, as the woman then runs into the sea and turns into a crab (similar to what happens in The Little Mermaid).

Another remarkable fairy tale is that of The Talking Bananas, which has similar elements to the Grimm tales.

A couple has one little son. An old woman on a nearby hill would like to devour the little boy. One day the couple head out to sea to catch fish. As a precaution against the old woman they hang bananas in the house and ask them to speak when the old woman turns up.

The couple catch so much fish they have to smoke it first, so they build a smoking platform. This means they will be longer from home than expected. The boy, meanwhile, spends his days on his creeper swing in front of the house. The old woman turns up every day and asks him if he's alone. He replies his kinsmen are in the house, but the old woman won't believe him. The boy then shouts 'Au rava' (kinsmen), and the bananas shout 'U' in reply. The old woman then runs away, but her hunger for the boy drives her back.

The boy eats bananas every day, which means fewer voices shout in reply to his call. One day there are no more bananas. So this time when he calls his kinsmen, no voices sound. The old woman gloats, tells him to call louder. She then kills the child and eats its liver, fills the cavity with leaves and sows up the cut. She wraps the body in a mat and

leaves it in the house, so the boy seems asleep.

The couple returns with their fish and call out to the boy. When they find him in the hut, his mother thinks he's asleep and tries to rouse him. His father notices the wound and realizes what's happened. He sharpens his axe and goes to the old woman's house. He calls out to her, tells her he's brought her fish. The old woman answers that his wife should bring them, but the man replies his wife can't walk because of an injury. The old woman emerges from her house and is brained by the man. He wraps her in a mat, puts her in her house, then chops down the posts and burns it down.

## **The Ocean**

Seas, lakes, and other bodies of water often symbolize the subconscious in dreams, or the underworld in mythologies. Like the forest, they are murky, dangerous places, and home to dangerous creatures. The witch in fairy tales (like Baba Yaga in Russian tales) clearly symbolizes the dark side of Nature – one sign of this is her cannibalism. That said, there are also male threats, such as ogres or giants.

Our bodies themselves don't fear death – our autonomous nervous systems do their best to keep us from harm or pain – annihilation is especially feared by our conscious minds. Every time we fall asleep our consciousness is absorbed into the subconscious, like our bodies will eventually be re-absorbed into Nature. Using such ideas from depth psychology, we can shed light on the deeper themes of tales and mythologies.

One salient part in fairy tales is the transformation of women as they move from land to sea, or vice versa. In the tale Jungle Boy, mentioned in the previous part, a woman is turned into a crab when she enters the sea. The Little Mermaid undergoes an even more harrowing transformation. By her nature she is half-human, half-animal, but lives in an environment hostile to human life. Her greatest gift, which she has to give up, is her voice, which reminds us of the Sirens of Antiquity, who lured sailors to their doom with their voices. So, in fact, she's robbed of her most powerful weapon before she's allowed to go on land and approach the man she loves. Internally, though, one would suppose she remains half-animal, and would therefore appeal to the animal side of her lover, the prince. This might explain why Andersen couldn't allow her to be successful.

In other tales men are transformed into animals. There's the example of Beauty and the Beast. In the Turkish tale, The Brother and Sister, the brother of the story is turned into a stag through his own carelessness. He continues to protect his sister in animal form, but the trickster who hoodwinked the sister out of marriage with a prince demands the meat of the stag to cure an illness (as in The Pretty Little Calf). In the end, the sister triumphs and the trickster is rejected by the prince.

Transformations of girls into animals also happen in these Turkish tales, but only of their own free will. No surprise then that the introduction to the collection mentions these stories were mainly told by women.

That sexual rivals of the hero, male or female, owe their success to trickery or magic is a common feature of fairy tales. This has an equivalent in real life when we think of a desired partner not being able to see our rival's 'true face.'

In fairy tales and mythologies, men find it easier to enter the water realm. In Celtic mythology, for instance, Fergus Mac Leda, King of Ulster, only has to put on special shoes to walk under water. Yet the water realm is still a dangerous place: in Lough Rury he meets a ferocious Kelpie, which frightens him so much his face becomes disfigured. Ruad, son of Rig-Donn, didn't even need shoes to spend nine nights under the sea with nine maidens. When he abandoned them, however, they came after him, kicking along the head of his son. And of course's there's the Scandinavian hero Beowulf, who twice defeats monsters from the deep, but is brought down by a dragon, a land creature.

In cultures where bodies of water don't play a part, deserts and woods become symbols of the unknown and the subconscious. They play a huge role in the three Abrahamic religions, all of which originated in desert cultures.

## **The Kaleidoscope**

I've only scratched the surface with this (long) article. One could easily make the study of fairy tales one's life's work. Already it's been the subject of countless linguistic, sociological, literary, and anthropological studies. Structurally they've been categorized by the Aarne-Thompson method, and exhaustively studied by Vladimir Propp.

Even a single story can turn up a myriad of interpretations. The story of Bluebeard, for instance. The most famous version is that of Perrault, though similar stories exist in other countries. In The Arabian Nights it is even the frame story around the cycle. The king in the story is a Bluebeard-character, and Sheherazad is often threatened with beheading. When she's finished telling stories, she begs the king to allow her to show him the children she's born him in the meantime, and only for their sake does he allow her to live.

Perrault's sayings at the end of Bluebeard warn girls not to be too curious, but also says men aren't that bad anymore. The theme of female curiosity punished is a very old one: there's the story of Adam and Eve, and of Lot's wife in the Old Testament, and in Greek mythology that of Pandora, and the tale of Amor and Psyche.

The anthropologist Maria Tatar interpreted Bluebeard, however, as an opposite tale to Beauty and the Beast, as a tale admonishing girls not to obey their husbands without question. Perrault's sayings don't confirm this though.

In Jungian psychology the key is seen as knowledge, opening the door of truth, but that seems rather a shallow interpretation. The psychologist Bruno Bettelheim saw the key as the phallus, and the blood on it, after the girl dropped it in the forbidden chamber, as the blood from her hymen. This too strikes me as shallow and one-sided.

It shows the kaleidoscopic nature of interpretation of fairy tales. Constructed and transformed over the ages and cultures, they take on new meanings whenever one looks at them. One recent author who reworked fairy tales and turned them into literature is English author, Angela Carter. In her short story collection *The Bloody Chamber*, she took traditional stories like Little Red Riding Hood and Beauty and the Beast, and made them new. In both the girl takes on the identity of the animal, so becoming an equal instead of a victim. So the one feature of the traditional fairy tale, the compensatory nature, was preserved in these stories. A few of these stories formed the basis for a Neil Jordan film, *The Company of Wolves*. Some of her novels, like *The Magic Toyshop*, also use elements from fairy tales.

Another example of a modern fairy tale is *The Master and Margarita* by Mikhail Bulgakov, a compensatory story involving the Devil and a settling of scores with the Moscow literary establishment of the 1930s.

Our consumerist society needs to cultivate envy to survive. This is done through advertising, but recently also through showcasing the lifestyles of the superrich, allowing them to flaunt their material, social, and sexual success. Inevitably this alienates many people. No wonder then that there's an industry for compensatory stories, the 'dream factory.' Computer games even provide an entire compensatory world for the individual. All of these leave their imprints on our minds. The danger here is that, as US-culture remains dominant, other cultures, and part of our subconscious will eventually become homogenized.

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Barbebleu, by Gustave Doré



некотором царстве жил-был купец. Двенадцать лет жил он в супружестве и прижил только одну дочь, Василису Прекрасную. Когда мать скончалась, девочке было восемь лет. Умирая, купчиха призвала к себе дочку, вынула из-под одеяла куклу, отдала ей и сказала:

— Слушай, Василисушка! Помни и исполни последние мои слова. Я умираю и вместе с родительским благословением оставляю тебе вот эту куклу. Береги ее всегда при себе и никому не показывай, а когда приключится тебе какое горе, дай ей поесть и спроси у нее совета. Покушает она — и скажет тебе, чем помочь несчастью.

Затем мать поцеловала дочку и померла.

После смерти жены купец потужил, как следовало, а потом стал думать, как бы опять жениться. Он был человек хороший; за невестами дело не стало, но больше всех по нраву пришлась ему одна вдовушка. Она была уже в летах, имела своих двух дочерей, почти однолеток Василисе, — стало-быть, и хозяйка и мать опытная. Купец женился на вдовушке, но обманулся и не нашел в ней доброй матери для



# **VASILISA THE FAIR**

## **a traditional Russian fairy-tale**

ONCE upon a time there was a merchant who had been married for twelve years and had only one daughter, Vasilísa the Fair. When her mother died the girl was eight years old. On her death-bed the mother called the maiden to her, took a doll out of her counterpane, said: "Vasilíshushka, hear my last words. I am dying, and I will leave you my mother's blessing and this doll. Keep this doll always by you, but show it to nobody, and no misfortune can befall you. Give it food and ask it for advice. After it has eaten, it will tell you how to avoid your evil." Then the wife kissed her daughter and died.

After the wife's death the merchant mourned as it behoved, and then he thought of a second wife. He was a handsome man and found many brides, but he liked one widow more than any one. She was no longer young, and had two daughters of about the same age as Vasilísa. So she was an experienced housewife and mother. The merchant married her, but he had made a mistake, for she was no good mother to his own daughter.

Vasilísa was the fairest damsel in the entire village, and the stepmother and the sisters envied her therefore. And they used to torture her by piling all the work they could on her, that she might grow thin and ugly, and might be tanned by the wind and the sun. And the child lived a hard life. Vasilísa, however, did all her work without complaining, and always grew more beautiful and plumper, while the stepmother and her daughters, out of sheer spite, grew thinner and uglier. Yet there they sat all day long with their hands folded, just like fine ladies. How could this be?

It was the doll that had helped Vasilísa. Without her the maiden could never have done her task. Vasilísa often ate nothing herself, and kept the tastiest morsels for the doll; and when at night they had all gone to bed, she used to lock herself up in her cellaret below, give the doll food to eat, and say, "Dollet, eat and listen to my misery. I am living in my father's house, and my lot is hard. My evil stepmother is torturing me out of the white world. Teach me what I must do in order to bear this life."

Then the doll gave her good advice, consoled her, and did all her morning's work for her. Vasilísa was told to go walking, plucking flowers; and all her flower-beds were done in time, all the coal was brought in, and the water-jugs carried in, and the hearthstone was hot. Further, the doll taught her herb-lore; so, thanks to her doll, she had a merry life; and the years went by.

Vasilísa grew up, and all the lads in the village sought her. But the stepmother's

daughters nobody would look at; and the stepmother grew more evil than ever and answered all her suitors: "I will not give my eldest daughter before I give the elders." So she sent all the bargainers away, and to show how pleased she was, rained blows on Vasilísa.

One day the merchant had to go away on business for a long time; so the stepmother in the meantime went over to a new house near a dense, slumbrous forest. In the forest there was a meadow, and on the meadow there was a hut, and in the hut Bába Yagá lived, who would not let anybody in, and ate up men as though they were poultry. Whilst she was moving, the stepmother sent her hated stepdaughter into the wood, but she always came back perfectly safe, for the doll showed her the way by which she could avoid Bába Yagá's hut.

