

LI JI

courage & the serpent

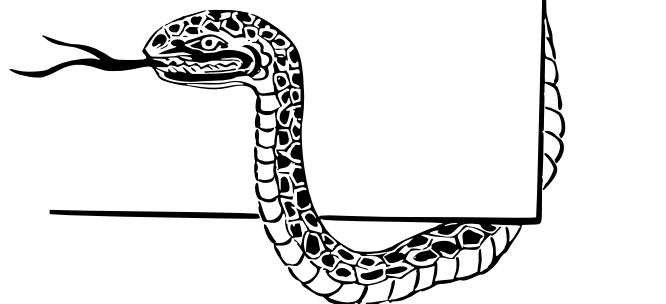




ISSUE VI:

LI JI

**courage
& the serpent**



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EDITOR'S NOTE

Six months into the year and Free Verse Revolution brings you its second magazine issue. The focus this year is on people in history and mythology and their stories. For Issue VI we share in the courage and evil of Li Ji's slaying of the giant serpent terrorising her village.

From a fierce photograph of the next generation, to heartbreaking and vulnerable poetry, to superb illustrations, this issue is a showcase of writers and artists from across the globe. When reading and editing submissions I was humbled and honoured by the stories our readers feel comfortable sharing with us. It is always a significant reminder of the sheer courage it often takes simply to create, let alone share your creations afterwards.

I hope in this issue you will find Li Ji in the grit and vengeful pieces, you will find her in the power and healing of those who share their recovery and survival, and, of course, you will also find the serpent. This issue is a stark reminder of the pain, heartache and trauma which continues to thrive, particularly in modern society. And so, I encourage you to view these words and images as your proverbial sword; your voice and your vision are a weapon and I hope you will never be afraid to use them.

Please be mindful of the following content warnings as you read:

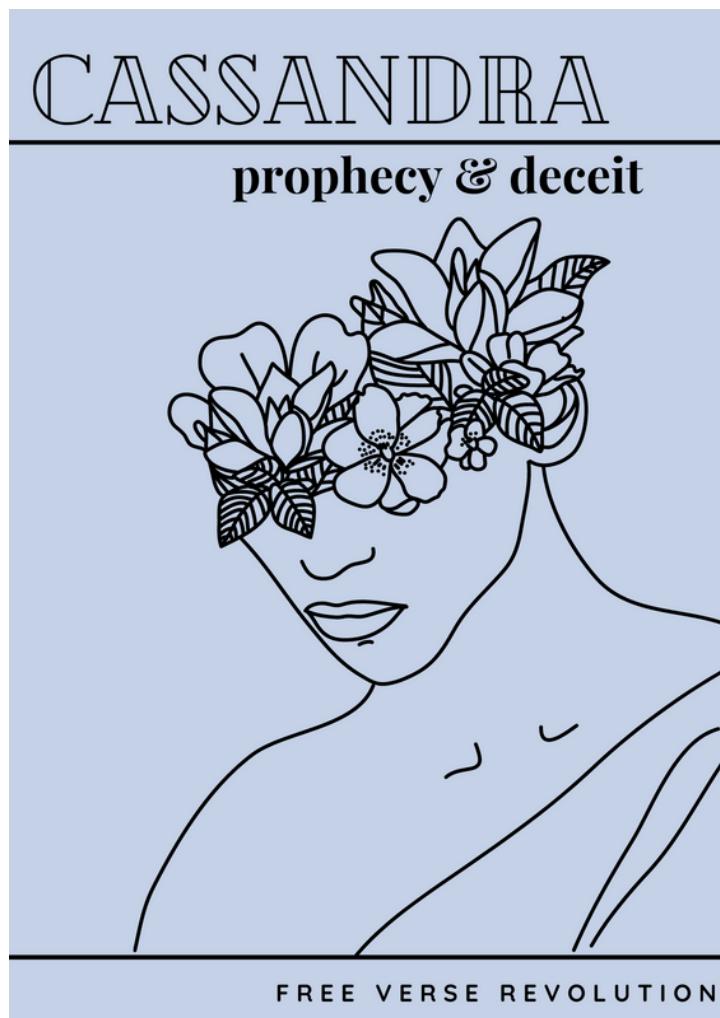
- page 16 - 23: discussion of PTSD, domestic violence and sexual assault
- pages 15 & 34-36: mention of sexual assault, child abuse and abuse within the family
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Your humbled editor, always,
Kristiana

FREE VERSE REVOLUTION

Free Verse Revolution is an international literary and arts magazine publishing quarterly issues in print and digital format. Each issue is themed and shares poetry, prose, photography and artwork by creators from around the globe. Free Verse Revolution also publishes an annual print anthology sharing a selection of pieces from the four issues of that year. We pride ourselves as a home for new and established creators since we began publishing poetry as an online WordPress platform in 2018.

Read previous issues online at
www.freeverserevolution.com



DRAGONS [SERIES]

IRINA NOVIKOVA



Materials: gouache, paper

Size: 70x50 cm

Year: 2020-21

ELEGY FOR THE NINE MAIDENS

CAITLAN DOCHERTY

you still exist in early afternoon's
slow procession of clouds: spun cotton
veil draped across sky's ribboning
aisle before earth's wedding song of rain.
i look for your poetry in spring's
theater of flowers: plum blossom,
moth orchid, amber morning
chrysanthemum. touched by autumn
sunrise, golden larch leaves catch
fire—a circus of light careening
through starry clusters. i sharpen the dull
blade of my heart for you. lightning
blackens the white pine. i tremble
with vengeance.



SWORDSONG

ANNI RANNISTO

I will hold this thought
in the hollows of my temples:

where my sisters' zest flourishes, your gluttony will never.

Our two plus four feet betwixt mountains
the firmament's permanence uncertain upon us,

but there are no surrogate notes for this swordsong,
no delicate take part in this serpentine exequy:

Our blood lies thicker than the village's edge

Now come a little closer, envisage
your upcoming feast,

palate agape, palate agape

Come peek through the oculus of your hideaway cave

you scalene-scaled slaughterer,
a harpoon-tongued harvester,
a sulphur-spleened-murderer

Come display
how the jaw exhilarates
for a maiden,

once before forever no more

And all along
I will hold this thought
at the tip of my blade:

where my sisters' tremble ends, you have already.

REBELLIOUS DAUGHTER

NABILA ABID

The rebellious daughter in me
Cuts her own sentences to be careful on respect.
Drinks tea every while just to keep up with the days.
Paints bullets of home which was once sane.
Keeps duaas in her heart and braveness on her tongue.
I'm keeping all the blood inside the skin so I don't end up being rebellious once
again, in the history of a rebel family.
I'm known to be the silent rebel, the one who keeps hearts and heartbreaks inside
and shows what an unharmed daughter is.
I look up to the salahs which he has showered to keep peace upon the rebel heart.
I write of love with a heart
which loves to be broken
Because it has been the legacy,
no one changes even if one wishes to.
In the end,
daughters are harmless in the most harmful ways
Abba tells,
to be kind to a rebellious daughter
while I bury the rebel just to fulfill the duties
of a kind daughter.

