





AN ANTHOLOGY OF ESOTERIC POESIS  
EDITED BY RUBY SARA

*Datura*

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# PREFACE

Ruby Sara

## *Xochitl Flower-songs*

*Anca zo zan nican tinechnahualan, Have you bewitched me,  
yectli ticchiuh ye motlatotzin. you have spoken lovely words.  
Iz im axcan tlahuanquetl, Here, now there is intoxication,  
mah the titlahuanquetl! inebriate yourself!  
Azo no netlacamachon tochan? Is there happiness in our house?*

## Aquiauhtzin of Ayapanco\*



THE LADY OF MOTH AND MOON unfurls her shy and deadly petals. These navigators of the midnight sea – occultists and poets and devotees seeking after that which seduces them – are familiar with the dream of intoxication that follows her scent. She is the woman in the song, the night-blooming narcotic, gorgeous and strange. She is the horned blossom, the guardian of the threshold, the keeper of madness.

The terrible mistress and the exquisite lover.

*Datura: An Anthology of Esoteric Poesis* is an exquisite, star-lined nest of these dreams – the poems and meditations of twenty-six unique voices from contemporary Pagan and occult communities.

The artists and thinkers represented in these pages cover a range of traditions and practices, as well as a wide variety of poetic style. Form poetry is well represented, from triadic rubaiyat and sestina to acrostic, as is lyric free verse and praise hymn. The imagery is rich and strange, which is only to be expected from a band of night wanderers, moonflowers and august lilies.

\* Leon-Portilla, Miguel. *Fifteen Poets of the Aztec World*.

Truly, these poems are a wealth. A wealth enriched by the addition of six essays exploring the history of esoteric poesis, the application of poetry to magical practice, the filidecht – sacred poets of the Celts, the transformational process of the act of poetic creation, the awe in meeting poetry out on the lonely road and in the face of one's god, and the roles of the poet in the greater community. These essays and poems together offer the reader a truly engaging, intriguing and mysterious glimpse into the inner workings and poetic depth of the contemporary occult literary artist.

It is the wish of this book to bring that dream vision to many people, riding on the haunting scent of the witch's blossom, that botanical bridge between old and new worlds and their deep magics, to the rich, magnificent flowering of literary tradition and the pursuit of the Great Work.

I am indebted to Peter Grey and Alkistis Dimech at Scarlet Imprint for their incredible support for this anthology. Thanks also to all the contributors to this project, for their talent and enthusiasm, and to my partner, Stephen Pettinga.

And, always, thanks to those capricious and terrible dæmons, those spirits and gods who inspire us, these difficult, gorgeous ones, these muses and genii – filling our blood with poetry and fire. We are awash in thanks and praise to you, o kin, o adversaries, o beloveds in the night, salting our tongues and blessing the work. Beauty! Illumination! Forever and ever.

It seems fitting to write these words on the cusp of Imbolc/Candlemas, the season of poetry and fire, when the Pagani lean their hearts toward Brigid, that goddess and patron saint of poetry, that fierce, red-haired, snowdrop woman.

May the words in this volume salt your heart; may they find a home in your blood; may they kindle a terrible fire within you, and in the depths of the night, may they bloom in your spirit like a narcotic flower, announcing unto you all those shattering and exquisite secrets that ferment and burn at the heart of the Work.

Ruby Sara  
Candlemas, 2010

*Mr. Bons screamed, "I see no one. I see nothing. I want to go back." Then he cried to the driver. "Save me! Let me stop in your chariot. I have honored you. I have quoted you. I have bound you in vellum. Take me back to my world."*

*The driver replied. "I am the means and not the end. I am the food and not the life. Stand by yourself, as that boy has stood. I cannot save you. For poetry is a spirit; and they that would worship it must worship in spirit and in truth."*

E.M. Forster,



# THE POETRY OF MAGIC

Notes towards a definition

Paul Newman

IN THE SAME WAY A NOVEL FINDS ITS ROOTS in the dirt and dust of life,  
alleys of commerce,  
litical intrigue,  
and exaltation,  
naturally inclining towards the mystical or wondrous.