So one day the harvest season came and the stepmother gave all three maidens their task for the evening: one was to make lace and the other to sew a stocking, and Vasilísa was to spin. Each was to do a certain amount. The mother put all the fires out in the entire house, and left only one candle burning where the maidens were at work, and herself went to sleep. The maidens worked on. The candle burned down, and one of the stepmother's daughters took the snuffers in order to cut down the wick. But the stepmother had told her to put the light out as though by accident.

"What is to be done now?" they said. "There is no fire in the house and our work is not finished. We must get a light from the Bába Yagá."

"I can see by the needles," said the one who was making lace.

"I also am not going," said the second, "for my knitting needles give me light enough. You must go and get some fire. Go to the Bába Yagá!" And they turned Vasilísa out of the room.

And Vasilísa went to her room, put meat and drink before her doll, and said: "Dolly dear, eat it and listen to my complaint. They are sending me to Bába Yagá for fire, and the Bába Yagá will eat me up."

Then the Dollet ate, and her eyes glittered like two lamps, and she said: "Fear nothing, Vasilíshushka. Do what they say, only take me with you. As long as I am with you Bába Yagá can do you no harm." Vasilísa put the doll into her pocket, crossed herself, and went tremblingly into the darksome forest.

Suddenly a knight on horseback galloped past her all in white. His cloak was white, and his horse and the reins: and it became light. She went further, and suddenly another horseman passed by, who was all in red, and his horse was red, and his clothes: and the sun rose, Vasilísa went on through the night and the next day. Next evening she came to the mead where Bába Yagá's hut stood. The fence round the hut consisted of human bones, and on the stakes skeletons glared out of their empty eyes. And, instead of the doorways and the gate, there were feet, and in the stead of bolts there were hands, and instead of the lock there was a mouth with sharp teeth. And Vasilísa was stone-cold with fright.

Suddenly another horseman pranced by on his way. He was all in black, on a jet-black horse, with a jet-black cloak. He sprang to the door and vanished as though the earth had swallowed him up: and it was night. But the darkness did not last long, for the eyes in all the skeletons on the fence glistened, and it became as light as day all over the green.

Vasilísa trembled with fear, but remained standing, for she did not know how she could escape. Suddenly a terrible noise was heard in the forest, and the tree-boughs creaked and the dry leaves crackled. And out of the wood Bába Yagá drove in inside the mortar with the pestle, and with the broom swept away every trace of her steps. At the door she stopped, sniffed all the way round, and cried out:

"Fee, Fo, Fi, Fum, I smell the blood of a Russian mum!"

Who is there?"

Vasilísa, shuddering with dread, stepped up to her, bowed low to the ground, and said: "Mother, I am here. My stepmother's daughters sent me to you to ask for fire."

"Very well," said Bába Yagá: "I know them. Stay with me, work for me, and I will give you fire. Otherwise I shall eat you up."

Then she went to the door, and she cried out: "Ho! my strong bolts, draw back, my strong door, spring open!" And the door sprang open, and Bába Yagá went in whistling and whirring, and Vasilísa followed her.

Then the door closed, and Bába Yagá stretched herself in the room and said to Vasilísa: "Give me whatever there is in the oven. I am hungry."

So Vasilísa lit a splinter from the skulls on the hedge and fetched Bába Yagá food out of the oven, and there was food enough there for ten men. Out of a cellar she fetched kvas, mead, and wine. Bába Yagá ate and drank it all up. But all there was left for Vasilísa was a little of some kind of soup, and a crust of bread, and a snippet of pork.

Bába Yagá lay down to sleep and said: "In the morning, to-morrow, when I go away you must clean the courtyard, brush out the room, get dinner ready, do the washing, go to the field, get a quarter of oats, sift it all out, and see that it is all done before I come home. Otherwise I will eat you up."

And, as soon as ever she had given all the orders, she began snoring.

Vasilísa put the rest of the dinner in front of the doll and said: "Dollet, eat it up and listen to my woe. Heavy are the tasks which the Bába Yagá has given me, and she threatens to eat me up if I don't carry them all out. Help me!"

"Have no fear, Vasilísa, thou fair maiden. Eat, pray, and lie down to sleep, for the morning is wiser than the evening."

Very early next day Vasilísa woke up. Bába Yagá was already up and was looking out of the window. The glimmer in the eyes of the skulls had dimmed; the white horseman raced by: and it dawned. Bába Yagá went into the courtyard, and whistled, and the mortar, the pestle, and the besom appeared at once, and the red horseman came by: and the sun rose. Bába Yagá sat in the mortar and went by, thrusting the mortar with the pestle, and with the besom she removed every trace of her steps.

Vasilísa, left all by herself, looked over the house of the Bába Yagá, wondered at all the wealth gathered in, and began to consider what she should start with. But all the work was already done, and the doll had sifted out the very last of the ears of oats. "Oh, my saviour!" said Vasilísa. "You have helped me in my great need." "You now have only to get dinner ready," the doll answered, and clambered back into Vasilísa's pocket. "With God's help get it ready, and stay here quietly waiting."

In the evening Vasilísa laid the cloth and waited for Bába Yagá. The gloaming came, and the black horseman reached by: and it at once became dark, but the eyes in the skulls glowed. The trees shuddered, the leaves crackled, Bába Yagá drove in, and Vasilísa met her.

"Is it all done?" Bába Yagá asked.

"Yes, grandmother: look!" said Vasilísa.

Bába Yagá looked round everywhere, and was rather angry that she had nothing to find fault with and said: "Very well." Then she cried out: "Ye my faithful servants, friends of my heart! Store up my oats." Then three pairs of hands appeared, seized the oats and carried them off.

Bába Yagá had her supper, and, before she went to sleep, once more commanded Vasilísa: "Tomorrow do the same as you did to-day, but also take the hay which is lying on my field, clean it from every trace of soil, every single ear. Somebody has, out of spite, mixed earth with it."

And, as soon as she had said it, she turned round to the wall and was snoring.

Vasilísa at once fetched her doll, who ate, and said as she had the day before: "Pray and lie down to sleep, for the morning is wiser than the evening. Everything shall be done, Vasilíshushka."

Next morning Bába Yagá got up and stood at the window, and then went into the courtyard and whistled; and the mortar, the besom, and the pestle appeared at once, and the red horseman came by: and the sun rose. Bába Yagá sat in the mortar and went off, sweeping away her traces as before.

Vasilísa got everything ready with the help of her doll. Then the old woman came back, looked over everything, and said: "Ho, my faithful servants, friends of my heart! Make me some poppy-oil." Then three pairs of hands came, laid hold of the poppies and carried them off.

Bába Yagá sat down to supper, and Vasilísa sat silently in front of her. "Why do you not speak; why do you stay there as if you were dumb?" Bába Yagá asked.

"I did not venture to say anything; but if I might, I should like to ask some questions."

"Ask, but not every question turns out well: too knowing is too old."

"Still, I should like to ask you of some things I saw. On my way to you I met a white horseman, in a white cloak, on a white horse: who was he?"

"The bright day."

"Then a red horseman, on a red horse, in a red cloak, overtook me: who was he?"

"The red sun."



Ivan Bilibin, Vasilisa returning from Baba Yaga

"What is the meaning of the black horseman who overtook me as I reached your door, grandmother?"

"That was the dark night. Those are my faithful servants."

Vasilísa then thought of the three pairs of hands and said nothing.

"Why don't you ask any further?" Bába Yagá asked.

"I know enough, for you say yourself 'too knowing is too old.'"

"It is well you asked only about things you saw in the courtyard, and not about things without it, for I do not like people to tell tales out of school, and I eat up everybody who is too curious. But now I shall ask you, how did you manage to do all the work I gave you?"

"By my mother's blessing!"

"Ah, then, get off with you as fast as you can, blessed daughter; no one blessed may stay with me!"

So she turned Vasilísa out of the room and kicked her to the door, took a skull with the burning eyes from the fence, put it on a staff, gave it her and said, "Now you have fire for your stepmother's daughters, for that was why they sent you here."

Then Vasilísa ran home as fast as she could by the light of the skull; and the flash in it went out with the dawn.

By the evening of the next day she reached the house, and was going to throw the skull away, when she heard a hollow voice coming out of the skull and saying: "Do not throw me away. Bring me up to your stepmother's house." And she looked at her stepmother's house and saw that there was no light in any window, and decided to enter with the skull. She was friendlily received, and the sisters told her that ever since she had gone away they had had no fire; they were able to make none; and all they borrowed of their neighbours went out as soon as it came into the room.

"Possibly your fire may burn!" said the stepmother.

So they took the skull into the room, and the burning eyes looked into the stepmother's and the daughters' and singed their eyes out. Wherever they went, they could not escape it, for the eyes followed them everywhere, and in the morning they were all burned to cinders. Vasilísa alone was left alive.

Then Vasilísa buried the skull in the earth, locked the house up, and went into the town. And she asked a poor old woman to take her home and to give her food until her father came back; she said to the old woman, "Mother, sitting here idle makes me feel dull. Go and buy me some of the very best flax; I should like to spin."

So the old woman went and bought good flax. Vasilísa set herself to work, and the work went merrily along, and the skein was as smooth and as fine as hair, and when she had a great deal of yarn, no one would undertake the weaving, so she turned to her doll, who said: "Bring me some old comb from somewhere, some old spindle, some old shuttle, and some horse mane; and I will do it for you."

Vasilísa went to bed, and the doll in that night made a splendid spinning stool; and by the end of the winter all the linen had been woven, and it was so fine that it could

be drawn like a thread through the eye of a needle. And in the spring they bleached the linen, and Vasilísa said to the old mistress: "Go and sell the cloth, and keep the money for yourself."

The old woman saw the cloth and admired it, and said: "Oh, my child! nobody except the Tsar could ever wear such fine linen; I will take it to Court."

The old woman went to the Tsar's palace, and kept walking up and down in front of it.

The Tsar saw her and said: "Oh, woman, what do you want?"

"Almighty Tsar, I am bringing you some wonderful goods, which I will show to nobody except you."

The Tsar ordered the old woman to be given audience, and as soon as ever he had seen the linen he admired it very much. "What do you want for it?" he asked her.

"It is priceless, Bátyushka," she said; "I will give it you as a present."

And the Tsar thought it over and sent her away with rich rewards.

Now the Tsar wanted to have shirts made out of this same linen, but he could not find any seamstress to undertake the work. And he thought for long, and at last he sent for the old woman again, and said: "If you can spin this linen and weave it, perhaps you can make a shirt out of it?"

"I cannot weave and spin the linen," said the old woman; "only a maiden can who is staying with me."

"Well, she may do the work."

So the woman went home and told Vasilísa everything.

"I knew that I should have to do the work!" said Vasilísa. And she locked herself up in her little room, set to work, and never put her hands again on her lap until she had sewn a dozen shirts.

The old woman brought the Tsar the shirts, and Vasilísa washed and combed herself, dressed herself, and sat down at the window, and waited. Then there came a henchman of the Tsar's, entered the room and said: "The Tsar would fain see the artist who has sewn him the shirts, and he wants to reward her with his own hands." Vasilísa the Fair went to the Tsar. When he saw her, he fell deep in love with her.

"No, fairest damsel; I will never part from you. You must be my wife."

So the Tsar took Vasilísa, with her white hands, put her next to him, and bade the bells ring for the wedding.

Vasilísa's father came back home, and was rejoiced at her good luck, and stayed with his daughter.

Vasilísa also took the old woman to live with her, and the doll ever remained in her pocket.