4.10.22 OR FRIDA

EMILY PERKOVICH

Weaponize me

Make me a Rorschach revolution

I want to spring forth from labor channel with the fight on the tip of my tongue

Tumble from the cunt under gunfire and stick the landing

The problem with a girl born wrapped in roses is that the umbilical cord has thorns

We could prune the flowers from my hair, but I want the overgrowth

I want the deadheads firing pollen bombs at the glass ceiling, I want the guts pooling at my feet, I want the slime, the rot, the stink of it, I want to fuel the ache,

I want to be birthed full-bloom,

I will caress the delivery,

Paint the blood across my brow

I want to sleep in the belly of the war,

I want to name myself

THE KIMONO DRAGON
AMOUR DE MA VUE



A DYING VIPER IN THE SNOW
(OR HOW EVIL WINS)

RICHARD LEDUE

After Aesop (who was before most of us)

Maybe it waited too long to burrow
(thought patience more prudent
than dead grass whispering dirges
among late autumn winds),
or didn't believe in winter,
even after numerous warnings
from the older snakes,
who in allegorical fashion
pointed with their tail ends
as they lectured the impetuous youth,
as if experience could be taught,
not experienced,
only for a farmer to find the frozen viper,
lift the serpent up into his coat,
where the warmth thawed venom,
allowed fangs to taste the kind of kindness
stronger than the most poisonous bites-
the farmer's death a victory
most of us are too cowardly
to face, so we rather embrace a moral
thousands of years old
about how we should step over evil,
and walking away the right path.

COBRA SONGS

RICHARD LEDUE

I

Stereotypical flute melody
charming the devil's cousin,
who themselves hiss deadly music
(older than Mozart's grave),
warning us of how easily life can be poisoned.

II

The commonplace fear of snakes
comes from the venomous fangs,
because humans are used to thinking
only of their own mouths,
which talk, yawn, sing or bite,
but usually just kill in the metaphorical sense
most believe harmless.

III

Of course, there was no cobra in Eden,
but just a regular snake
used by Satan,
who may have invented ventriloquism,
except we'll never know
how much he moved his lips
while talking up an apple.

IV

We'll also never know if Mozart was scared of snakes,
but he was afraid of the trumpet as a child,
and grew up to love shit jokes,
so I'm sure he would have had something witty
to say about ouroboros though.

V

Grew up watching GI Joe:
soldiers fighting terrorists named Cobra,
and each one had an action figure.

I broke the first one I got
in under a minute, twisting it around
until the elastic inside
snapped.

Luckily, people are stronger than that.



DRAGONS [SERIES]

IRINA NOVIKOVA





HOLDING

VANESSA NAPOLITANO

Inside an egg you expect to find
a hatchling, or to crack the shell for your breakfast.

Instead, inside this brittle house I am fully formed,
nucleus, teeth, needlepoint, poise.

Hold me in your hands, smooth, feeling powerful.
I will burst out, heels and fists first,

already in motion. Staccato, blinding.
You hold shards of the cage that held me.



WRATH

SANGEETHA

Wrath draped in sheer organza
Looking better that she should
Scorches eyes that question her
In the name of all that's good
Embers long into the night glow
Not one fellow being dare stoke
Pain is not a story to share
Just to label oneself woke
Betrayal scatters platitudes
Leaving blanks that deceit fills
Trust holds fort with blindfolds on
Love sharpens the arrow that kills
Wrath burns bones in catacombs
Wrath lies curled in every womb



TIMES UP

FIONA DIGNAN

She wakes in the language of snakes
Slick oil sipping caves
scales feathered between ivory
thighs, night curling as leathered licks
lapping wrists, ribs
wet nooks
Apple breathed, she wants to know
what it is to coax power
and win. A bruised peach
held in fanged cage, displayed
dislocated jaw choking
on her pit and wit

He listlessly lurks, between boulders
groomed to pebbles
beneath slithering sinews. Vermillion
gold skein, he whispers
sulphurous serenades across
the valley's velvet air
Billows of bloodless
moths to forked tongue
flame, snaking line, servant
girls, the dregs, trash
*I'll make you a star
baby girl, bleached bone
statue, golden
icon, name in lights*

She is all sweet
rice cakes, all action, Rrriot girl
agent, the glint of steely
surprise in her palms.
At the moment teeth are bared
she strikes, cool slice snips arched
vertebrae, venom slicks
impotent, baptising her anew
She holds the skulls of her sisters
reads their braille cavities

Alas!
Me too
Me too

PILLS YOU'LL SWALLOW

CAITLAN DOCHERTY

you'll outlive him. blood history boiled
down to capsule, a red notch veining
the chalk white center. you'll swallow
rivers: fish scales, your sisters'
coruscating pain, a city's warm morphine
betrayal. the price of beauty
callouses your mother's palms. wind
hisses through maidenhair
trees' fanned leaves. rain shreds dawn
redwoods' silky feathers. you'll unfurl
the pink flag of your tongue, marvel
at its quivering as you learn
fear and courage are fruits plucked
from the same tree.

DAMAGED GOODS

CAITLAN DOCHERTY

i wake with matted hair, damp bedsheets
vining my calves and ankles. sharp slivers of daylight
bisect the wallpaper's crop of gold
peonies. all morning, fenced in
anger bends and breaks fork tines from the root.
i want to be memorable
as the rash of thorns that haunts
the honey locust. many summers, my mouth has been
a soft resting place for bruised fruit.
in kitchen's graveyard, i mourn
mold-infected blackberries, stale loaves of bread.
so little is salvageable.
june burns what's left, drives red
swelter through my veins. i worship you
in unbridled fits of aggression.

JACKALS BITE

SARAH BELLUM MENTAL

I don't know a sashay
I do know baggy clothes

doesn't change their taste.
Doesn't change the hunt

I am hunted before by it
by the shadow I loved

to follow until he
turned on me.

All the favorite people
in my family turn to be

jackals looking for
a bite.



TIN MAN

ROBIN L. HARVEY

Was it a dream, a bump on the head,
or true love, this?
In the center of the cyclone
two hearts as big as houses
were swept up in
that first kiss
spellbound and smitten by
those lusty/rusty lips.

Swept away and up so high
over the rainbow Tin Man and I flew
until we crashed, smashed to bits
on an emerald sidewalk
slaked with green grit.

There, he crushed my pretty, little heart
in his stolen, steely grip.
My ruby red lust turned to ice
as he cut me paper thin
and folded me in pieces
to grope my wind-stung skin.

With oily moves so masterful, so shiny and relentless
what could I do, an orphan in a threadbare, gingham dress?
With a head spun full of straw and sticks
my body welded to his anvil hips
spread like candy across the yellow bricks.

As the macho, manly, bastard sang
that age-old “nympho-slag-slut” slang
I became his bitch, his wicked witch
until I clicked my heels three times
and told that hunk of metal, “Please, I don’t mind.”

All that wild night, red-light, green-light ... endless
his fickle fists, his cold caress . . .
lost in a bubble I floated wounded, wan and witless.

For twenty years I bore his blame awash in shame
until a world of witches blared my truth
thundered in headlines, Twitter, TV, too.
Everywoman's tale told in 60-point wonder:
time's up, sisters, it's him, not you.
Not me? Why not? Because #@MeToo.
And then I knew these Tin Men
they don't want our hearts
just to rip our fucking souls apart.

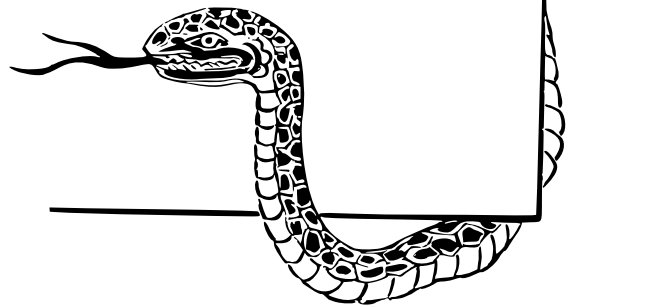
Tin Men, screw you.