So let us begin by stating poetry is closely related to magic and that both  
find a common dependency in the word 'image'  
purports to be a science of the imagination,  
past or future or willing them to generate shifts and changes in the course  
of human affairs,  
order to organise and stimulate the imagination. If we consider the myste-  
rious element in inspiration,  
to magic and occultism.  
like mediums to receive the word. In Classical Greece,  
spoke through them,  
A poem would begin with an invocation to the spirit to infiltrate the proc-  
ess of creation:

*Sing to me of the man, Muse, the man of twists and turns  
driven time and again off course, once he had plundered  
the hallowed heights of Troy.\**

In the Christian World,  
convey his intention through a priest or individual who had felt the word  
or gnosis move inside him. The bulk of Early English verse was religious in  
inspiration,  
Bible stories and festivals.  
natural sciences and the spectacular growth of European trade, influences  
flowed in from far and wide.  
vast corpus of secular information and esoteric lore that became available.

\* Homer: Robert Fagles translation, 1996.

Yet contrarily, in Christian cultures,  
 fence punishable by death; the notion nevertheless took grip.  
 if God's enemies made the definition of Goodness stand stronger.  
 bethan playwright,  
 piece *Doctor Faustus* dealing with a magician who bartered his soul in order  
 to attain power and worldly wealth. Likewise,  
 of James 1<sup>st</sup>,  
 Shakespeare (1564–1616) included the grisly witches' scene in *Macbeth* that  
 made effective use of the superstitions and gossip of the day,  
*and midnight hags* gloating above a cauldron into which they fed culinary  
 horrors in order to gain a glimpse of what was to come.  
 mental epics like Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667) and *Paradise Regained* (1671),  
 two bedrocks of the devotional corpus that spelt out the battle-lines be-  
 tween good and evil. This is not to say that the voice of no other gods could  
 be heard. On the contrary,  
 civilisation, the Greek and Roman authors were constantly read, quoted  
 and echoed in secular poetry, Platonism being allowed to flow into the  
 stream of Christianity.

As hunger for knowledge took in disciplines like history,  
 politics,  
 19<sup>th</sup> centuries ranged in subject matter,  
 and exotic around which they composed fantastical,  
 While staying at Porlock on the Exmoor coast,  
 (1772–1834) sank into a dreaming delirium which he evoked in language  
 scarcely equalled for its vividness and brilliance:

*In Xanadu did Kubla Khan  
 A stately pleasure-dome decree :  
 Where Alph, the sacred river, ran  
 Through caverns measureless to man  
 Down to a sunless sea.*

The poem shows the Mongolian emperor Kubla Khan ordering the raising  
 of a palace devoted to luxury and sensual diversion. Surrounded by walls,  
 towers and exotic gardens, beside it runs the sacred river that flows through

intertangling,  
evokes a deep chasm situated near the river that seems to be the site of a  
geyser or volcanic eruption,  
air which is smoky or steamy,  
future conflict:

*And 'mid this tumult Kubla heard from far  
Ancestral voices prophesying war!*

So the pleasure dome is built in a region that is geologically unstable,  
potential disaster zone.  
or revolution in the offing as is common in human affairs. These  
shatter the pleasure dome to fragments like the chaff spouted up from the  
boiling fountain.

The third movement turns its attention to an Abyssinian maid with a dul-  
cimer whose music thrills the poet beyond measure,  
'magically' or 'imaginatively' recreate the pleasure palace of Kubla Khan.  
In a reverie,  
from Plato's Paradise but could find no mortal equivalency for what he'd  
seen.

to contain him in a magic circle.  
terrible,

Uniquely alive,  
one thing about magic that appeals,  
with a wave of a wand,  
In supplying this dazzling immediacy,  
Kubla's pleasure dome.  
the swirling rhymes will stay engraved on the memory.