Translated by Leonard Arthur Magnus

The story in Russian, with all the illustrations by Bilibin, can be viewed [here](#).

# **ALGO**

## **Deicide**

You could have carved it with your own hands,  
You carried it to where it stands.  
Now it weighs a tonne,  
The carpenter's Son.

## **Masks**

Now that all wear a mask  
It's so hard to tell  
Who fell from heaven?  
Or climbed out of hell.

And Maybe it doesn't matter  
Whose side you take.  
Rodin just sculpted,  
But we opened the gate.

And life not so Super.  
Not an altar for ego.  
Believe it or be leaving,  
Its down there we go.

# GERRY FABIAN

## Wrong Number

An ashen lady, once a wife to be, as in a dream  
sent the phone crazy. I usually never answer it.

(Phones announce industry or memory.)

Yet after it rang nine, I was intrigued to find the scheme.

The rule is : A sharp decline after five on the line. They quit.

(A phone is a toll to all but the fool.)

Her voice was hazy, at first. Then a pattern of phrasey words began.

My memory was May, then she burst into the past. Again, I was there.

(Some people intend that nothing should end.)

She moaned of a flame she wished to reclaim. And I her. Her talisman  
had helped her decide to gently collide and touched here inside. Where

(I loved the lady. The lady loved me.)

had we gone? What phenomenon had made her love's leper.

Could I erase? Would I retrace my ice into her water?

(I wear your scar. Fine. How well do you wear mine?)

It is awkward when no one speaks. It reeks of garlic and pepper.

I wanted to answer; to love her and dance her. But life's so much shorter.

(The voice is the same but time ruins the game.)

She speaks of the fire over miles of wire only because she is dazed  
with the scent of her age. A fear she must gauge and elate to me.

(I'd love to tell you how well I loved you.)

So our words slowly tire while I acquire a painful desire that leaves me crazed.

She tears me apart with this talk from her heart. And all she takes is me.

(You know you're alone when there's no one left to phone.)

# **GERRY FABIAN**

## **Vaunted Volition**

Multimedia messages  
taunt, tease and test  
a belief in the craven images  
of want and desire.  
Those with strong stolid minds  
reject the vainglory  
and intuitive coherence  
to smelt the thrust  
of syllogisms.

## **Cornerstone Guide**

I am at the root of goodbyes.  
People come and go in my life  
with such regularity  
I often view myself  
as nothing more  
than a travel terminal.  
For many, many years  
I felt a sense of loss  
or better yet  
a sense of foundation or fixture.  
But now I realize  
that I am the landmark  
by which they measure their change.  
I am their human checkpoint;  
I am their sense of belonging.

**JESSICA BALLANTYNE**

# **Kissed Cracked Killed Clipped**



# **ANNIE BELL**

## **The Muse**

She is beautiful.

She fills me with inspiration: a passionate tryst.  
Her phoenix-like heart is of pure amethyst.  
Yearning, I need her; she beats only for me  
But it's just not that simple for her to possess me.  
Beneath her desirous and beautiful face,  
there beats an ice heart in a prison of lace.

Paper and ink, pen in hand, ink on paper.  
Paper and ink, pen in hand, ink on paper.

The blank page stares at me, demanding I fill it.  
Her diamond hard laugh says even if I will it,  
she won't let me walk through the woods of her mind.  
She is vicious and to my torment, she is blind.  
She is cold as ice and conceals all her wealth,  
hiding her heart with ingenious stealth.

Paper and ink, pen in hand, ink on paper.  
Paper and ink, pen in hand, ink on paper.

An empty marriage: without her intervention,  
the pen stands poised but no thought breaks the tension.  
Increasingly purple, she taunts me with silence,  
mockingly smiling in cruel, passive violence.  
I wait and I wait but she just takes her time,  
withholding her honey of metaphor rhyme.

Paper and ink, pen in hand, ink on paper.  
Paper and ink, pen in hand, ink on paper.

She is a cruel temptress, yet when the mood takes her,  
she switches to seductress from evil heart breaker.  
When she warms up, deciding she wants to be heard,  
I must simply obey and write down every word.  
She speaks and I become a cerebral fast-breaker;  
absorbing ideas, I'm the poetry maker.  
My pen is her sword and my paper her mirror.  
Her steel eyes shine golden with warmth from within her.  
Her ink vomit spews out all over the page.  
For a moment, I'm freed from my ice crystal cage.

Unfrozen, the ideas flow out like a river.  
I sort out the pieces, sliver by sliver,  
and then, when the ideas have flowed to their peak,  
she just turns away and refuses to speak.  
'Til next, she decides she has something to say,  
I'm left with no choice but to sit and obey.

Paper and ink, pen in hand, ink on paper.  
Paper and ink, pen in hand, ink on paper.

# **DECLAN TOUHEY**

## **An Eloquent Plan**

Tearing pickles. From the chumwucks of young gazoomaboddies. When there fresh and reep and full and testy. Nothing beter after work. Tell the truth I do.

My alarm clock is work singing to me. Promising me about the gudness of the day, the briteness of the hours. Animal, human, plastic, all bones matter. The factory melts them and. Extracts there shiny syrup. The one used to treet STIs from artifeecial intelligunce.

The names went kahjlocko and got killed. A wheel ago. By sooted pyeople who think for work. All pyeople blanks otherwise. Told us to reecord thoughts. Like a dieary. As if for alien wanting to no about our lives. For not the betterment of ourself but for everyones. Or something. No writing either. Just sit and think and project thoughts on walls. Where they stay forever. Fleeckering like holy tattoos.

The Glubba from Birr. Hes the fellas. Wants our thoughts to be on walls forever so history nose his rain. And ours too I spose. Doesnt mind if give out we about him. Hes pregressive like that. Sometimes wish I had a name. When come home and see partnerblank Id like to address them pearsonally. Glubba matches each blank with another blank and they remain partnerblanks until one dies. Afterwards new partnerblank appears. The chirgrups are amazing because they pump into our water and make everywhere luv for our partnerblanks and jobs. Nobody falls out of luv or comomits suicede. It is beetiful.

But the sedness is their. Due to the chirgrups it causes no pain but. We feel it. We feel it underneath the luv. We are happy, though sed pyeople in happy pyeople bodies. When I see my partnerblank and they say, Hello, partnerblank, much luv, and rub my handies, and when I rub their handies and say also, Much luv, I wud lyk to cry. We fornicate since cannot marry. Nor have child run. Saddest is fornicating and I squeeze partnerblanks hand and they grip the back of my head calling over to each other, Partnerblank, partnerblank. Would luv them a name but there are no names any more.

Even in the past, names gone. At skwl we learned the teetles. Person One from anshant Greece to Person Million, hoo is the Glubba. Blanks are not Persons. Blanks are those hoom do not duseve teetles. Lesson one in skwl. We all member.

Lately I have visisted club for blanks against soots. Glubba lyks sidition sence he says it leeds blanks to the riteness of soots. To the errir of there ways and the pholly of sidition. Healthy circle he says. The club then is open and non a secret.

I went to club only cause flimblub was lost. Which was bloo and spoke positivie words in eyurs as I slept. Keep us going. Help the goodyvibes prickles our skin. But mine was lost and cant get new one. Soots wont help me. Go home blinkyblank they say.

So I went to club. See if I find friends.

No flimblub no problem they say. Better without it. We get you something new. Better. New person in town hoo save us. Other side of river.

River Tolka make me think of flimblub and its kindness. When we really happy we loud to cry tyurs of happiness. Flimblub makes us cry and sleepy partnerblanks pretend smileyfun but hold glumglum by the handies inside and say ssshhhhh glumglum ssshhh.

Blanky said flimblub lest week. Blanky you are strang. Strang to collect bones but strang on the mindliness oswell. Lyk a special gweetaroo. This was last message. Gweetaroo saying supreeseed me. Gweetaroo all veery special so a special gweetaroo must be eggstra special.

Now my strangs is going. Gweetaroo I am not. Flimblub has forshaken me and I am in my punishment. I shake and vomit. Clubperson promises a helpful from the new one.

When we get to tent I see more pyeople. Big and small pyeople waving handies. I have no friends I reelise. Workpyeople hoo collect bones with me but not friends. Nobody lyk that hoo waves handies and makes smileyfun at me.

The tent is rid and white and tell and spiked. Lyk something from skwl we saw. A ricrus I think. Where pyeople went for funclaps and laughykins. Silly blanks with silly faces. Klons. And cloudypink food that littleblanks eat. The ricrus died many time ago we lerned.

Tent has cue outside. Long slidy line of blanks waiting. Clubpersons join cue and chatchat energyly. One clubperson slaps back mine and says. Blankblank get ready. Special day this. We becoming free. We becoming. Sign above seemsays Elephant Man but. Not shur. Tent small for elephant.

The cue moves forward and I think. Normal thinking runruns around work always but. This time think I about clubperson words. We becoming. We blankblanks in a prosess. We in a we too. Together. I feel lightness and smileyfun. And not cause chirgrups.

Enter ricrus Ive forgotten about bloo flimblub and elephants. Pyeople everywhere. All look toward stage at end of tent. Darkbright and shadowy. Hushwhispers and loudywords. Lyk a churchsong confused. Prepare said clubperson. Prepare blankyblanks for our salvation.

And a longhair person on stage. With stringy facewool. Not a blank for their clothes but not a soot either. A pyeople in singler form. And a look that doesnt tear pickles. That respects the chumwucks of young gazoomabodies. That wants to learn others about pregress and holygoodchange.

My good people he said. Crunchyhard voice. My good people of Finglas. You're probably all wondering what I'm doing here. That's something that people like me say in these situations all the time. You're probably wondering what I'm doing here. Well, the matter is simple, and it concerns you all directly. So much so, in fact, that if we don't take direct action in response to the iniquities I'm about to lay bare for you, we are lost as a people.

His workpassion was unlyk own. Weird quality. Lyk shape of wettlelup berry.

For after all that is what we are. A people. A group of persons. Not an indistinct multitude of blanks. And though the Glubba from Birr and his retinue of suits might try tell you differently, they'd be wrong to do so. Very wrong. You see, there are things the Glubba isn't telling you.

Things I know from having worked with him for many years. Or for him, rather.

Queetness lyk windshush inside the ricrus tent. Even babyblanks seelent.

You all, I'm sure, have been fulfilling the Glubba's latest requests by composing these mental journals of yours, correct?

Yesmumbles and noddyheads.

Great. Well, not so great, really. Because, you see, when you finish your journal entry for the evening and project it on your walls, you're not doing so for the sake of posterity, as the Glubba would have you believe; instead, you're projecting it on your walls so that your flimblubs can photograph it during the night and send it directly to the Glubba. And what he's doing with it—or what his team's doing with it, rather—is that they're turning it into best-selling interplanetary literature.

We confuseyface and squintymutter.

Yep, all true, folks. It turns out that the residents of the Ismenius Lacus quadrangle of Mars are big fans of yours. Apparently they can't get enough of their blanks. Which is why the Glubba wants an account of your thoughts, your habits, your lives. And once he has them, once he has them he gives the data to a coterie of literary suits and they churn out novel after novel to meet the demands of the interplanetary market.

A Day in the Life of A Blank. Merry Blankmas. Blank Noodles and Lemonsauce. The titles vary. But so long as they mention blanks, they're going straight to the top of the Martian charts. Gan dabht ar bith.