INTERVIEW

WITH

Robin L. Harvey



Introduce yourself; when did you begin writing? When and why did you decide you wanted to share your work with others?

I came from what many would call a horrific childhood. I grew up to become an actor, dancer, teacher, journalist and now, I hope, a decent poet. But I never decided to share my work. That's always been a part of who I am.

My big sister taught me to read a few months before I turned four. I started writing at about age five. By first grade, the school librarian bought me a scrapbook for my poetry and illustrations. In third grade, I wrote and performed plays, made sculptures and art, and wrote poetry, all shared with my school. What's the point of creating if you don't share it?

Where do your inspirations come from? Are they musical, literary, ekphrastic or all three?

All three and more. Over my life, I have sketched, painted, taken photographs, acted, danced, and always written. My twisted childhood and genetic legacy inspired the first half of my recent poetry collection about a girl who came to urban, working-poor Toronto, via small-town Newfoundland and was raised by creative, artistic parents with mental-health and substance-abuse demons.

My inner-city school designated me as gifted, so I enjoyed creative enrichment programs and read incessantly; the classics, mythology, archaeology and astronomy fascinated me as a kid. I reference symbols and imagery from these throughout my work.

Programs in art, sculpting, pottery, music, movement, writing and track-and-field helped me escape my abusive home. At age 10, I'd flee the chaos, hop the subway and hit the museum or art gallery to hang until closing time, drawing and taking notes.

I left home at 16 to save my sanity and went to university on a scholarship aiming for a fine arts honour's degree. By 17, my first mental breakdown forced me to drop out.

A few years later, when stable, I studied acting, movement and dance while freelance writing and working as a remedial tutor. Eventually I became a journalist for the city's daily newspaper. There I wrote about homeless people, pimps, sex workers, and how we mistreat people with mental illness and the frail elderly. All of these were inspirations.

There is one important thing I owe to my parents. My first language was their Newfinese, a patois of Irish, Gaelic and Cornish that still echoes throughout my poetry.

With regards to this issue, how does your poetry link to the themes of courage, power and evil/temptation?

The tale of Li Ji's sacrifice and plan to vanquish the power-mad serpent speaks to me on many levels. I am in awe of her choice to be a warrior, to throw off the cultural constraints imposed on her sexuality as the "sacrificial virgin," to defeat evil. Courage and self-sacrifice were the way she stayed true to herself and those she loved. When she sees the bones of the nine sacrificed maidens and wonders if they should have fought, I'm haunted. My childhood was brutal and sexist, and I am a survivor of physical, emotional and sexual assault. When I was nine, in a drunken blackout, my father tried to strangle me. I spit in his eye and told him to murder me because at least then he'd no longer torment my family. (That shook him back to reality.) It was an easy sacrifice at the time as I could endure no more abuse. Still, the abuse continued until he sobered up long after I left home.

When I was kidnapped and gang raped, I was a mother who chose to succumb to the evil so I might escape to live for one who needed me. I still wonder should I have fought? Was my sacrifice worth it? Did its impact damage my child? Li Ji also wondered.

Living with PTSD means daily inner battles, courage and honesty, to fight the temptation to give in and numb myself. It's much easier to lie to yourself rather than confront the evil part of you still believe is within to love yourself.

I've seen and experienced much evil in my personal life and, as a journalist. Though I try to see complexity behind injustice, entitlement and privilege, I see greed and fear as the root causes. I believe, however, we all must choose to believe in humanity's goodness because only that will fuel our courage and ensure our survival.

How would you describe your writing process?

I have PTSD and a type of OCD where music is always playing in the back of my head, looping lyrics or notes through my thoughts, an oft-annoying, intrusive soundtrack to my life. Creative expression is my distraction and escape.

When I write I am sucked in and so hyper-focused, I hear nothing. The roof could fall in, my son says, and I'd still be writing. My mind never shuts up so I'm always jotting snippets in notebooks as poems bubble up. Some poems write themselves. Others struggle for years to fruition. What's hardest for me is to narrow my focus to catch the poem "snippets" so they can land and grow.

You recently published a poetry collection titled 'PTSD: Poems to Slay Demons', how would you describe this collection to anyone yet to read it?

The book, PTSD Poems to Slay Demons, reflects my journey to overcome, heal from and live with trauma. It also reflects humanity's struggle in an increasingly traumatic world. I think the book embodies survival and hope and believe we can all survive to thrive.

What was your favourite poem from this collection to write and why?

That's unfair to ask, like asking a parent their favourite child. I love and hate them all. If I had to pick today, I'd say Fly Bye-Bye, Mean Girls. That started when I kept hearing the rhythm of girls skipping Double-Dutch. My parents often dumped me outdoors with my big sister for hours. She was a great skipper. I was four years younger and terrible so I got picked on. That memory of the skipping rope sound created the poem.

If you could give advice to your past or younger self, what would it be?

Everything's ephemeral eventually, nothing lasts forever and time heals. Don't be so hard on yourself. You're not crazy, just damaged by the social, genetic and economic constructs shaping your life. Ugly ducklings can grow up to be swans, as long as they don't buy into the hyped-up, bullshit benefits promised to members of Swan kingdom.

What are your writing/publishing goals for the immediate future?

The future? Writing the first book has slain many of my demons and changed me, but not the reason I must write. More and more, I believe privilege must be destroyed. Those subjugated by it must fight collectively to survive. I want to write and make people think about that. I'd love it if a traditional publisher took an interest, but I think I would be hard to market or brand.

THEM'S FIGHTIN' WORDS

ROBIN L. HARVEY

Tell me why, my tin star, lover guy
we awake to clear and blessed dawns
skin-to-skin with the safety on
and you kiss me, hard.

As we tumble bullet-free through fevered musk
your breath burns our blistering bullshit crisp
and the milkweed wisps of last night's railings
are forgotten
dust in the wind.

Until my touch sparks a revenant
and once again I'm facing down
tombstone eyes deep as the grave
gunning for me to start another round.

We're back in the loop
high noon at the "we're-not-OK Corral"
with Annie Oakley and Wild Bill
locked and loaded for another go-round.

Enough. So take your cheap shots, your pot-shots,
your please-take-it-back shots.
Paint a bull's-eye on my heart
fire off them fightin' words
hit the mark and break me apart.

Dress me up in her finery
swing me from that hanging tree
you've strung up in her memory.
Maybe, cowboy, I'll roll like a tumbleweed
happy to dance on your grave.

But before you fire another round
check your aim and line up your sights, gunslinger.

I've got a Bowie knife
and a Colt 45 with her name etched on every bullet.
I'll cut her down to size,
face down all six-foot-four of you
bury that woman in your churlish blues
and see her six feet under.

Then dead or alive all you'll see is me.
I will be the wanted one
with my face, my name
posted in black and white
on our bedroom wall.



rites

LAURA LEWIS-WATERS

They call me *girl-eating serpent*
put me on a mountain-high pedestal
so they can perform their rituals
in the shadows of the Yung
but I have my own ritual magic
and I tap tap tap my sword
against my teeth, draw the
serpent with my tongue
against my cheek, round
and round and if I do it just right
maybe I too will be able
to have children of my own.