### THE PASSING OF ARTHUR

By the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when religious persecution had all but died,  
attended the publication of books like the *Oxford Book of Mystical Verse*  
(1917) which,  
and a range of religious emotion that would be not have been considered  
proper in previous centuries,

*Lotus* and other significant gestures towards exotic faiths. respectable word than *magical* with its connotations of occult expertise. The latter can also be applied to an adroit verbal illusionism. in this extract from *The Passing of Arthur*, Alfred Tennyson (1809–1892) recreates the conveyance of the body of the King Arthur by barge to the Isle of Avilon.  
*as from beyond the limits of the world, and proceeds to climb the hill:*

*Thereat one more he moved about, and clomb  
E'en to the highest he could climb, and saw  
Straining his eyes beneath an arch of hand,  
Or thought he saw, the speck that bare the King,  
Down that long water opening on the deep  
Somewhere far off, pass on and on, and go  
From less to less and vanish into light.*

The lines mimic the workings of the human eye. an effect ascribed to painters such as Corot, diminishing of a solid object as it recedes from the observer. strates Tennyson could not only look at things, placing himself into a fable of high romance and anchoring its reality by the miracle of observation.

#### A MAN OF WORDS & NOT OF DEEDS

'Magical'

also has baneful connotations,

The Romans constructed wells of cursing and healing into which they would throw votives in order to energise the process of revenge.

centuries,

warts, colds and rheumatism and,

they hated or disliked.

*A man of words and not of deeds  
Is like a garden full of weeds  
And when the weeds begin to grow*

*It's like a garden full of snow  
And when the snow begins to fall  
It's like a bird upon the wall  
And when the bird away does fly  
It's like an eagle in the sky  
And when the sky begins to roar  
It's like a lion at the door  
And when the door begins to crack  
It's like a stick across your back  
And when your back begins to smart  
It's like a penknife in your heart  
And when your heart begins to bleed  
You're dead, and dead, and dead indeed.*

The above 'nursery rhyme' is usually attributed to the Elizabethan author John Fletcher (1579–1625) who was born in Rye, Sussex. The quotation *Deeds, not words* can be found in his play *Lover's Progress*, but many think Fletcher was recalling an old folk rhyme, woman who wished to literally curse her husband or lover. The lines are compulsive; they possess the blind, fury and one can imagine a witch chanting them in the depths of her vengeful loneliness.  
manner,  
hatred. If this were not so, human history would be even more chaotic than it is.

#### CODHAM, COCKRIDDEN & CHILDERDITCH

After that dose of arsenic,

*I Should By Chance Grow Rich*, by Edward Thomas:

*If ever I should by chance grow rich,  
I'll buy Codham, Cockridden, and Childerditch,  
Roses, Pyrgo and Lapwater,  
And let them all to my elder daughter.  
The rent I ask of her shall be only,*

*Each year's first violets, white and lonely,  
The first primroses and orchises –  
She must find them before I do, that is.  
But if she finds a blossom on furze  
Without rent shall all for ever be hers,  
Whenever I am sufficiently rich:  
Codham, Cockriden, and Childerditch  
Roses, Pyrgo and Lapwater, –  
I shall give them all to my elder daughter.*

Needless to add, Edward Thomas (1878–1917) was very poor when he wrote those lines, even though he had been bright enough to receive an Oxford education. He could barely afford the upkeep of his Gloucestershire cottage. Finding presents for family birthdays and Christmas Day was a problem. Hence, direly lacking funds, he voiced his need to be stupendously magnanimous in a poem that has the same type of honesty as the preceding curses but is entirely charitable in outlook. Unfortunately this delightful piece of rural wishery never succeeded as a spell: Edward Thomas died amid the bloody trenches of the World War One. The real wealth he bequeathed to his children was his poetic legacy that made the whole world aware of his daughters and what he would have them own.