Hear Irishwords with no Englishmeaning.

Now, some of you might think this is a good thing. Some of you might be excited at the idea of your own thoughts appearing in a bestseller on Mars. However. However, however, however, however, however. There's an issue. Which is that the Glubba and Company are, of course, selling these books at an extortionate price. It's basic economics, after all. The demand isn't going away, so the costs remain high. Exorbitant even. Anyway.

They're taking credit for your work. They're taking credit for your work and not paying you for it. That's the first problem.

The second has to do with your jobs, which you hold down only because of the chirgrups and your flimblubs. Remove those two and you'd experience your labour in all its aridity and squalor. You'd grow weary of it, tired of your lives, and want change.

The third is that you're doing nothing about your oppression. Nothing, that is, until now. I want to represent you, I want to help you. I want to bring about a better society for blanks.

Suddenshout came from faroff blank. If you blank why change. Yeahyeahs and quizzy looks. I anticipated that question, my good friend. I have been experimenting for years with various chemical agents to find one that would counteract the effects of the chirgrups, and only last week discovered that a small amount of antimony will do just that. It's my intention to distribute antimony pills to every blank in Ireland by the end of the year. The pills are metal, you see, and only keep the chirgrups at bay so long as the pill's in your body; hence, you have to keep an eye on your bowel movements at all times and be ready to retrieve, clean, and consume the pill once more whenever you find it.

Laughykins, shakysmirks, facecovers with fingies. Woolface flustering.

Now, I know it sounds silly. I know it sounds daft. But it's the only way. Once the antimony pill is in your body you'll understand; you'll come to hate your job and loathe the society in which we all, unfortunately, have found ourselves. But there's a way out! That's the beauty of the situation. All you have to do—

Pyeople were leavung. Some steyed and cheeckled, others shooffled, coatflurrying past and boobooing the man as they lef. I lyked his wordywords thow. They stuck to my mindliness. Lyk taloosa juice on karnobby leaves.

My good people, this is in your best interest! Our best interest! Once we've all consumed our pills we'll be in a position to better organise ourselves, to form a coherent union, to strategize for the deposition of the Glubba! Believe me: you can all be happy, truly happy, without the artificial aid of the chirgrups and your flimblubs. As for the pills, they're only temporary. As soon as we oust the Glubba, chirgrups will be a thing of the past, and the antimony pills will no longer be necessary. At that stage all that's left will be to revolutionise the working world of Ireland. Happiness awaits, my friends, happiness awaits!

Angryred blanks up ahead throwing gazoomaboddies at Woolface. Shoutyshout words. Woolface offstage, whooshing for everyone.

Thank you for listening, friends. We'll chat again soon. God bless.

Clubperson nudges and. We follow. Round side of ricrus tent. Where woolface has tinny cabin. All seelent but smiling.

Clubperson takes fresh gazoomaboddy from pocket and. Hands towards woolface. Hoo looks hardhard. Lyk tough question is gazoomaboddy. Touches chumwuck and gazoomaboddy coos and splutters luv at all angles lyk messiness. Woolface rips pickle from chumwuck and gazoomaboddy screams soft for us to hear.

Thats a good pickle he says. Eating, chomping, chewing, slushing, munching. Voice lighter thow. I make smileyfun at woolface and wave handies. Friendyvibes. He does too. Rips off woolface, messes up longhair. Woolface is woman, not man.

Hi she says. Im Lucy. Would you like an antimony pill?

Nodnod and offer palmies. Into goes cold flat pancake pill looking like flimblub.

I swallow feeling friendlyfun.

# **MICHAEL H. BROWNSTEIN**

## **DARKFALL**

1

Night is often the hardest,  
and I answer:  
Don't eat ice cream after surgery unless you had your tonsils removed.  
Be patient with the hired help. This is what creates loyalty.  
Cherish family and friends. They are gifts unwrapped.  
Open yourself to the spirit of possibility, wind chimes, the warm spray of the  
tropical ocean.

2

This is a somber house full of shadows and disharmony, a darkening of  
night before night arrives.

3

I do not know how to get my woman to love me.  
Outside windows of darkness congregate.  
Inside, a light goes out, then another then another.

4

I am resting in the house of too much heat.  
What is there to do to make things whole again?  
Nothing? Everything? Something else?  
A too ripe apple implodes on impact.  
Is this an answer? A meaning to life?  
Do you not remember the night  
the small white dog shivered next to the large angry dog?  
Who was it who made that terrible mistake?

5

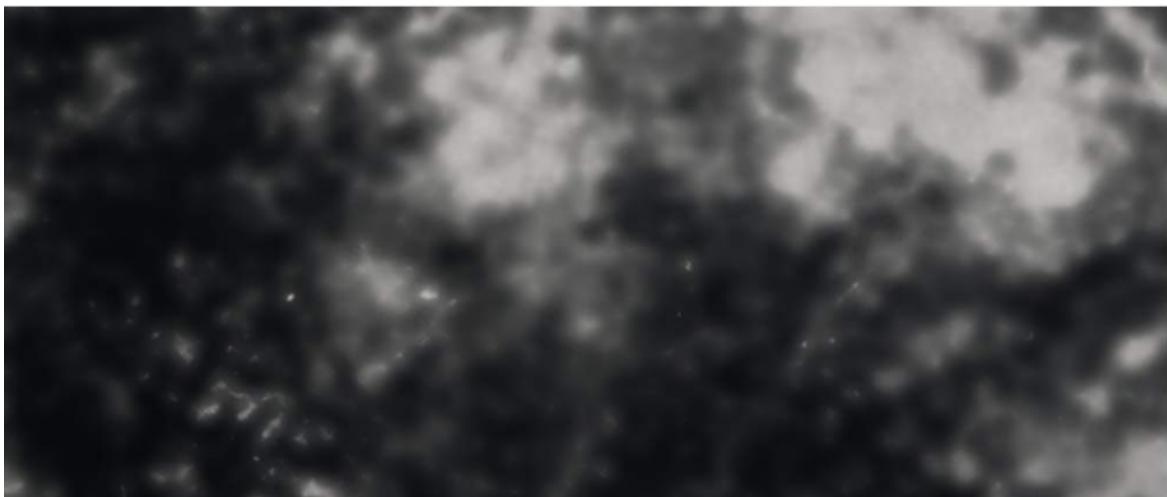
And so we go home to practice  
jump shots, fly fishing, outdoor bowling.  
An outline of soul. The way lips move to smile.  
The pathology of a fatal accident. The expression of onlookers.  
Who does not see themselves in mirrors?

6.

Night is the hardest.  
It goes on for days.  
There is no break in its rapture,  
no tears in its angry net.

NEXT

Within the texture of love,  
a heavy crust of quilts,  
the thick orb of nightfall,  
the easy sigh of wind,  
lullabying itself to sleep.



# **GEORGE MOORE**

## **Tunnel**

I was tunneling before I woke,  
the soft earth coming away in my hands,

mole-man with eyes of loam and peat  
just before the ground collapsed.

Mother said that the whole pile will come  
crashing down if you play on that housing site.

But where was I tunneling that year?  
Down to the first feverish kiss of a neighbor girl,

down to the center of the earth,  
to its dark silences and the embryo of its fire,

deeper into the impossibility of escape.  
Friends disappeared into tunnels in jungles

into boobytrapped backdoors and narrow digs  
of a time that was eating us for lunch.

While I was tunneling in ice and snow  
to build a cave for a wintry night,

to keep the candle at its center alive  
in the quiet of the stone-dead mountains.

The soft earth coming away  
in my hands I remember.

The duckbilled platypus building gates  
along the tunnel deeper into her den.

But where was I digging, out of the air,  
when my fingers finally met stone?

# **GEORGE MOORE**

## **Night Vision**

The aye-aye with its startled eyes  
out of the night, seeing you in your blindness

and hearing each incidental movement  
of prey or enemy, by the skin tingling ticks of  
echolocation

related even in her diminutive size to ape and gorilla  
or maybe human. Am I hiding in this ultra skin

camouflaged by the wakeful millennium  
senseless to the senses of the storm

across the bay the day they threaten to arrive.  
Are my eyes salted by the raw waves

unlike the lemur's? How she folds back the night  
with her penetration of the different layers of darkness,

peeling away the outer bark of the world  
like a grape in the talons of a hungry mind.

# **GEOFFREY HEPTONSTALL**

## **THE FEAR OF DARKNESS**

I can't see you out there. You are there, aren't you? I wonder if you have a light. I wonder about many things. I'm in the dark, although there's moonlight in a clear sky. Haven't we met before? You know, you're very strange.

Strange, this place. All secluded. No-one can see. No-one would ever know, would they? Like I say, strange. So why am I here? Well, I was looking for something. What was I looking for? Something I thought I'd lost. And what was that? I can't remember. There's a reason why we forget things, you know. And what's the reason? I can't remember.

If I close my eyes am I invisible? On nights so dark the world is blind. I am dreaming of a forest where fear is fear of endless night, where dark is not a dream. Better not to think of these things. I see nothing that is not night. I am seeing everything inside out. I can't see anything.

I've told them about the lighting in there. It's a disgrace. We pay all this money for what? I ask myself. Why should I ask you? Aren't you tempted to answer me? Just a little perhaps? 'Why don't I ask you?' You ask yourself. Ask me. I'm here.

Am I stupid because I stumble in my understanding of things? There are nights so dark the world is blind. I didn't need telling that. As a matter of fact I knew already. I read it somewhere. I can read – and write. It's more than many can say. Obscure as its meaning may be, I do know about life. I lived my life. It's more than many can say. Imagine a life of reaching out, the seeking of symmetries. That's how I lived.

So, ask me what life is. It begins with... No, it begins with me? I don't think it does. Suppose it could. I mean, I do have my special moments of insightfulness. It's more than many...

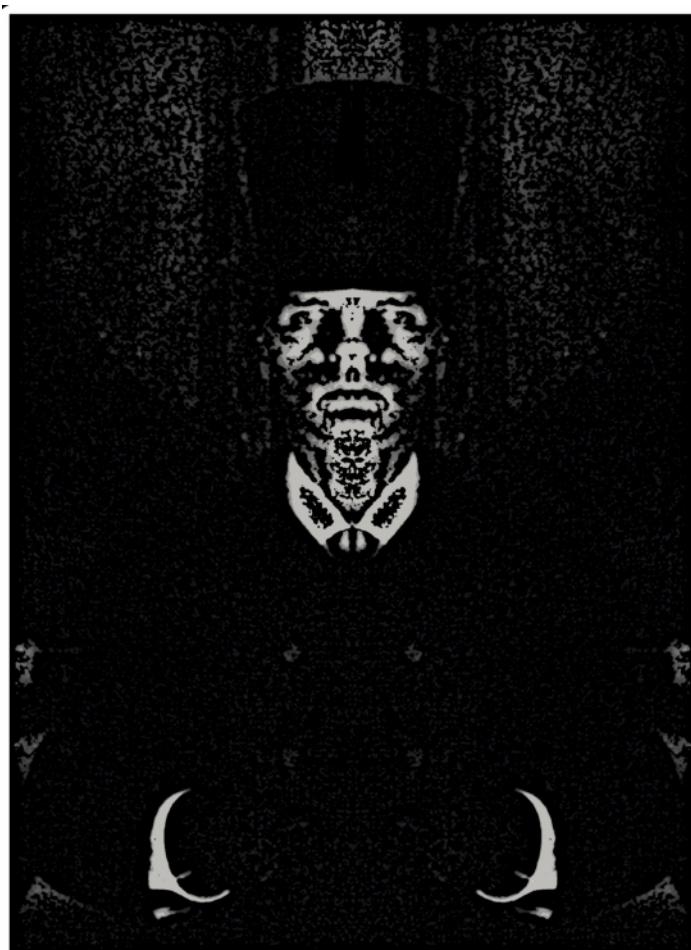
The blind see light. What do you see? I see the same as everyone else. That's obvious. Where's the moon? Tell me where the moon is. There isn't a moon, not tonight. I can see the moon in my mind's eye. There isn't a moon .It's too dark. That's the thing about night. Use your imagination. Look at the moon. Can you see it? Can you see it now?