THE SUN AND THE SKY

SHREYASI PODDAR

Part I: Setting Fire to the Sky

She would miss him,
But her time here was over,
She was needed somewhere else;

She stretched out her hand,
Even as duty pulled her farther and farther away,
Till her long fingers were all he could see;

She would be back soon, she promised,
The fiery tip of her nails slowly fading away,
Leaving his face to be swallowed by darkness;

She came back the same way she had left,
Hand reaching ahead,
His blues disappearing in light of her golden glow;

Her radiant, incandescent beauty,
Brought life back to him,
Until the continuous cycle threw its shadow once again.

She would miss him,
But her time here was over,
She was needed somewhere else;

She stretched out her hand,
Even as duty pulled her further and further away,
Till her fingers were all he could see;

She opened her lips,
The promise sitting ready on her tongue,
As she tried to choke back a sob;

She watched him helplessly,
Her hand still outstretched,
There was nothing she could do;

She tried resisting the pull,
Fingers reaching out,
But there was nothing she could do.

There was nothing she could do,
He watched as she struggled,
She watched him as he watched her;

The fiery tips of her nails faded,
His face was swallowed by the darkness,
All quicker than usual;

As his face hid behind deepening black despair,
Her glow was replaced by his shining tears,
As the epiphany of what he had done struck him;

Her hand had been outstretched,
His had been by his side,
But she returned, duty forced her to;

She returned, as a mighty ball of fire,
His tears still shined, but they were outshone,
She was the sun and he, the sky, was on fire.

THE SUN AND THE SKY

SHREYASI PODDAR

Part II: Fires Setting

She was the sun,
And he, the sky, was on fire,
And that's where this story should end;

But she was fading,
Her hues separating,
Melting into the waters beneath;

She did this often,
But that night, it was different,
That night, there was no promise to keep;

Her fire faded,
And his darkness deepened,
And soon there was nothing to see;

He thought she'd return,
Or maybe, he hoped that she would,
Or maybe, he felt it was her duty;

She'd thought that once too,
But now that she knew,
She realised duty was but an illusion;

The cycle was a trap,
'Twas a never-ending loop,
One she had put herself through;

And every time, she'd fallen,
And every morning, she'd risen,
Only to fall prey to the illusion again;

But after nights and nights of falling,
She realised she could finally set.

GENESIS AND THE MURDER OF CROWS

KAREN E. FRASER

She waits for the Loon's call to unfold
incandescent and emerge free, rebuilds
ruins with a kiss in the blink of ceasefire's eye

while he sleepwalks though the climate of his
own making - without conscience or reverence.

As a sign of hope, the crescent moon rises

to complete her, forges courage and patience
from a pulse of stars, fills her oracle eyes with silver,
chooses liquid nitrogen for her diamond tongue and

pours the entire future into the bowl of her belly.
She swallows creation, meets birth and death with ease
and bleeds rivers in luscious defiance, her body

forever anchored to the rhythm of revival.
He insists he is woke but his eyes are still sewn closed,
the doors of his heart are bolted by fear.

He has chosen power and so the torment of a Universe
without end consumes him. She trades every last feather
willingly to become a beacon; gives evidence at the trial

of inhumanity and maintains that true beauty will only exist
without ownership as the superb wren, having eaten
the emperor butterfly, proves her case for cause and its effect.

DEMONOLOGY

CATHERINE BALAQ

I

He came into nothing and made himself known, ululated into the darkness, pissed into the void, took his manhood out and made quick work with his hands. Sprung life in an untamed seep and foam. Unformed, he waited for his echo and when it came it consumed him like the mouth of a serpent, the jaws of a lion, the roar of the tide, an uncrackable shell, yolk on the outside and inside nothing but emptiness. Everything and nothing at all. Dying will be the easy part. It is just the living that we need to work through. That is the dirty truth of things. The seeds below the soil.

II

Come
into the wetness of your own being.
Behind the breast bone.
There you will find it.
Undo the buttons, don't fumble.
Place your hand across your chaos.
Cross your ribs with shadow.
Between lungs and diaphragm, moist inner space.

Your fingers dry as guilt.
Your innards wet with grief.

Place your hands on your mayhem.
It's all the love you ever felt but are no longer able to give.
Unspent, it gathers in the corners of your eyes,

lumps in your throat.

And in the damp hollow of your chest.
Come.

III

The death monster has three heads, vulture, eagle, and crow. He stands guarding the gates, beaks clacking, claws riffing. Stops the living from entering and the dead from leaving. His back is a writhing mat of feathers and worms, snake-like maggots that stink of meat. I lull him to sleep with a blackbird's song. I caught it last week, for the occasion. Just open my purse and it flies out. He is sleeping now, look. All six eyes closed and his feathered body slumps over a tree stump.

Through the gates and down long ways ever onwards into myself. I am a labyrinth. Each time I open, I wonder if I am going the wrong way. The voices of women screaming keeps me heading on. Can you hear them too? If you look out the window and be still, you might just make out the cries, and then you realise it is coming from within you.

I find three versions of myself, tied captive with coils of snake ropes, reaching out their hands. I cannot save them all. The ground is shaking. I am not strong enough to hold on, one of me falls into nothing. Did you too ever lose something, you never knew you were looking for?

Walking back up to the overlands, working together, me, myself and I, we subdue the bird, tie his beaks together with worm tails. Clack, clack. Up through the rock and into the light, travelling for three days. The crow spews up through his tied beak. An acrid foam that falls on the woodland floor. In its place comfrey grows. This is how the garden started.

*roots of field bindweed / peck / borage / lambsquarter / peck /
pigweed / peck / buckthorn / crabgrass / quackgrass / purslane*

The other mouthed beaks wail and screech. The beast is dying. I spill blood on the ground, cut each head clean off. Crow's head will not break. He will not die, flies free. A black feather falls loose from the sky and lands at my feet. I keep it as a souvenir. I eat the vulture and the eagle head. The taste of my mistakes oddly familiar, like chicken.

I cut a foot loose

from the body that remains,

wear it round my neck.

*peck / nutsedge / creeping charlie / cracked skull / cracked shell / peck /
cockle picked / brain curdle / lunch snack / snowdrop / crow attack*

520 POINTS
AMOUR DE MA VUE



BISEXUAL LOVE TRIANGLE
(WITH SNAKE AND FROG)

LENA S.

That woman I hate, that snake, that stickpin
was sitting in my seat the way *I* do
where I was supposed to wait and watch for you.

She made me a stranger in my own skin,
suddenly also a snake, itching to shed.
Impostor. Pretender. Unmade bed.

Magic became her, magician was she,
texting you swiftly, fingers flickering
like snakes, like handling a trick deck

And all the hearts spilled out onto my feet,
chased by the clubs, the harsher, thicker thing —
none of them being the card that I had picked yet.

The diamonds in her hands gently tipped,
the ones on her fingers softly sparkled,
All of them still aimed at my slittable throat —

I was speechless save for shameful croaks,
A frog, a toad; a desperate, ugly bloke,
unsexed by this usurpment, this false hope.

I hid my neck, my collarbones, I turned
my head in soft submission. All for you.
In spite of her. Because of her, too.

My surrender was both sought and earned:
I served you my two ears, vulnerable holes,
and every burnished freckle, every mole.

I got here already used up, burned,
was then displaced by that snake and her cards
who stole my front-row seat, kicked me off guard.