### EMPEROR *of* HOCUS POCUS

Edward Thomas was loosely classed as a Georgian poet although, unfairly, he was never admitted into the 'official' anthologies compiled by Edward Marsh and others. This was because his poetry was too subtle and understated; it took critics a generation to salute him as a major poet, almost as important as Hardy, an English equivalent to America's Robert Frost (whom Thomas had known personally) yet casually overlooked because his voice did not strike that modern tone characterised by the work of T.S. Elliot and W.H. Auden.

Another poet, three years older than Thomas, was overlooked by the reading public. This is because he is better known as the Wickedest Man in the World. Aleister Crowley (1875–1947) rated himself among the greatest of the English poets (even though, linguistically speaking, he harked back

rather than innovated). When W.B. Yeats, a fellow poet and member of the Golden Dawn, failed to praise his work, a rift formed between the two which smouldered into open conflict. The frictions of the Golden Dawn are set down in AC's *Confessions* which also contain a fair amount of literary reflection. Crowley states that he was deeply affected by Shelley's *Alastor*, the clarion rhymes of Swinburne and the dramatic monologues of Browning. At Cambridge, he was drawn to the French Decadents who hinted at perversities he was to explore with relish and incorporate in poems that were destroyed by His Majesty's Customs.

### HYMN TO PAN

As Crowley's writings are too copious to summarise, I shall merely cite his poetic flagship *Hymn to Pan*, employed in the raising of the god in a flat in Paris in 1914. Hymns to Pan, protector of flocks and lord of revelry, had previously been written by Shelley, Keats, Elizabeth Barrett Browning and others. Crowley's invocation is distinguished by an ecstatic ferocity that is reflected in its bucking, attenuated rhythms. The poet taps the black springs of the subconscious and allows them to well up and submerge the ego. The *lissome lust of light* is the same force that intoxicated the Berserks, warriors of Odin, before they went pillaging and rampaging. It is the same *ekstasis* which overwhelmed the followers of Dionysus and set them blood-letting and flesh-tearing:

*Thrill with the lissome lust of the light,  
O man! My man!  
Come careering out of the night  
Of Pan! Io Pan!  
Io Pan! Io Pan! Come over the sea  
From Sicily and from Arcady!  
Roaming as Bacchus, with fauns and pards  
And nymphs and satyrs for thy guards,  
On a milk-white ass, come over the sea  
To me, to me...*

The goat, whose blood was hot enough to dissolve diamonds, was insatiable in its lust – an amoral attitude striking back to a time before constraint and family values. Crowley's Pan is the undifferentiating pulse of nature, akin to the Spanish *duende*, the puckish earth-spirit, who can turn malevolent or dangerous, in the same way a party can turn nasty when everyone has drunk too much. But it needs be emphasised that the frenzy is streaked with despair. For the anonymous vessel, who constitutes the voice of the poet, is imploring the god to take him over. Unhappy in human bondage, he wants to leave the pain and fragmentation of the world and re-unite with the cosmic All-begetter:

*I, who wait and writhe and wrestle  
With air that hath no bough to nestle,  
My body, weary of empty clasp,  
Strong as a lion and sharp as an asp –  
Come, O Come!  
I am numb  
With the lonely lust of devildom.*

Finally the god tears into his body and possesses him. The poem ends on a paean of raging madness that will inevitably succumb to the pang of gravity. For each passion hoards the echo of its death. The blood has to ebb back to the lower centres and, similarly, the spirit to a foredoomed earth in which pleasure is reined to mortality and duty and moral responsibility dominate. For, taking Swinburne's view, this is not the carefree realm of Pan but of Christ, Saviour and Law-Giver:

*Thou hast conquered, O pale Galilean; the world has grown grey from thy breath,  
We have drunken of things Lethean, and fed on the fullness of death.<sup>†</sup>*

## TOYS

Pan's world was very much part of pre-classical Greece. It was an animistic world that believed insects, plants, stones and drops of water secreted a soul and therefore were alive. Though derided by scientists, animism will always

† *Hymn To Proserpine*, Algernon Swinburne.

persist because it corresponds with people's fondness for objects and oddments. Sculptors assemble scraps of driftwood; children and adults collect pebbles and shells. They also keep lucky coins, wear good luck charms just as in the Middle Ages when pious peasants put their faith in a chip of wood from the cross on which Christ was hung.