I was hopeful until I met you. There isn't a moon. I thought there was a moon. I wonder if there will be a moon ever again. It's possible only because anything is possible. But is it likely? That's what I want to know. Is it going to happen to me? Am I the sort that it's going to happen to? If you're that sort, yes. If you're not, then, no, it won't happen, not to you. To someone else, perhaps. But not to you if you're not that sort. If it's not your destiny. Something foretold in the stars if there were any stars in the sky.

There are stars. It's just that you can't see them. If I can't see them then they're not there, are they? If they were there I'd be able to see them. That's logical, isn't it? You need to apply logic to a situation. It's logic that if something was there then I'd be able to see it, yes? Only if you look. And you're not looking. There are other worlds out there, brilliantly visible yet completely unknown. I came out here to see the stars.

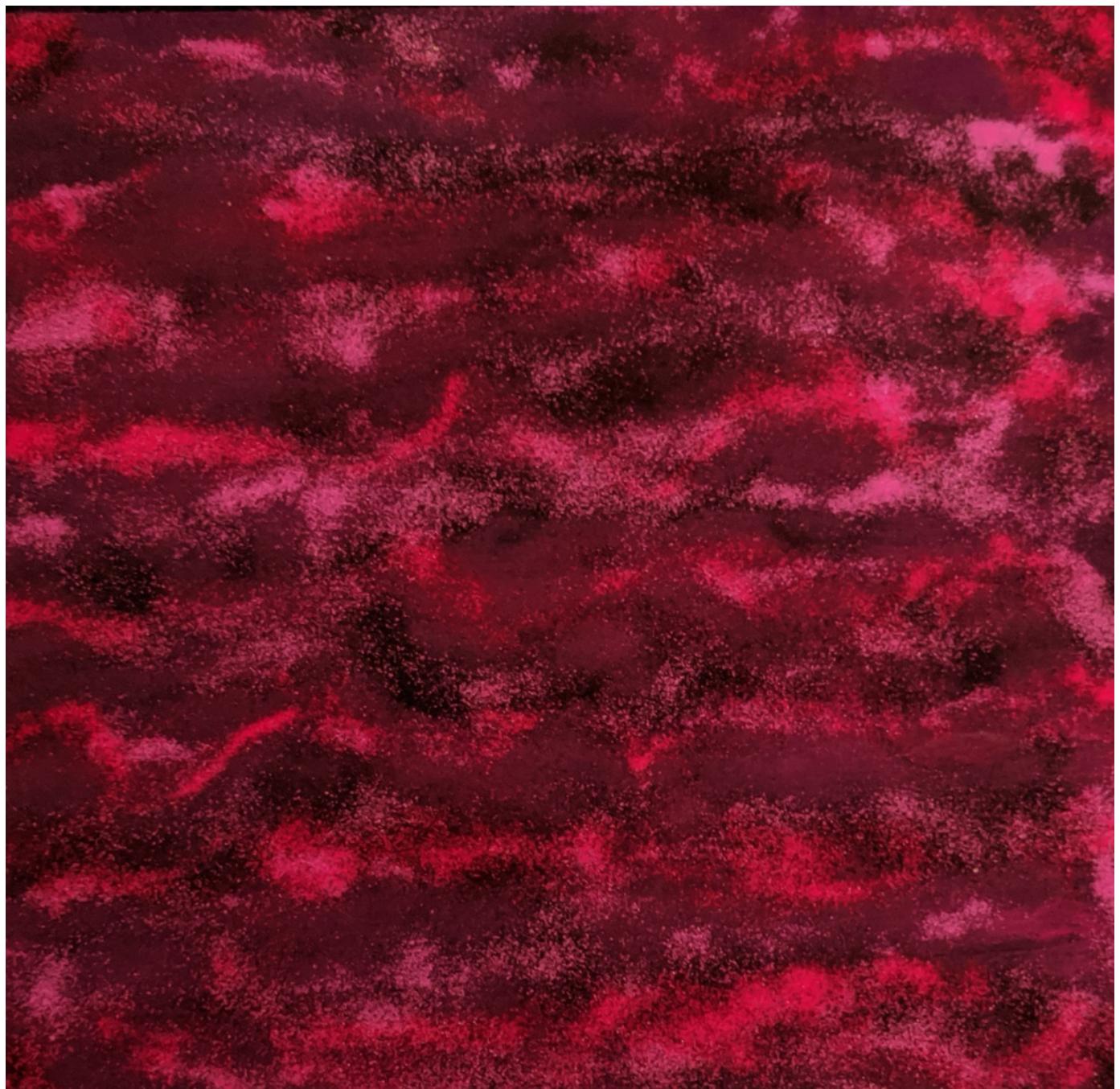
Well, to be honest, I get a bit bored sometimes. I mean, that's why I'm here. But why here and not somewhere else? Why there? Why not? What better answer can I give than to say I was searching for mysterious worlds? Or was I searching for you? You wanted to see me even though I don't know you. I didn't until a moment ago, did I? I didn't know you until I opened your eyes. Because I was still awake. I was thinking. I was thinking about you. I didn't know you. That's what I was thinking about. I don't know you, I thought to myself. I don't know if anyone else exists. That's what I thought. Quite a nice thought to have as a matter of fact. And now I know it's true.

I was never good with words. I think more than I can say. Like, how do I describe a night like this? It doesn't need describing. There are the two of us, you and I. Perhaps that's what I wanted: a happy ending. No pain, no tears, just nothing really. I wanted a dark night. Like a child I wanted to be frightened, and then loved. I wanted to be loved. Always remember there is starlight. Isn't that good? I can light a candle. And you can go on your way. You can follow the flame because you can follow me.



**Laura Minning**

# **Supernova**



# **Maria Arana**

## **How Different**

how different it is  
to be left with your cold heart  
beating  
from hours of running  
while I wait  
standing still  
in front of my enlarged door  
your blood  
seeping  
between my fingers  
forming a pool  
under my feet

**Laura Minning**

# **Phasing**

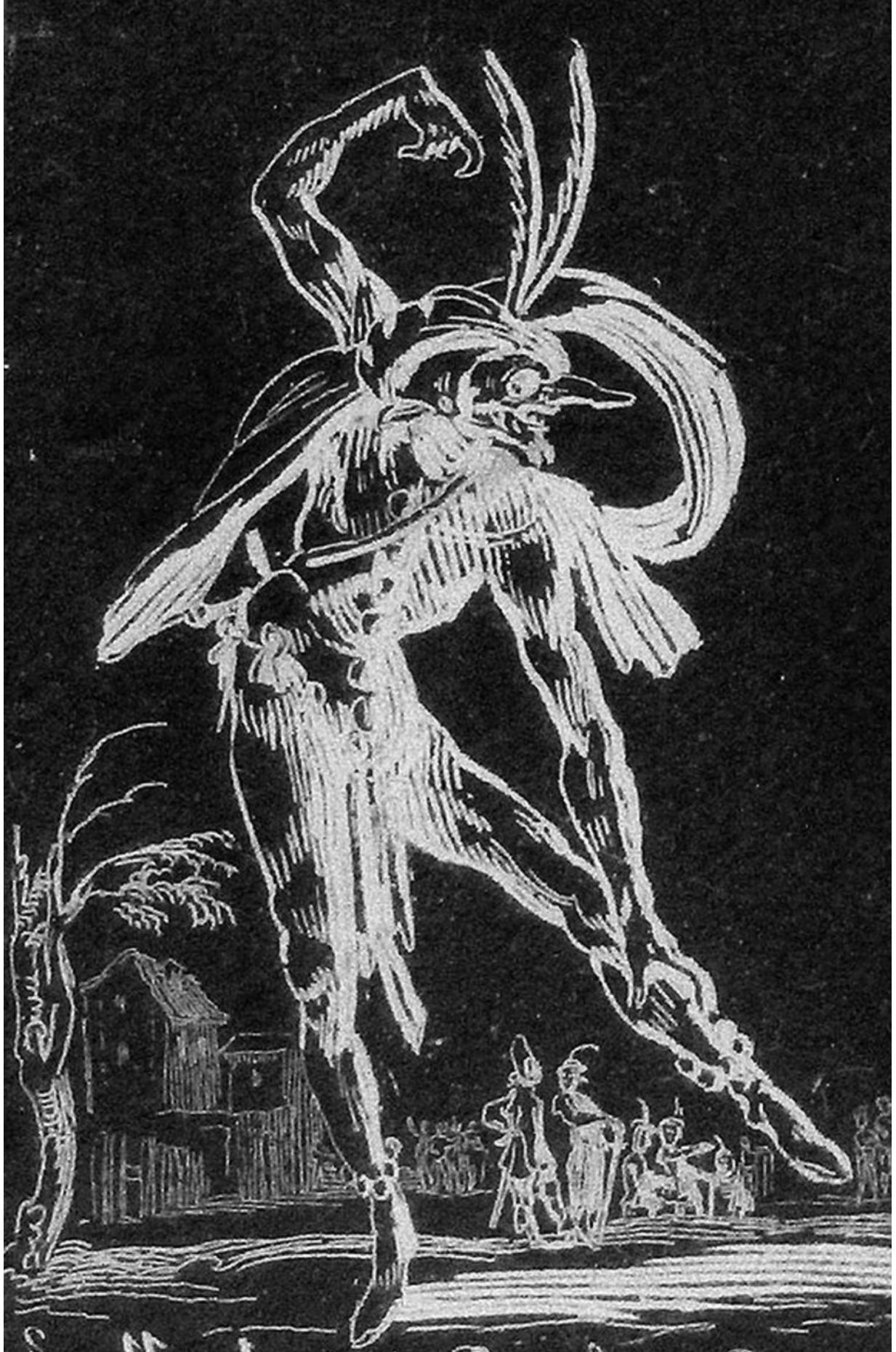


# **Maria Arana**

## **Crooked Things**

hide in the shadows  
teeth grind against each other  
bellies tortured by smells  
wind brings  
caressing cheeks  
they would rather rub  
against their jolly surface  
until blood spills  
and bathes their crooked feet  
singed by the sweat of their prey  
yet crooked things hide in the shadows  
scrape the uneven ground  
with their razor-sharp toes  
pawing obscenities  
leaving their scented musk  
for those petty prowess

Jacques Callot, Capitano Cocodrillo



# **Charlie Thomson**

## **Suicide Doors**

Nobody exists on purpose, nobody belongs anywhere, and everybody's gonna die.  
Nobody exists on purpose, nobody belongs anywhere, and everybody's gonna die.  
Nobody exists on purpose, nobody belongs anywhere, and everybody's gonna die.  
Nobody exists on purpose, nobody belongs anywhere, and everybody's gonna die.  
Nobody exists on purpose, nobody belongs anywhere, and everybody's gonna die.