I watch her, smouldering, at night, instead
through gaps between these hard cold stainless bars.

LAMBS

EMILY PERKOVICH

in third grade i learned that tiffany's mom and dad screamed like naked animals, but it didn't mean anything to me. all the parents were upset and said that tiffany was going to grow up to be a slut (*i mean come on, her name is tiffffaneeee, what were her parents thinking? and did you know she is friends with that jenna girl in fifth grade? but no, that's her brother's girlfriend, are you sure they are friends? maybe she didn't know about the sex, maybe her brother told her, maybe there is hope after all, but did you see how short her skirt is? and, her name is tiffany. i mean, really. anyway, isn't this the same girl that told the kids that she saw her santa presents in the closet before christmas? remember that mess? all i know is that they need to kick her off the cheerleading squad, those girls don't need that kind of reputation, imagine if the other schools knew that tiff taught the girls about fucking? don't call it fucking, that's not very christian*), so i asked my cousin about the naked animal screaming, and she drew me a picture of two people in a bed, with blankets carefully strewn over everything but the woman's breasts. i guessed this meant that tits were considered public even though naked screaming like animals was supposed to be private until you were a slut. after tiffany quit cheerleading, most girls wouldn't talk to her, so she hung out with a lot of guys, and "slut" still didn't really mean anything to me except for screaming like naked animals, which also didn't really mean anything to me. by the time animal screaming started, i had forgotten about the warning, and we were all sluts, anyway.

we probably would have dropped it, if we weren't required to pick up our rosaries and repent

hail mary, keep me clean. our father, why are girls sluts, when men watch for what lies behind our teeth?

when i was ten i was afraid to eat ice cream cones because something told me it would be too unholy to watch a young mouth suck at the tip, to tongue at the softness

breathing in the feminine tense makes this your responsibility, makes the compromise motherhood or sluthood, makes the threat the only option, whispers keep your mouth holy, keep your hands clean

forgive me, for i have sinned, my last confession was dripping with sticky sarcasm, and honestly i think it's pooling from between my legs into the baptismal fount, but that's only me trying to love my neighbor

OLD SOUL ISN'T A COMPLIMENT

SARAH BELLUM MENTAL

He says I'm an old soul as his hand crawls up my thigh
too large to be attached to a twelve year old girl
I'm a tree trunk, he is another tree looking to parasitize

me until I'm nothing but a stump of a being
that they stamped out who I was. Old soul, little one with
body presenting as a teenager when she is nothing but

this tree has known many who fell her
who looked to take from her roots and drink her
stored water as a thirst that could never be extinguished.

Old soul, he says my eyes are so pretty and I want to
reply that it is the Spanish moss who swears he is
not a parasitic being but the epiphyte looks to use me

as a support system that I told it not to use me
like it does but no one listens to what my limbs say.
He says my eyes say a world and I want to reply

that they cut emerald into my bark the first time
branches were taken as a thing it
wanted more than I did but I still miss

the missing pieces of myself that I can't
find a way to make a log home out of
rotted roots that can't seem to hold a roof

over my head if I begged it to.
Old soul is repeated like a compliment but
I am a sapling body and you cut into my trunk

like it has treasures inside the center
try to find my rings and add your years
to my youth that you gave without

a second thought of how each cut
is rot that I can't remove from me
old soul he repeats and I remember when

I was free and I didn't know if it
was just a dream
I couldn't wake from.

WE CAN'T PIECE THE PLASTIC DOLL
BACK TOGETHER AGAIN
SARAH BELLUM MENTAL

I've never told anyone about this until you
right now, this moment, this experience

I had a serpent try to take everything
from me, his slither his stance

his hands, my body
his heart an eroded gas tank

with no fuel in it. But he was beautiful
in his kindness to me

I turn him to it
to save me from it.

The only way
you listen is if I use metaphors

to make the serpent
inhuman

make it a cold being
make it into someone

other than my family.
I love him in a way

which seemed impossible
for so young, but you explain

their hands
on your fascia

remembering the
lack of curves

he came to me after
the happening

and we went downstairs
to the basement.

I am six
he is older

I am child
now not

now adult
now struggle

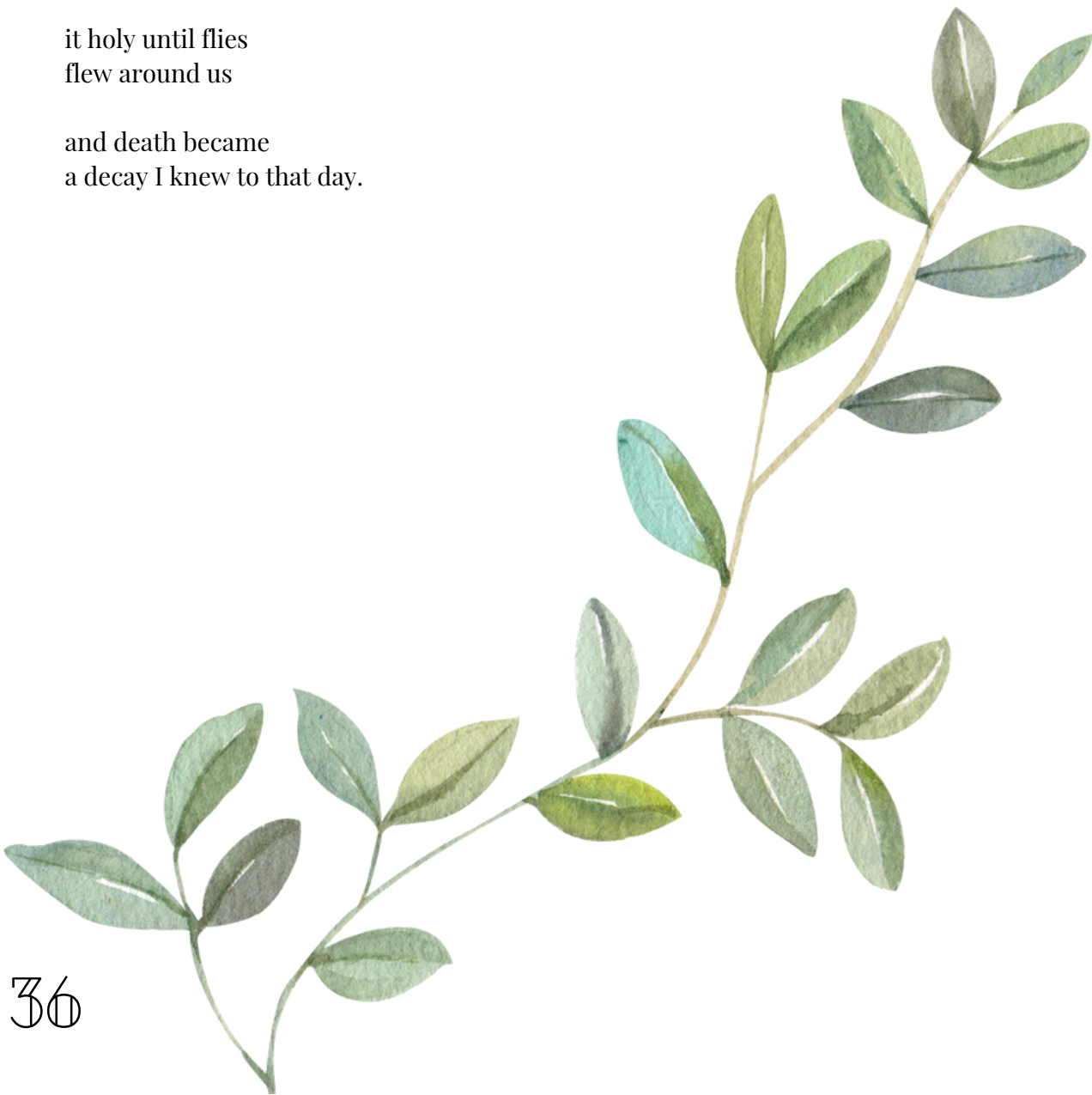
now destroyed
now so broken

we can't piece
this doll back together.