A curious and moving poem of 'relic magic' was written by the Victorian poet Coventry Patmore (1923–1896) who, after the death of his first wife, became a Catholic and single parent to six young children. On one occasion, for repeated defiance, he struck his small son and sent him up to bed. Later, overcome by remorse, he visits his room where he finds him quietly sleeping. And then he sees on the bedside table a cluster of tiny objects which the boy had arranged with delicate orderliness; from *The Toys*:

*He had put, within his reach,  
A box of counters and a red-veined stone,  
A piece of glass abraded by the beach  
And six or seven shells,  
A bottle with bluebells  
And two French copper coins, ranged with careful art,  
To comfort his sad heart.*

In quietly patterning shells and coins, the child had tried to restore form to his disrupted world, to defend himself against the explosion of anger in the parent he trusted and loved. Unwittingly the boy was doing the same ritual as Bronze Age man. Crouched skeletons are often recovered from bell-barrows with a ring of shells around them or circle of protection against the chaotic spirits that lie beyond the grave. Some have interpreted the toys as the trappings of the world, objects that detract from God, but they are more akin to pathetic consolatory symbols whose inertness precludes the possibility of betrayal.

#### THE INDESTRUCTIBLE SYMBOL

Like Aleister Crowley, the Anglo-Irish W.B. Yeats was a practising occultist. While the former is passed over, Yeats is acknowledged as the greatest traditional poet of the 20<sup>th</sup> century writing in English. Fascinated by the

ghosts, spirits, automatic writing and Ireland's fairy lore, he was a founder member of the Hermetic Society in Dublin, attending the initial meeting on June 16<sup>th</sup> 1885. When in London in 1888 he joined the Esoteric Section of the Theosophical Society. Two years later, he joined the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, taking the magical motto *Demon Est Desus Inversus* (DEDI), and was associated with this organisation for over thirty years.

Yeats firmly sets the poet in the role of seer who has access to unique knowledge from beyond the normal boundaries of perception. He believed in the indestructible, energised symbol, capable of insinuating itself into human affairs. Through his mastery and understanding of hidden worlds, a poet is able to translate and wield such powerful emblems so that they may hint at what is to come. This is well demonstrated in his famous poem, beginning:

*Turning and turning in the widening gyre  
The falcon cannot hear the falconer...*

What follows is a portrayal of disarray and social breakdown. The gyre around which the falcon moves is not only the circle of its hovering but a historical movement corresponding to the spirals of human consciousness as they ascend and descend through alternating phases of manifestation and dissolution that are virtually the turning pages of history. As for *The best lack all conviction, while the worst are full of passionate intensity*, that is now a byword for political failure at street level and the higher seats of office. This state of affairs paves the way for a more terrible sight:

*A shape with lion body and the head of a man,  
A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,  
Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it  
Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds.  
The darkness drops again; but now I know  
That twenty centuries of stony sleep  
Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,  
And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,  
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?†*

† *The Second Coming*, W.B. Yeats.

The *rough beast* is the monster of man's tainted deeds and manipulations shambling towards total manifestation or chaos. No St George or St Michael can slay this pre-ordained dragon. A masterful vision of apocalypse and nihilism, the poem has a tension and menace equivalent to passages in *Revelation*.