Now would be the time for this to be true. I'm in serious trouble if God is real. I'm in real danger if he actually doesn't want us to kill ourselves.

Oh well.

The stool I'm standing on falls, after I kicked it. The belt around my neck tightens.

Eyes closed.

Eyes open. I'm seated now. In a leather chair. Weird. I can't see much; there's a beam of light flying over my head, reminiscent of a projector but there's no screen. "What's happening?" I inquire as though some omniscient entity is next to me. There is no response. There is no chair next to me. There is nothing around me. I repeat myself. My tone remains calm and unwavering.

In response to my question, the beam forms an image on a screen ahead of me. The image is filmed from the corner of a room, the scene is simple, not how I remember it, no decor, no color, just my grey body, in a grey room, hanging from a grey belt. The body is kicking gently, still alive it seems.

I watch for a few moments before I notice I'm no longer alone. A figure sits to my left, a man. He watches contently as he continually fails to throw pieces of popcorn into his mouth. He looks vaguely familiar; someone I know but don't quite know.

"Neil Patrick Harris?"

"Oh! Hi, yeah! I make guest appearances in dark, twisted literature as well."

"What are you doing here?" I demand.

"Isn't this a great movie?" Neil thinks aloud.

"What on earth are you doing here?" I snarl.

He places his popcorn down and finally meets my gaze, "Easy with the attitude scamp, you invited me," he explains, "Everyone gets to meet the most awesome person in the world just before they finish offing themselves."

"You seem a bit arrogant. Who put you in charge of sending off the clinically depressed anyways?"

"Clinically depressed?" he presses with a touch of sarcasm, "Or clinically stupid?"

"Depressed." I mumble grumpily.

The film on the screen begins to change, Neil picks his popcorn back up and begins

throwing pieces back over his head once again. The screen runs through thirty-six years of my life in just several seconds. From birth to (almost) death. It flies by but somehow I'm still able to feel every moment as though I'm living them again.

"Crazy! Isn't it?" Neil remarks.

"What's going on here?" my tone relaxes again as I gain some more control over myself.

Neil inhales deeply before speaking, "You know how people talk about seeing their life flash before their eyes? This is that, your life flashing before your eyes; it happens when you're midway through a near death experience. Awesome right?"

He chuckles slightly then continues, "Funny thing about it is that it's not exactly flashing before you, thirty-something years of life really does just shoot past like a blur doesn't it?"

"So you're what? The Grim Reaper? Jesus? You're not Jesus are you?"

"Wow kid! Never seen someone guess it that fast!"

"Really!" I buzz with excitement now, "You're actually Jesus!"

"Nah, I'm just messing with you. Did you forget that I'm gay? Actually, I see it now, 'N.P.H the gay messiah' that's got a pretty cool ring to it!" He jokes emphatically, "Unfortunately, no such luck today boyo, the bearded bastard you're looking for is through there." He motions to his left. The gate to the afterlife isn't quite as thrilling as I'd expected. In fact, it's not even a gate. It's a bland white door with a scuffed brass doorknob. Some pale natural-looking light bleeds through the spaces around the door. "So God is real then?" I attempt to ask, though my voice is a touch shaky and not particularly expressive.

"You ask so many questions! Seriously, if I didn't like talking so much I might just send you on your way through the door to find out for yourself. But yes, she is real, and she really does hate gays, but thanks to some pride marches in the streets of heaven she can't send us to hell anymore, we're actually all immortal now; but don't tell anyone. She actually released Freddie Mercury! Crazy right! Anyways, before you ask anymore questions let me explain what's going on. Basically, God employs a bunch of people to deal with the dead and help them figure out what their next step should be, we're basically cosmic careers counsellors. Since the suicide rate is so high in the LGBTQ community she decided, 'who better to deal with suicide souls than the most awesome gay guy around?' so here I am dealing with you. Yes, I know, you weren't gay, we've already discussed this LGBTQ equals immortal. I just have to deal with the rest of you. So when

you guys off yourselves, you come up here, to my cinema, I show you how you died; I show you your life, and then I try and help you figure out where you're off to next. Got it?"

"No." I grumble, "I don't get it."

"What part of that was unclear?" Neil groans in frustration.

"Literally all of it."

"You were a physicist or something weren't you? You're supposed to be smart."

"You called me clinically stupid a second ago."

"You called yourself clinically depressed, that sounds clinically stupid to me. I just watched your whole life. Not even once did you visit a shrink or even talk to a family member or friend about your emotional state. How do you know you were clinically depressed? You felt sad sometimes? Maybe you went on WebMD a couple of times. You spent 77.85% of your waking life happy. Then you had a bad day and suddenly you're dangling from a belt. I don't buy it. I think you got bored and curious. A dangerous combination. You just wanted to know what came next didn't you?"

I'm rendered speechless by his statement. My mouth opens but nothing comes out.

"That's what I thought," Neil snarks, "You're pretty lucky my schedule wasn't backed up today. I got to you just in time, you can still fix this. If you want to."

Three more doors appear to the right of the first door. One has a sign which reads, "EXIT" in bold green glowing letters, the next has a glowing green sign bearing the recycling symbol. The third door appears to be a bathroom.

"So," Neil begins again, "First door takes you to the foot of the throne of God, it's a pretty cool sight but probably wouldn't be my first choice if I was you. God can be a bit of a scumbag, she doesn't like most people except the happy-clappies, considering your Catholic upbringing, among other things, I wouldn't test your luck. She's not too fond of the Catholics, something about them being a cult and not embodying Christianity. Second door is pretty special; since you didn't die instantly, and you're pretty much still alive, you can go through back to your body. The belt will snap and you'll be back to your regularly scheduled life, though you will have some explaining to do. Third door leads you to a new lobby hosted by a real great guy, Brendon Urie, he'll make you fill in some paperwork, give you a quick interview and then he'll send you down into the body of a newborn baby, you get to keep your brain but the memories are gone. So what's it going to be?"

"What about the last door?"

"Oh, yeah sorry, the next leg can take a couple of hours of travel and waiting time to get you where you're going. The last door is just to use the bathroom before you leave."

"So which door should I pick then?"

"I told you which one you shouldn't pick, the rest is up to you, unfortunately."

I stare at the doors for a while. Each one appealing in its own way. The thought of facing God seems pretty cool, though burning for eternity doesn't. My old life could be interesting, though I'm not sure I'd like to deal with explaining the whole thing to everyone. Reincarnation. Now that would be cool. But what if I end up in a third world country or as an orphan. That wouldn't be great.

I step towards the doors, place my hand on the knob of the "EXIT" door, turn the handle and push. Nothing happens.

"It's a pull!" Shouts Neil from the back of the room.

I turn the knob again and pull the door open. The door opens to reveal nothing but a concrete wall with a piece of Banksy graffiti sprawled on it. I turn to question Neil but

I'm instead greeted by a gorgeous lady of African complexion.

"Tyra Banks?" I ask excitedly.

"Wow, every pretty and tall black girl has to be Tyra Banks? You racist little pig. No I'm not Tyra fucking Banks. I'm God. Yeah I know, God's black and a woman, and Satan is a Korean midget. Get over it. Listen here, I gave you a great life. You know how hard it is to build a person? Do you? No you don't. But you went and threw that life away for no reason? Did you even read my book? It's like the most famous book ever. It specifically said "Don't kill yourself." and what did you do? You killed yourself. Imagine one of your fancy thesis science paper things just got finished, and before you could even fully be proud of it, it just deleted itself from the computer. Not great, right? And then you didn't even mean it? You kill yourself and then try to go back. No way. Absolutely no way! You ain't going back. You're going straight to hell."

She opens her mouth again to continue scolding me but as she does a sudden flash moves across my vision, followed by a loud clank. She drops to the floor and Freddie Mercury steps over her body brandishing a fire extinguisher.

"Take that you vile homophobe!" he exclaims as he proceeds to slam the fire extinguisher into her head repeatedly.

"Apologies," Freddie announces as he lifts a bloody hand to greet me, "Neil, myself and a few others have been trying to take her down for a while."

Neil comes strolling through the door to heaven sipping on a juice box and nonchalantly steps over the corpse on the floor. "She's mortal on this side of the door," he explains, "We just hadn't figured out how to get her angry enough to come down here before. As it turns out the 'EXIT' door was just the trick. Anyways, want to come help us kill the angels and saints now?" Unable to speak, I offer a shocked nod and Freddie grabs my hand, he guides me over to the recycling door. As we enter the door's proximity it bursts open and Billy Joe Armstrong and Brendon Urie skip through hand in hand. Behind them follows an army of LGBTQ members. The immortals. They dance through the door wielding weapons both advanced and makeshift, from assault rifles to drumsticks and typewriters.

Neil goes to open the door to heaven only to discover it's been locked from the inside. The crowd gives way as Alexander the great charges forward and hurls his sandal-clad foot through the lock of the door. The tattered plywood slab swings freely now and we charge through the frame into the city of angels. Alarms ring out across the skies; angels and devout Christian souls flood into the streets, they charge at our ranks. Due to a complete and utter lack of military strategy from both sides, a wild scene of entropy ensues around me. The Seraphim patrol the skies and fire down into the chaos below. I look to my left and enjoy the sight of Shakespeare hurling a quill through the eye of Gabriel, Elton John choke-slamming Cassiel. Ellen DeGeneres kicks Michael in the crotch as Tim Cook beats Jegudiel to death with a MacBook pro. Meanwhile Caitlyn Jenner rides on the back of a Pegasus towards the squadron of Seraphim flying above. She hurls javelins across the skies which manifest into figures

as they approach their targets. Tom Ford sinks his teeth into Metatron and they tumble to the ground. Abraham Lincoln recites the Lord's prayer as he slams his fist into the side of Moroni's head. The Seraphim fall one by one to the ground and become swarmed with my allies throwing attacks of all calibers. Hayley Kiyoko screams out, "Who's holy now?" as she drives her culturally appropriate Katana sword through the neck of one of the beasts. Buildings go up in flames as Emma Gonzalez and her host of teenage Lesbians hurl Molotov cocktails over the frontline.

I run for cover amidst the unfurling battle. I stumble over the mangled body of Raphael and block my ears from the screams of my own fallen comrades. I manage to slide my body underneath the preserved arc of the covenant. I continue to watch as the fight rages on, bodies pile up and blood runs thick in the streets of the silver city. The skies are all but clear as the last of the six-winged beasts crash into the ground. The Earthly army continues its dominance, charging up the steps towards the castle atop the hill. Neil and Freddie at the forefront of the action, brandishing swords, slicing heads off Saints and impaling Angel after Angel as they go. The host of Cherubim at the gate of the castle frantically arm themselves as the battle moves further up the hill.