It opened its fly
asked me to hold

it holy until flies
flew around us

and death became
a decay I knew to that day.



THE NIGHT DELILAH DIED

MOLLY FUREY

The night Delilah died I was kissing a ghost.
Her red screams sounded like sports cars
in the back streets of night
And my soul was
a flittering hand
waiting for a human to haunt.

Hearts crunched and bled
into Easters and Valentines and then
ran off down the sink.

The morning after Delilah died
she left me her men under the bed.
Neatly folded with red socks
and stained sheets.
She left me baby names like Ginny
and ghosts in mini skirts for summer.
Not knowing
I could not house more.

Three eggshells under a tongue
and I get the bleeding chick
A bank note under the boot
An empty body

And a bathtub with no loving.

When my red Delilah died
The Baby knew.
She wouldn't eat
And we all stayed in the swimming pool until the submarines
picked us away.

The day after my Delilah died, she watched me
kissing a ghost.
Not knowing her red lips had already
faded away.

THRIFTING
LISA PERKINS

(Inspired by 'A Ghost in the Throat' by Doireann Ní Ghríofa)

*She, the most punk
that pink can be, holds
riots inside her cells
until the swell
breaks to
wash
her
tame*

This is a female shop / Satin, nets, ruptured veils /
We sweep the moulting armour / Chapters of
the hourglass breathe on every shelf /
Outfitters of a haunting / I stretch the
hunt across my skin / Into
this coil of thoughts /
Swamped
within a
sale
Like a hat
tries on a snake, the
side-winding bastards slip away /
This is a female shop / Stocked with the
industry of dreaming / We gorge on phantom
orchard days / The empty peels of meat / With an
under-skirted plum stone swinging in the throat / Shower
me in power blouses, button-downs undone in 60's 'Cisco /
This is how it goes / A factory of folklore, for the taking / These
are female hands / Ballads bloat the joints / Fingers charming ley lines
'I'm not twisting to arouse you' ... It's just the stirring dust life of the work

I fold relics
of a dream
in a pre -
loved bed
I changed
/ This is a
female shop
in the making

HIJAB

NABILA ABID

I have always been a symbol of safety and choice unlike the headlines making a lot of noise,
I am draped around the faces which is a freedom of expression
The democracy I have been living in never questioned my existence before
Fauzia loves to use me without spreading any lies,
Reimagined resilience,
loving is our jihad.
I am known to be a hijab
Softening our hearts with a pinch of coexistence
I wish to be nothing but a medium of empowerment and the only choice,
I am found missing,
may we return back to our calling.
I am a peace of cloth
While I hope to return back to my mammoth.
My only prayer to Almighty is to spread peace
I belong to you, your sister and whoever wishes to drape me.
I symbolise protection as opposed to destruction
Just like the skin on one's body
I am the jewel for many.
Those who wish to unveil me, do not believe in me.
Radhas wrap me as Odhni, Khadijas wrap me as a veil
If you don't know then please don't judge me.
I am the symbol of safety
Solemnly learning to teach thee
The poison of hate and propaganda
will neither benefit you nor me.
The seed of love and tolerance will together free us.

FAERIE GLEN (CRÓGA)

JESSICA BERRY

Would you like to know what it really means to be away with the faeries?
Southern entrance of the mountains, you will unlock their intoxicating Glen -

At one a.m.

At once, you run there!
Sniff out flutes,
fiddles, bagpipes, trumpets, lutes,
a psaltery, gemshorn, the Celtic harp and castanets
Wakeup call
and fall of scales on the brass serpent
(And all otherworldly music)

You will see their moss-covered cottage, rap their flaxen door
The garden festooned with wildness like a Lion's untamed roar

Where the Kilbroney River leads they dance on nimble feet
Acrobatic idlers, sewing shadows to your bedsheet

One day, what you've witnessed will whisk into boyish dreams
Business hearts are leather-bound from teeming at the seams

Then come away again; investigate reflections
Admire a child who once had every wee folk as companion

You may not find those faeries havocking the bark and leaves
But might you discover the kind of courage it takes to *want* belief?

DRAGONS [SERIES]

IRINA NOVIKOVA



HOPE IN NADIR

SHREYASI PODDAR

She walked the streets with a hungry child,
Begging for some money she could borrow,
'Cause she hadn't lost her hope yet like she'd lost her pride,
And she'd still got her dreams of tomorrow;

Oh her sweet little smile and her bundled-up child,
Her eyes once so bright, now drowning in sorrow,
Snowflakes settling on frostbitten skin,
But she's still got her dreams of tomorrow;

Toes poking out through her worn out shoes,
Her shoulders held high in an act of bravado,
But her child is crying 'cause it's had nothing to eat,
And she tells it all about her dreams of tomorrow;

She continues walking though it's a death march now,
Her sandals against hard cobblestone, making a rapid staccato,
'Cause after scorching days and nights when the cold sank within,
She can still remember her dreams of tomorrow.

IMPEDIMENTS

CAITLIN KENDALL

Some people know what it's like
To argue behind closed doors
So the children won't hear
To wish he would hit you
Just once
Because that would be clear
To live with his voice in your ear
Who would want you
With your pimply tits?!
Even now, even though it's been years
To tiptoe around when he's home
To quiet the children
And tidy the mess
To find excuses to be
At work
At the gym
Out with friends
So you don't have to go home
To dread the ringtone of your mobile phone
Because you know it's him
Where are you?
Who are you with?
When are you coming home?
Answer me!
To be fine for your friends
(Yes, we're fine)
For your family
(Yes, everything's great)
To clear away his empties
Then find more under the bed
To have knots in your tummy
Not butterflies
When he makes you sit in his lap
To feel trapped
To feel scared
To feel unsafe
And some people don't.

THINGS THEY DON'T TRAIN ARMY WIVES FOR

CAITLIN KENDALL

How to comfort you
When you've been betrayed
15 and straight out of school
They promised to show you the world
And they did
Well the war zones anyway
3 tours of Afghanistan by the age of 21

How to calm the burn
Of that small hot pink scar
Where the bullet punctured your lung
You were dead for 3 minutes

Raised to know right from wrong
A born protector
You believed you were helping
Those women
Those children
How do I help you
To save them now?

How to shoulder the weight
Of your friends
Those things they had to do
Those things they saw
How to give that meaning now
All those friends you lost
How do I make sense of that for you now?

How to stop the nightmares
How to make you feel safe
That you don't need an escape plan
To kill everyone in the room
Whatever room you're in

How to dry the tears
That you hide from me.