In its harshness and taut authority, *The Second Coming* is dramatically different from Yeats' earlier work. The latter is flooded with the wishes and dreams of a young vulnerable poet who is often in love and finds himself misunderstood and mishandled:

*Would I could cast a sail on the water  
Where many a king has gone  
And many a king's fair daughter,  
And alight at the comely trees and the lawn,  
The playing upon pipes and the dancing,  
And learn that the best thing is  
To change my loves while dancing  
And pay but a kiss for a kiss.*<sup>8</sup>

The phrase, *cast a sail on water*, is a brisk, elegant way of saying *take a boat out*, and the arrival in the mythical land where the poet will measure his generosities cautiously, changing his loves *while dancing* and paying *but a kiss for a kiss*, contains the tacit admission that, after being wounded in love, he is seeking shelter in shallow, cynical strategies. From the wearying celebration, he walks to the margin of a lake, finding the collar bone of a hare, *worn thin by the lapping of water*, signifying it has become wise through the wear and tear of time. Using it as a kind of spyglass, he observes the reality around him and laughs at the routine world of conformity and marrying in churches, framing their easy chatter within an ironic talisman. The lines possess the allure of Yeats' early faery poems and yet they express disenchantment, but the taint of cynicism renders the achievement a wiser one, the Celtic magic tempered by hard-won knowledge.

§ *The Collar-bone of a Hare*, W.B. Yeats.

## ENTERING THE WASTELAND

The German philosopher Hegel observed, *the Owl of Minerva flies through the dusk*. This is a pretty way of saying wisdom arrives just before darkness falls or vital insights arrive too late to save things. Aleister Crowley, for instance, was part of the Late Victorian and Edwardian revival of Pan. This bookish revival of a mythical deity took place at a time when mechanisation was destroying the rough grazing, forest and rock the god was supposed to inhabit. Hence a literary culture of Pan was started up in a world that was finding less and less physical space for him.

Particularly after the First World War, poets were disenchanted with what they saw was a botched, broken civilisation, a society in a state of sickness and spiritual stagnation. All the fighting and bloodshed was seen as pointless, for it had benefited no one, and into this vacuum poured a number of spiritual teachers from Russia and India trying to point out where man should go next.

At this time appeared a Modernist epic, the most important poem of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, deeply infiltrated with occultism and magical imagery. It tried to represent this lost state of affairs and was called *The Waste Land* (1922) by T.S. Eliot (1888–1965).

a state of tortoise-like hibernation until April strikes, *stirring dull roots with spring rain*, forcing a response from plants and humans:

*April is the cruellest month, breeding  
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing  
Memory and desire, stirring  
Dull roots with spring rain.*

In the section that follows, *A Game of Chess*, the ominous atmosphere is intensified by capitals repeating HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME. The poem is interrupted by shifts of tone and mood and is underscored by a contempt for what mankind has made of the world, the manner in which it has so absolutely corrupted the face of things that it can offer nothing for the despairing truth-seeker:

*What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow  
Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,  
You cannot say, or guess, for you know only  
A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,  
And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,  
And the dry stone no sound of water. Only  
There is shadow under this red rock,  
(Come in under the shadow of this red rock),  
And I will show you something different from either  
Your shadow at morning striding behind you  
Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you;  
I will show you fear in a handful of dust.*

Turning from erotic initiation, the poet makes his way across the barren acres, the hell of modern London, with its fumbling seductions and hordes of bowler hats pointlessly circling around obscure intentions. Civilisation offers nothing but a *heap of stony rubbish*. What matters are those surges of beauty and religious ecstasy, glimpses into *the heart of light, the silence*.

*– Yet when we came back, late, from the Hyacinth garden,  
Your arms full, and your hair wet, I could not  
Speak, and my eyes failed, I was neither  
Living nor dead, and I knew nothing,  
Looking into the heart of light, the silence.  
Od' und leer das Meer.*

Sacrifice is a preoccupation of Eliot's epic, utilised to enrich the land and revive spiritual fervour. *The Waste Land* is thick with corpses to some deity or another, usually to mitigate a sexual error or witless transgression. How the gods savour a spot of grand guignol! Drownings, abortions, mutilations, rapes and burnings – all agitate the hypnotic, menacing verve of the blank verse. Not only is Phlebas drowned, he has his eyes pecked out by gulls. As for poor, battered Tiresias, he was blinded for taking the side of Jove against Juno (arguing woman enjoys the keener pleasure in the act of love) and Ariadne hanged herself following her abandonment by Theseus.