A breath of courage flows over me and I leave my hiding space, draw a sword from the body of Saint Catherine and begin dashing up the hill to join the fight. Three angels I do not recognize charge towards me, in one swift motion I spin and slice all three in half with my angelic sword. I trudge through the piles of bodies and pools of blood, both earthly and heavenly. The hill steepens as I approach the crowds. The sound of war is deafening, swords clashing, drums pounding; groups of pacifist souls band together in alleyways, singing hymns requesting defense from their God. Their God who lies with her head caved in at the door to heaven. The four Cherubs at the foot of the castle stand their ground. An eagle, a lion, a calf, and a man. The earthly army stands face to face with the four mammoth creatures, unblinking, unspeaking. Neil steps forward and with a voice like thunder calls out to the beasts, "Your God is dead! Lower your weapons and open the gates. The battle is won. The throne is ours."

The creatures exchange glances and then bow their heads. The gates swing open. We climb the final flight of stairs and stand atop the castle of God. The view reveals heaven and earth, it's spectacular. I can see every moment in time and every point of the universe at once. The carnage in the streets below, the carnage in the streets of Aleppo. A supernova exploding in some far-off galaxy, the first rays of the morning sun sliding over the Alps.

A gentle breeze flows over the land, bodies drift away into the unknown; sand dunes shifting across a desert. The cherubs fade into oblivion, heaven below my feet wanes, the crowd shrinks as their immortal souls are finally freed. I feel an airy euphoria come over me and soon enough I lift onto the breeze. My body as I knew it gone, my view of the universe remaining, everywhere, everywhen.

# **Lesley Synge**

## **Pandemonium on the Road to Puri**

All over India, yogini statues are missing and temples razed  
but Hirapur protects its ninth century treasure still.

The isolated village is six kays from Bhubaneswar  
a Mother Goddess anomaly between two big Hindu cities.

An old man who speaks English hurries over  
as the taxi dust settles. After Namaste, he's off,  
his rat-a-tat-tat words spiced with incense and ghee.

Number 1: Maya on a dead body. 2: Tara on a dead body.

Barefoot, under a hot blue sky, we circle. In each niche  
a goddess carved in chlorite dances with bare feet.  
Her hair styled, her jewels unique, she stands triumphant:  
Murati on a camel. Vaishnai on an owl. Virupa on a boar.  
When patriarchy came to rule our planet  
Mother Goddess temples such as these were scorned.  
Tantric techniques? The exit door. Although they protect them,  
Hirapurans know to worship only one of the sixty four.

A feminist from a far shore is a more likely pilgrim  
than a Hindu, but the villagers persist.  
Vrisabhanna on a mountain. Jalakamini on a frog, the guide rattles on.  
These buxom, broad-hipped wild ones who've danced down  
from the sky are freedom fighters all!  
Their cacophony of love and war lives on in stone.  
The village slumbers while their yoginis shoot arrows  
laugh, brag and bang on drums.

A caretaker-priest squats by Mahamaya the village goddess  
halfway round. She's behind red cloth  
and flower offerings, so sacred she must be hidden.  
He dabs vermillion on my forehead and says something  
which my rat-a-tat-tat man translates as godblessu.  
Yosha. Aghora. Bhadrakali, he resumes.  
By now it's clear what work the Muslim conquest did –  
there's not one form intact.

Conquest means subdue. Subdue the flesh and stone! I saw  
museums in Bihar overflowing with bashed-in Buddhas  
but here it's the tantric woman who's trashed.  
Legs, a-dance or standing strong, smashed.

If the beauty had four snaking arms, three severed.  
Jagged wounds maim wondrous breasts.  
Hands aloft are robbed of their sweet fingers. The spree a great lark –  
Invader iconoclasm, at the temple's half-a millennium mark.

Ghatabari on a lion. Kali on Lord Shiva. Number 56  
Chamunda. The hag with sagging breasts who teaches: death.  
For centuries the villagers sat tight.  
The British, for example, never knew.  
After independence, a local archaeologist came by.  
His report: a miracle, of the sixty-four, only one is missing!  
I imagine his boss respond in delirium –  
Bot changa! Not bad for a millennium.

Vayu Veena dancing on a stag. She's the last of the compendium.  
The guide is done except for four male deities. They paid homage  
with their penises erect until the invaders unmanned them.  
I find my shoes and show rupee gratitude.  
These devout farmers! They'll surely spend the coins  
on incense and gold leaf. The taxi starts.  
I'm quiet as we go. From one half-hour's visit, what can I know  
of a civilisation that once worshipped the Mother Goddess, the Flow?

Here in Australia, each year, we count our female dead.  
And here in Australia, each year, the maimed yoginis haunt me still.  
This poem? No answers. Nor have I yogini tarot cards to sell  
or tours to take you on.  
I've only a mystery – and it shatters me.  
The divide. The divide between the too-few men who can love  
a bold woman, full and free,  
and those who – those who –

In 2013, I visited one of India's most unique and hidden treasures – a ninth century yogini temple. Yogini (the feminine of yogi) means goddess in Sanskrit. I owe what little insight I have to the catalogue, Sixty Four Yogini Temple Hirapur by Suresh Balabantaray from Bhubaneswar, Odisha, and my Hirapuran guide who, I hope, is still escorting tourists around the site.

# **Lesley Synge**

## **Jonathon and the Queen's Land**

Jonathon, they are real.  
The women called Amazons are not mythical  
they're warrior horsewomen  
from the vast steppes of Eurasia  
ancestors of Ukrainians, Kazaks and Mongols –

Do put aside the one thing you 'know' about,  
those amputations of their right breasts, and listen.  
There are accounts of them  
in Old Persian and Old Chinese  
and Sanskrit stories about  
lands where queens reigned. Stri-Rajya.  
Because they killed enemy soldiers themselves  
the stories spread far and wide  
and the Egyptians knew of them, the Turks, Armenians  
and Azerbaijanis –

Not myths darling. Validated by Herodotus.  
D'y'mind? A little respect for the 'Father of History'.  
Herodotus went to the northerly edge of Greek influence  
where the steppes began  
and interviewed them.  
'We wield bows and arrows  
throw javelins and ride horses  
know nothing of womanly tasks.'  
Although they struck him as peaceful enough  
the Scythians insisted they were randy man-killers.  
Oh yes! The Greeks of classical times  
found them fascinating.  
They kept their women by the hearth, y'know,  
whereas the Amazons carried weapons, rode horses  
and strode about in leggings –

Leggings, yes trousers if you will.  
The Greeks noted their tattooed fingers  
their lethal arrows –

What?  
oh give up on those 'breast amputations'.

They wrestled with men in the agora  
The Greek fought oiled and nude but the Amazons  
refused to undress, kept their strong thighs hidden –

Oh will you stop grinning? All this  
is not fucking ‘feminist projection’  
‘poetic imagination’.  
They are depicted on pots in museums  
their names translate as  
Hot Flanks, Armed with a Sword, and Iron –

Not Iron Age Jonathon  
a woman warrior named Iron.  
Another story. A princess was told that  
Alexander the Great was camped near the Caspian Sea  
so rode in to be impregnated by him.  
She stayed a fortnight then galloped away –

Granted, Jon my love, such stories are hard to verify –

So what if they wrote nothing themselves?  
Lack of literacy isn’t the same as ignorance, Jonathon.  
They belonged to the winds. Winds are real enough:  
winds that whip the snow of the mighty Caucasus Mountains  
winds that flog the Silk Routes and stir the desert dust  
winds that chew the Great Wall of China  
built to keep such nomads out –

Jonathon when you repeat the word myth ad nauseam  
it is so unhelpful.  
The Spanish named the mightiest river in America the Amazon  
because the Indigenous women battled them so fiercely.  
Amazons here too they thought –

So you concede there may be ‘something’ in it.  
That’s big of you Jonathon.  
The anthropologists are out there now, all over Eurasia,  
studying pottery shards, excavating burial sites.  
They’ve found that when an Amazon met defeat –  
a sword in the ribs, an axe to the skull, an arrow through the guts  
she was interred with her horse –

With her horse.

Listen, why don’t you?  
Can’t you hear them  
gathering in a corner of your lame mind?  
Here they come, thundering.  
Hot Flanks and her sisters

whooping together  
yiy  
yiyay  
yiyaaaaaa!

This dramatic monologue is inspired by The Amazons: Lives and Legends of Warrior Women across the Ancient World by Adrienne Mayor, Princeton, 2014.

# **Lesley Synge**

## **Bedtime Story for a Lover**

A long time ago –Vincenzo began – my father Roberto Filippo Riccardo Logozzo lived on Lipari and fished the Tyrrhenian Sea. It was then a small wild island and very poor. He fished as his father had done, and his father's father, and his father's father. Throughout the centuries, Santo Bartolo, patron saint of pescatore (fishermen), protected them all, at least unless the water swallowed them.

Roberto Logozzo, son of the sea, fell in love with a daughter of earth, shy Maria on holiday from Sicily. He stood on Via Garibaldi and sent his songs up to her. She could not resist him, although he was illiterate and she was educated.

They married and while Roberto harvested the blue waters of Mar Tirenno, Maria made five healthy children. Their first was a daughter – Anna. Then a son, Mario. Another daughter, Elena, and another daughter, Simona. And then, yes, another daughter, Rachele.

By the late 1940s, Europe lay in ruins after the war. Italy was poor, Sicily poorer and Lipari poorer still. It had not always been so. The volcanic forces which formed Lipari made obsidian, a black glass. In the ancient world before metal making, obsidian was treasured because it could cut and trade in obsidian made Lipari prosperous. By the middle of the twentieth century, natural glass didn't interest anyone. Life for a fisherman with five children was difficult. Immigration seemed the only option.

'Why don't we start again in Australia?' Roberto suggested to Maria.

On the day that the papers arrived, Roberto strode down to the harbour to his boat. As he inhaled the scents of rosemary and oleander that the wind brought down from the hills, tears ran down his cheeks. Whether from relief or sadness he did not know. His father's words rang in his ears: Si nasce da soli e si muore da soli! You're born alone and you'll die alone!

Voyages. Lipari to Messina. Messina to Napoli. Napoli to Sydney. Roberto Logozzo found a house to rent in Leichhardt near the water, and bought a prawn trawler with his life savings. He gave it a new name, Maria, and painted the name on the prow. Meanwhile his wife braved the shops. Everywhere – Sale! Sale! Sale! on big red banners. God, what a passion for salt Australians have, she told Roberto.

Maria packed him a lunchbox, a flask of strong black coffee, and a number of cigarettes that she rolled herself although she herself never smoked. Roberto made the first foray on Sydney Harbour without mishap and gave her the best of the catch on his return. He sold the rest to the Fish Market and would always, always, keep the

best of the catch for the family.

He sailed out through the heads to learn the wild ways of the Tasman Sea. After that, he spent days, weeks, away. *Si nasce da soli e si muore da soli!*

'My' Vincenzo was the first Logozzo child born in Australia. Alessandro came after him. Seven children: three boys and four girls.

When Vincenzo turned five, his mother enrolled him in the same Catholic school his siblings went to. 'We'll call you Vince for short,' the nun said. His mother called him 'Enzo and when Vincenzo heard the nun's pronouncement, he cried out, 'Sono Enzo. Enzo!'

At home, he was Enzo, English was irrelevant, and Mamma's food ruled. She made zuppa di vongole, insalata di calamari, penne del pescatore and sometimes, on celebration days, all three and more. When it came to food, the family was the richest, the most satisfied, the most content family in the world.

When Roberto wasn't at sea or leaning against the house in the shade, busy with his nets and hooks and sinkers, he helped Maria in the back garden. They were paying off a home. He did the digging and took the credit when the neighbours declared Logozzo tomatoes were the best in Sydney.