I am the one who has to pick up the pieces
How to pick up the pieces

TO SHOOT A MESSENGER

MORGAN HAYES

There is a camera I carry with me, the snap of its shutter makes a sound worth flinching from. The viewfinder, an inverted telescope, places everything at a distance. Through its gaze the sky is small enough to hold. You taught me how to frame the scene, to leave out the ugly parts. To aim true. Daughters learn early how to bite their tongues. Cut their teeth on the business. I once tried to show you in pictures how the sinew frays between us. To you, apparently, the polaroids were blacked out. Unseen. When you lie you touch your neck, as if remembering a scar. Maybe you should hold the camera. In your photographs I would wear a dress the color of canaries. I would look young and brazen and stupid. I would be smiling the way I never do for you. The last time I asked you to listen, you told me I'm missing the point. Which point? The tip of the arrow, buried in my chest? You used to teach me honesty was a virtue.

Steady your feet
Use the whole of your strength
To draw back the bowstring
Fletching against your cheek
Let the arrow fly
Homebound



JIMMY IN THE ATTIC

MORGAN HAYES

I was nine when my dog disappeared into the walls of our house.
Crawl spaces like wounds in a body,
 hidden passages where rats whisper.
He'd come in after me, always by my side,
 I don't remember what I had been looking for.

A small mutt, my sentinel, long faced with placid eyes,
 the only dog who hadn't barked at the shelter.
Yet, he killed vermin as skillfully as any barn-cat.
I used to hold him out in front of me when I was scared,
 my foil, he had courage enough for the both of us.

There and then gone,
 swallowed up by plywood and insulation the color of gums.
Voice rising, tight in my throat, I beckoned him back to me,
 but the house sat silent, walls unyielding.
I rattled a bag of treats with the same vigor he once used to snap a dormouse's neck.

The minutes grew long amongst dusty suitcases,
 my thin arms pressed to my heaving chest.
The flashlight cast a weak glow against hungry shadows.
Through sobs I heard a gentle whine, mistaken at first as my own.
Panic brought me groping blind through cobwebs and viscera.

Spun fiberglass acquiesced my search, a tail wagging at my touch.
Wedged between the bones of the house,
 I needed both hands to pull him free.
Revived and triumphant, his palomino head held high,
 a limp rat dangling in his jaws.

DOUBLE DOWN DIGITS
SARAH BELLUM MENTAL

I down double-digit pills
think of how many I can take at once before

my body revolts to the prescriptions
I keep prescribing myself too.

Sometimes when I sleep, I repeat
you're okay. You're okay. Go to sleep

go the fuck to sleep but my skin
doesn't listen to the accusations of how

if we just slept, anxiety wouldn't
be making love to us under the sheets.

I don't know who to turn to when my
mouth turns to cotton, and I become

a cotton-mouthed reptile
looking to find anything that will

keep her warm without killing her.
I stare at the pills for a star minute

where I wonder if this
is too much, but my body

keeps breaking down
these chemicals but still

two Melatonin
two Benadryl

two tylenol
three ibuprofen

one muscle relaxant
because the tension is causing

muscles to cramp, asking
for it to stop

it doesn't end. We're just
beginnings of oval-shaped things.

I take three pills in the morning
birth control

allergy pill
antidepressant

stretch marks look like
cracks in the desert, too thirsty

not to drink whatever
you offer it even if it kills you.



SURVIVAL OF SORTS

RICHARD LEDUE

Used to daydream about being brave,
standing up to past bullies,
who probably went into real estate
or middle management, or found themselves
years later with some sort of epiphany
that had nothing to do with me,
but I discovered I prefer Sunday mornings
sipping coffee, talking to myself
about how long to boil eggs,
and watching reruns,
where the cowardly and courageous thoughts
silenced by laugh tracks,
leaving me the sort of survival
not funny enough to ever be a sitcom,
but just sad enough to keep tears
(decades old now) in their place.

SPIRIT

ELLEN CLAYTON

an erasure from pp. 141 - 143 of Emmeline Pankhurst's 'Suffragette: My Own Story'

heroic

women

linked arms and stood

the ir
ground

the y

refused

simply

Co n

to

f orm

SPIRIT

ELLEN CLAYTON

an erasure of pp. 266 - 267 of Emmeline Pankhurst's 'Suffragette: My Own Story'

the

spirit
of

women

is

power

THIS IS A POEM I SHOULD HAVE
WRITTEN IN 2017

ELISA FAGGIOLI

One day I will have my revenge and it will sound like the thunderstorm that struck the oak tree in the garden three nights ago, like the persistent drop on the bathroom tile and the shock wave hitting the window. I will become the viper and hiss at your hand, because with you it is not possible to be both human and alive, so I will be the nightmare. In my scream you will see the skeletons I keep behind my forked tongue, they will stare at you with the same eyes — my eyes, with pupils emptied by the fire, ashes-black and mouth-eaters, so that you will finally stay silent — buzzing in my ears for years like an old broken television. You will satiate my sweet tooth for traitors, for cage-builders, for prisoners: I will devour away your words, I will break free. I will finally rest.



DRAGONS [SERIES]

IRINA NOVIKOVA



THE NEXT GENERATION
FIONA DIGNAN





MEET THE CONTRIBUTORS

Amour de ma vue (she/her) is a French girl of 27 years old and a former student in art history who loves to draw, make jewelry, assemble papers and accumulate useless objects! To create her hand cut collages, she uses all sorts of papers she can find (magazines, scores, textbooks, newspapers...). She never prints anything; she always works in a "recycling" spirit with all the papers she gathers. I love to make anachronic compositions and harmonizing colours and try to denounce, through her collages, sexism, capitalism, cliché and causes that matter to her. She also has a passion for puns and poetry, which she uses in her collages' titles. You can follow her on Instagram @amour_de_ma_vue.

Anni Rannisto (she/her) is a 33y old poet from Finland. Her debut collection of poetry 'Moonbeam Sentinels & Sunbeam Forgettance' was published in February 2022. Some of her work has also been published in a journal called Scissortail Quarterly. You can find her on Instagram under the handle @reveries.of.atlantis

Caitlan Docherty (she/her) lives in Illinois. She has a prairie view from her 4th floor apartment. More of her work can be found in VAINÉ Magazine, blood moon POETRY, Sunday Mornings at the River, Beyond the Veil Press, Sledgehammer Lit, and Calliope's Eyelash. Please visit her on Instagram @cmnpoeetry.

Caitlin Kendall has an MA in Creative Writing from Newcastle University and was shortlisted for the Creative Futures Literary Award, the E.H.P Barnard Spring Poetry Prize 2021, and the Monofiction 'Sanity' competition. She is currently working on her debut novel for Young Adults and a collection of poetry. Her work has appeared at Fragmented Voices, Alchemy Spoon, Northern Writers Studios, The Black Cat Poetry Press, Bloody Hell Zine and Writerz N Scribez. She lives in Northumberland with her husband, children, and a menagerie of beasts.

Catherine Balaq is a neurodiverse/disabled writer, art educator and body psychotherapist. Her poetry play Fuck the Moon was commissioned by Paper Nations and short-listed for the Bristol Old Vic Open Sessions 2019. She was short-listed for the Bridport Poetry Prize, 2021 and a finalist of the Lyra Festival 2021.

Elisa Faggioli is a 23-year-old Italian poetess who has been writing both in her mother tongue and in English for a couple years now. While poetry is her main passion and creative outlet, she is also pursuing a Masters' Degree in Chemical Engineering. She escapes from numbers with writing, basically. You will find more of her work on Instagram @cappuccinocolacao (or @elisascrive if you want to explore some Italian-only poetry).