After spying on the naked Diana, the hunter Actæon was torn to pieces by dogs; Ugolino and his children were locked in a tower and starved to death. Philomela, daughter of the King of Athens, was raped and had her tongue cut out and Stetson appears to be cultivating a dead body in his garden.

*Stetson, that corpse you planted in the garden,  
Has it begun to sprout?*

Such outrages lend the luminous lines a savage piquancy. The technique awakens the senses as much as the shock tactics devised by Gurdjieff when he would abruptly shout a command at the top of his voice or institute a sudden, terrible silence. Full of mood swings, stark arousals and throttled exclamations, the poem plunges into a nightmare collage, a disjointed newsreel of violent, sensuous scenes and scenes of drought, outrage and desecration. Eliot undermines the conventional aesthetic by violent surreal combinations that astonish and beguile. The vision may be bleak, but the bleakness thrills. There may be despair, but it is a radiant despair. There may be weariness, but it is a weariness that energises the concept of exhaustion.

#### THE OLD PIER-POST

Eliot craved a religious anchorage and emphasised a poet should be *impersonal*, a conduit rather than a fountain of indiscriminate impulse. Such detachment was timely. With the quantum breakthroughs of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the electron microscope had replaced Madame Sosostris' cloudy crystal ball. For a brief period, poets affected a materialist, workmanlike attitude, ceasing to think of themselves as priests but as mechanics of language. Their machine parts were the words that had to be assembled properly, so that meaning cranked into motion: verbal logic rather than an oracular outpouring.

But many rebuked this strident scientism, defending poetry as a sacred calling. Robert Graves (1895–1985) maintained that, from ancient times, poets venerated Artemis or the moon goddess to whom their lives were bound. Not only had they to serve her, but willingly sacrifice themselves to her greater glory:

*Water to water, ark to ark,  
From woman back to woman:  
So each new victim treads unflinching  
The never altered circuit of his fate...<sup>5</sup>*

John Cowper Powys found reading of Graves' *White Goddess* (1948) painful. Though a muse of passion and enslavement corresponded with his masochistic tendencies, it failed to address his solitary, self-pleasuring side. Born in 1872 to a country parson, Powys had been educated at Sherborne School and Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, later finding work lecturing on English Literature and turning out popular books and pamphlets. Famous for massive narratives like *A Glastonbury Romance* and *Porius*, he was not scientifically minded but had picked up enough popular physics to realise a constant bombardment of particles affects the blood, brain and muscular tissues. Atoms, galaxies, stones, plants and neuro-physiological sensations were all part of the universal flux. Hence, he reasoned, metaphorically speaking, a single thought, a tiny vibration, can reach out to the edge of the cosmos. Human beings are joined in a cosmic mesh of sensations with flies, dust mites, ashes, potato peelings and other droppings and drippings.

A few of his later poems bear vivid witness to his animistic philosophy. In particular, *The Old Pier Post* takes on the identity of neglected block of wood:

*I am the sea-ward looking one,  
Covered with weed and slime –  
“Fresh fish for sale!” – of a row of posts,  
That rotted by centuries not like ghosts  
To the ebb and flow of time.  
Sea-tangle and sea-scum  
Will the Christ never come?*

Two lovers meet by the pier post. They make love and leave attached to the wood strands of their hair. Also two seagulls, formerly mates, add their feathers to the mix, along with bits of sea-scum and scales from a mackerel

☞ *To Juan at Winter Solstice*, Robert Graves.

they had shared. Paltry and worthless, yet refined by human and ornithological passion, these emotionally charged scraps enable the post to come alive:

*A shining tress, a feather, a thought –  
With these I create a soul,  
A soul that is not to be sold or bought;  
Yes; I who am nought and less than nought –  
– “Fresh fish for sale!” – have something caught  
From the waters as they roll!”*

Thomas Hardy would have loved this poem for its quaintness and audacity. Yeats too would have approved of soul-making via bits and pieces. But why, having achieved its magical goal, should the post seek out Christ? Is it because, now possessing a soul, it must seek the Redeemer of Souls? Possibly, but more likely Powys is not being doctrinal in his choice of language but conceives Christ more broadly as a symbol of love and hope who will respond to the highest and lowliest.