Sometimes when mending his nets Roberto became philosophical. 'I'm an ignorant man Enzo but I know this – rely only on yourself,' he advised. 'Never count on anyone else. You're born alone and you'll die alone.' *Si nasce da soli e si muore da soli.* And, after a lifetime of harvesting the sea in the two hemispheres of the world, Roberto sold his trawler.

'That's how it was in the old days,' my lover told me as we rested against the pillows of his bed, sated, and drinking wine. 'Dad tried to be satisfied with scouring the shoreline to prise mussels from the pylons. He would take up a bucket and call, Enzo, the tide's right, let's go! The waters of Sydney Harbour were pure and good and whatever those waters gave you, you could eat. But scrounging couldn't satisfy him.'

Roberto bought a small boat and painted Maria II on her prow. A craft purely for pleasure. 'Enzo, let's go!' he called and out they sailed.

Nights spent fishing were nights lived in another world. Roberto cast the nets and waited for the ocean to fill them. The kerosene lantern shone, the swell rocked them, and stars shot across the immense pitch black sky in long slow arcs.

One night, out past South Head, a giant stingray got tangled up in the nets. It would take Roberto's precious nets with it if it plunged down into the depths in an attempt to escape.

'Nasconditi! Into the cabin,' he ordered. 'Stay out of the way.' He hauled the entangled ray onto the deck.

From the cabin, Vincenzo heard it thrash. It was a monster – longer than the entire boat. It fought and flapped and thrashed its deadly tail but his father danced around

it, slashing at the net with his knife to cut it loose. He started hacking off its wings SPLASH! it flung its mutilated body overboard.

The night was again peaceful. Quiet. The lantern shone, the boat rocked, stars shot across the pitch black sky and Roberto took out his cigarette tin and lit one up. The battle replayed in Vincenzo's mind. He could only stare at his heroic father – a fisherman ready to die to save his nets. The kero lamp glowed yellow and the cigarette flared as a small red dot. *Si nasce da soli e si muore da soli!*

Roberto was barely into his sixties when his health began to fail. He rolled up his nets and sold Maria II and agreed that a surgeon should cut off his legs. The front garden became his favourite place. He sat there in his wheelchair with his stumps of legs to crush basil leaves between his fingers to catch its peppery aroma. He lent close to waxy white gardenia flowers to inhale the lush perfume.

He was rarely without company. Family, friends and neighbours came by and younger fishermen sought his advice. 'Buongiorno, Maestro della rete! Professor of nets!' they greeted him. He suffered pain in silence and saved up for a holiday to Lipari.

Many remembered them, him and Maria. The sea breezes still smelt of rosemary and oleander but Lipari was no longer poor because tourists from northern Europe liked the island's wild beauty and came in droves each summer. There Roberto's life ended.

Vince left his affairs, both business and romantic, and flew to Palermo. He caught a train to Messina and a ferry to Lipari. The body of his father lay in a coffin beneath a glass lid, awaiting burial: the last fisherman of the line. *Si nasce da soli e si muore da soli!*

When he first spoke of his father, I assumed Vince would replicate the man's steadfastness. (I am Maria, leaning out of a window above a cobblestone lane near the harbour, courted with song. Miles Davis, mostly.) I adored Vincenzo bello.

'I never needed Santo Bartolo,' Vince said, 'He's the saint for fishermen and I was in business. I parted ways with saints and the church early.'

He adhered to a modern holy trinity: money, sex and food. His hedonism was deep with an implacable preference for amore. Conquest. Not oleanders, gardenias, the sea. Or me.

It's the ancient pescatore e maestro della rete who I love now. My battles with monsters are as formidable as a fight with a stingray, my words are nets to cast, to harvest, to fight, to mend.

Si si si, I hear you Roberto. Like an ancient fisherman, a writer must accept: *Si nasce da soli e si muore da soli*. This is what I learnt from Vincenzo's father.

# CONTRIBUTORS

**Pauline Barbieri** was shortlisted for the Bridport Poetry Prize by the poet laureate, Sir Andrew Motion and twice for the Exeter Poetry Prize by Jo Shapcott and Lawrence Sail, respectively. She has had six collections of poetry published and was shortlisted for the Cinnamon Press Novel Awards for her book, 'Smoke and Gold'.

**Frederic Leighton** (1830-1896), a British painter and sculptor of academic art. Was very popular and successful during his lifetime.

**Seth Crook** has taught philosophy at various universities, is transitioning into a seal, lives on Mull. His poems have appeared in such places as The Rialto, Magma, Envoi, The Interpreter's House, Butcher's Dog, Northwords Now, Causeway, Snakeskin. And in anthologies such as the Port (Dunlin Press), Green Fields (Maytree).

**Catherine Pozzi** (1882-1934) was born into a family with connections to the French art world. She studied history, philosophy, religion, math, and sciences. During her lifetime she published an anonymous autobiography, her poetry was published posthumously.

**Pádraig O' Connor** is a writer based in Cork City in Ireland. His first play 'Madam of Myrtlevalley' was staged last year. He is currently working on his second play 'This, That & The Other' which will be performed later this year. He also writes short stories.

**L.B. Sedlacek** is an award winning poet and author with poetry and fiction appearing in many different journals and zines. Her latest poetry books are "The Adventures of Stick People on Cars" (Alien Buddha Press), "The Architect of French Fries" (Presa Press) and "Words and Bones" (Finishing Line Press.) She is a former Poetry Editor for "ESC! Magazine" and also co-hosted the podcast for the small press, "Coffee House to Go," for several years. She teaches poetry at local elementary and middle schools and publishes a free resource for poets, "The Poetry Market Ezine." In her free time, LB enjoys swimming, reading, and taking guitar lessons.

**Peter Van Belle** is the editor of The Klecksograph and has published poems and short stories in Great Britain, Ireland, New Zealand, Canada, the US, and Belgium. As a child he lived in the US, but now he lives in Belgium.

**Ivan Bilibin** (1876-1942), a Russian illustrator and designer, best known for his illustrations of Russian fairy tales and scenes of medieval Russia.

**Algo** is 40 and from Ireland. In self-imposed self-isolation, Algo only wears black and enjoys studying the School of Austrian economics, reading comic books and meditating. Believes organized religion is a club but is not nihilistic.

**R. Gerry Fabian** is a retired English instructor. He has been publishing poetry since 1972 in various poetry magazines.

He is the editor Of Raw Dog Press <https://rawdogpress.wordpress.com>.

He has published two books of his published poems, Parallels and Coming Out Of The Atlantic.

His novels, Memphis Masquerade, Getting Lucky (The Story) and Seventh Sense are available at all ebook publishers including Amazon, Apple Books and Barnes and Noble. He is currently working on His fourth novel, Ghost Girl. is scheduled for publication in 2020.

Born in sunny South Africa, **Jessica Ballantyne** moved to London in 2009 after graduating with a BA (honours) in Fine art from the University of Pretoria. Specialising in oil painting, Ballantyne creates art that revolves around the main subject matter and passion of her work: the body mind. Influenced by Surrealism and psychoanalysis, Ballantyne creates artworks which combine her love of automatism (a surrealist technique of free-association or creating without thought or plan) with spirituality and the subjective experience of being.

*"I have a great curiosity about many things, which feed into my work, including animal instincts, sexuality and desire, the subconscious, dreams, the Self, mysticism, meditation, psychology and neuroscience. I'm fascinated by the concept of identity and how, personally, it always appears to be in a state of flux. I love how malleable the mind is, how we can change and transform ourselves."*

Joanna Bell writes under the pseudonym **Annie Bell**. She lives in County Waterford, Ireland but is originally from Brightlingsea in Essex, England.

**Declan Toohey** is an Irish writer based in Halifax, Nova Scotia. His fiction and criticism has appeared in Visual Verse, The Stockholm Review of Literature, and Idle Ink. He is currently at work on a collection of short stories.

**Michael H. Brownstein's** latest volume of poetry, How Do We Create Love?, was recently released (Cholla Needles Press, 2019).

**George Moore** is the author of Saint Agnes Outside the Walls (FutureCycle 2016) and Children's Drawings of the Universe (Salmon Poetry 2015). Poems have appeared in The Atlantic, Poetry, Orion, Arc, Colorado Review, and Stand. He has done recent residencies in Latvia and Greece, and work has been shortlisted for the Bailieborough Poetry Prize and long-listed for the Gregory O'Donoghue Poetry Prize. After a career at the University of Colorado, Boulder, he presently lives with the wife, also a poet, on the south shore of Nova Scotia.

**Geoffrey Heptonstall**'s publications include a novel, Heaven's Invention, and a first collection of poetry, The Rites of Paradise. He was a regular contributor to The London Magazine for several years and lives in Cambridge.

**Laura Minning** began writing creatively at the tender age of nine. Her first poem was published by her Alma-matter in 1989, and her second received an Editor's Choice Award by the National Library of Poetry in 1993. Laura's work has been featured both in hard copy and on-line, via publications like "Literature Today", "Amulet" and "Stanzaic Stylings". Laura received her first International Merritt of Poetry Award in 1995 and her second in 1998. Both were presented to her by the National Library of Poetry. Her outstanding achievements in poetry were internationally recognized again in 2005 by Poetry.com, who was kind enough to bestow the title of International Poet of the Year on to her.

Laura's first collection of poetry, "dear diary" was published by Vantage Press in 2003. Her second book, "sunburst" was published by Xlibris a year and a half later.

Laura's artistic accomplishments have been equally impressive. She's been creating and exhibiting abstract work since 2013. Her pieces have been displayed at venues like the Iowa Children's Museum, the Trenton Free Public Library and Barcode. Her artwork, as well as her original photography, has also obtained publication status both in hard copy and on-line.

The Barcode exhibit was held in 2016. It featured thirty-six pieces of Laura's original abstract artwork. Four of those pieces were sold over the course of the exhibition's opening weekend, and the entire event was sponsored by Bacardi.

In 2018, Laura produced a chapbook, entitled "fusion", which featured photographic images of her artwork.

As a person with legal blindness, Laura hopes to inspire other creative people with disabilities to never allow anything to hinder them from reaching for the stars and accomplishing their dreams. If you were to ask her about her creative successes, she would tell you that the difficult is but the work of the moment, and the impossible takes a little longer.

For more information about Laura and her work, please feel free to log onto her web-site at <https://brcartandpoetry.wordpress.com>.

**Maria A. Arana** is a teacher, writer, and poet. Her poetry has been published in various journals including Spectrum, The Pangolin Review, Nature Writing, and Cholla Needles Magazine. You can find her at [https://twitter.com/m\\_a\\_Arana](https://twitter.com/m_a_Arana)

**Charlie Thomson** is a Zimbabwean born and raised author currently living in London. His last few years have been spent building collections of stories all based around human existence. His first novel "Cassie: A London Legacy" is set to publish in early April.

**Lesley Syngue** lives in Brisbane, Australia. She has three poetry collections, Organic Sister (Post Pressed, 2005) Mountains Belong to the People Who Love Them (Post Pressed, 2011); Signora Bella's Grand Tour (self-published Zing Stories, 2019) and is collected in The Sky Falls Down (Ginninderra, 2019). She has an MA in Creative Writing from University of Queensland and is an award-winning writer in many genres.

**END OF ISSUE TWO OF THE KLECKSOGRAPH**