Ellen Clayton (she/her) is a poet from Suffolk, England, where she lives with her husband and three young children. Her poetry has been published in various online and print publications, including Capsule Stories, Nightingale & Sparrow and Anti-Heroin Chic. Her debut chapbook, Home Baked, was published in April 2022 by Bent Key Publishing. More of her work can be found on Instagram @ellen_writes_poems.

Emily Perkovich is from the Chicago-land area and the Editor in Chief of Querencia Press. Her work strives to erase the stigma surrounding trauma victims and their responses. Her piece This is Performance-Art was a finalist for the 50th New Millennium Writings Award and she is a 2021 Best of the Net nominee. She is previously published with Cathexis Northwest, Coffin Bell Journal, and Awakened Voices among others. She is the author of the poetry collection Godshots Wanted: Apply Within and the novella Swallow. You can find more of her work on IG @undermeyou.

MEET THE CONTRIBUTORS

Fiona Dignan is a stay-at-home mum of four children and took up writing during lockdown to escape the chaos of homeschool. Prior to having children, she worked as a Human Resources manager and has a BA in Social Anthropology and Religion and a MA in Human Resource Management. She has been published in Aayo magazine, The Sacred Feminine Journal and is to be published in the next issues of Mslexia and Querenicia Press LLC. She has recently had two poems shortlisted for the E.H.P Barnard Poetry Prize and is delighted to have her first poem and photo published in this edition of Free Verse Revolution. Her daughter Kate is also super proud to see herself as a Little Li Ji in training! She can be found on Instagram: @fidignanpoems.

Irina Novikova is an artist, graphic artist, and illustrator. She graduated from the State Academy of Slavic Cultures with a degree in art, and also has a bachelor's degree in design.

The first personal exhibition "My soul is like a wild hawk" (2002) was held in the museum of Maxim Bagdanovich. In her works, she raises themes of ecology; in 2005 she devoted a series of works to the Chernobyl disaster, drawing upon anti-war topics. The first big series she drew was The Red Book, dedicated to rare and endangered species of animals and birds. Writes fairy tales and poems, illustrates short stories. She draws various fantastic creatures: unicorns, animals with human faces, she especially likes the image of a man - a bird - Siren. In 2020, she took part in Poznań Art Week. You can follow her on Instagram @irinanov4155 and @irina1187novikova.

Jessica Berry (she/her) grew up beside the seaside of Bangor, County Down, Northern Ireland. She is an English teacher at the Belfast Model School for Girls. In 2021, Jessica was placed in Bangor's annual poetry contest hosted by the Aspects Literary Festival. Her work has also been included in publications such as Drawn to the Light and A New Ulster. She is working on her first poetry collection; inspired by Irish myths and fables. You can follow her on Instagram @jessicaruth.poetry.

Karen E. Fraser is a Melbourne-based, published writer and poet. With degrees in Professional and Creative Writing, and Anthropology, she marries a love of quiet observation and collecting with necessary storytelling. Karen has held various roles as writer and editor (including Verandah 25 Literary Journal). Her work embraces the natural world, social justice, and connection illuminated through the lenses of liberation, equality, dignity and belonging. You can follow her on Instagram @be_nourished.

Laura Lewis-Waters is a mum, teacher and research student from the Midlands. After living abroad for a while, she is now finally settled teaching English at secondary school and researching verbatim and map poetry for a PhD. Her debut book Bathroom Prisoners was recently released by Bent Key Publishing. Her poetry has been published in The Mechanics Institute Review, Public Sector Poetry Journal and Streetcake Magazine. You can follow her on Instagram: @lauralewis_waters.

Lena S. has been writing creatively since she learned to make letters in kindergarten. This is her first time being published. It has taken many rejection letters and a lot of drafts in the proverbial wastebasket to get here, and she could not be more grateful for your eyes on her poem. As a lifelong Midwesterner, she is creatively nourished by the temperate zone's sacred ritual of the changing of the seasons, and as a Minneapolis transplant and true-blue folkie she derives significant inspiration from the city's rich live music scene. Her favorite thing to write about is people: some she meets, and some she invents. If you'd like to read more of her work, you'll have to wait, as she isn't ready to share it yet -- but she'll get there!

MEET THE CONTRIBUTORS

Lisa Perkins (she/her) is a published poet and mother to three little muses from Dublin, Ireland. Her work has been featured in various print and digital zines and anthologies. Poetry is her favourite place to disappear and be found in, as both a release and hold on our shared stories. Her work hangs out on Instagram dressed in wordplay and lyrical narrative, @lisaperks.

Morgan Hayes is a tea enthusiast and emerging writer based in the heart of California's Bay Area. While she predominantly writes prose for herself and her loved ones, she can be found learning the art of poetry on Instagram at @morganlehay. She procrastinates writing by attending community college, playing D&D, and walking her rescue dog.

Molly Furey is 19 from a small town near Manchester in the UK. She started her writing journey back in 2018, using poetry as a creative outlet throughout highschool and onwards. She has previously featured in issues from Free Verse Revolution and hopes to continue creating new work. You can find all of her pieces on Instagram @fureysfreeversee.

Nabila Abid is from Jaipur, India. She is in her final year of graduation pursuing Political Honours. An avid reader and a good listener, in her pastime she can be found reading and writing poetry which will have a social issue attached to it as well as taking care of her plants. You can follow her on Instagram @expresswithher.

Richard LeDue (he/him) currently lives in Norway House, Manitoba with his wife and son. He is a Best of the Net nominee, and has been published in various places throughout 2021. His first chapbook was released in 2020, and a second chapbook in 2021. As well, his third chapbook, "The Kind of Noise Worth Writing Down," was released in October 2021 from Kelsay Books.

Robin L Harvey finished her post-degree graduate certificate in creative writing at Toronto's Humber School for Writers in 2021. She lives in Toronto near a beautiful, large park with her son, who has graduated from OCADU and is a painter. Besides her son, she loves anything from Star Trek, weird vintage clothes and her rowing machine.

Sangeetha writes on her blog mindfills.wordpress.com. She's at the moment, fascinated by how wandering words tessellate to encase moments...moments she likes to revisit.

Sarah Bellum Mental is a Write About Now virtual poet and originally from Chicago, Illinois. Now living in Houston, she continues being a part of spoken word poetry. She performs poetry live to try to give a home for those who don't have a voice. Her first and second books are taking pre-orders now: <https://sarahbellummental.com/pre-order-swallow-my-sparrow/> She is a 2021 WOWPS and Southern Fried Poetry Indie slam contender.

MEET THE CONTRIBUTORS

Shreyasi Poddar first discovered her love for creative writing when she was six years old. Her house was under renovation and having obtained permission from her mother to write on the walls before they would be repainted, she began pulling out her sketch pens and wrote poems on things she associated with whichever colour pen came into her hand. During lockdown, she tried writing fanfiction out of boredom, eventually moving on to original works and seriously got into the craft. Though her main passion is poetry, she enjoys writing short stories too and hopes to be able to move on to larger works one day. You can find her on Tumblr at @mortallynuttyqueen.

Vanessa Napolitano lives in Yorkshire with her husband and daughter and works with international students. She loves to write both about her own world, and through adopting and exploring different personas. You can find some of her work on her instagram page @nessanapswrites, and her most recent publications in the anthology 'Songs of Love & Strength', the exhibit Maternochronics, and in New Normal zine.