#### GHOST CRABS

The notion of creating a soul is hardly new, but what exactly constitutes a soul, that so-called immaterial thing held so precious? Is it a strongly individual quality which will live on after death or it a fragile manifestation that can be taken over and supplanted?

Perhaps the most melodramatic presentation of possession by an evil, negative force is Ted Hughes's poem *Ghost Crabs*. Opening on a beach where the tide is going out, the retreating water leaves uncovered enormous crabs *like a packed trench of helmets*, who creep inland and invade the bodies of men and women, making them act in a compulsive, aggressive way. The poet lays his lines like straight, heavy slabs of irregular length. After a while, the compulsive mantra of direct, blunt statement becomes hypnotic.

*They stalk each other, they fasten on to each other,  
They mount each other, they tear each other to pieces.  
They utterly exhaust each other.*

\*\* *The Old Pier-Post*, John Cowper Powys.

*They are the powers of this world.  
We are their bacteria,  
Dying their lives and living their death.*

The philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer would view these spectral crabs as ciphers for the overpowering will that operates through men and women. Temperamentally speaking, a Romantic pessimist, Schopenhauer saw people not as instigators of action but as objects or mediums controlled by a timeless, non-conscious force that found its form in the turbulent phenomenal world. Men and women are little more than vessels caught up in the gale of this thing-in-itself that directs their fates and appetites. Dylan Thomas evoked the same invisible power in his famous lines:

*The force that through the green fuse drives the flower  
Drives my green age; that blasts the roots of trees  
Is my destroyer.*

Like Crowley and Powys before him, Ted Hughes (1930–1998) attended Cambridge University in order to study English Literature, but found the prevailing academic approach stultifying. It favoured a detached, juiceless style of writing that depressed him. After spending a childhood in the wilds of Yorkshire and a stretch in the RAF, he hungered for a more congenial type of knowledge relating to people, their beliefs, passions and taboos. This insight was confirmed by a dream in which he saw himself sitting at the desk in his room, uncertain what to write, when this strange creature, half-fox and half animal, enters and places its bloody paw on the blank page, saying, *Stop this – you are destroying us.*

The incident gave rise to one of his most anthologised poems *The Thought-Fox*. First it presents the lonely, composing poet in his study, sitting beside the ticking clock with an empty page before him. Somehow his room suggests a dark, enclosing forest and he senses a creature, *entering the loneliness.*

*Cold, delicately as the dark snow,  
A fox's nose touches twig, leaf;*

*Two eyes serve a movement, that now  
And again now, and now, and now*

Eventually the ghostly creature enters or ‘manifests’ in the room which stands for the mind. The poet is alerted by the *hot stink* of physical incarnation facilitating completion of poem. The animal is an emissary, a spirit fox responding to the call of the inner self. According to Hughes, this eerie visitant inspired him to switch from studying English Literature to Anthropology.

### LIVING IN FALMOUTH

On par with Hughes was a fellow poet who shared his enthusiasm for magic and the life sciences. Peter Redgrove (1932–2003) is the poet of the electrified nerve and tingling pore, of the interacting of colours, textures, sounds and lights. His chief god is Proteus, Lord of the ever-changing beard, moustache and hat, the epitome of malleability and metamorphosis. Whenever Redgrove touches the subject of water, the outcome is always an act of miraculous conjuring. The liquid will arise and take on all the shapes and flavours of existence, metal rods, clouds, spurting manes of animals, placid mirrors, glinting leaves and coins. He can make rock burn and glow like skin. He is a transformer and no respecter of any line or demarcation, for each adjective, each noun, is a portal to everything else, an audacious linkage that need never end anywhere, save when the poet decides to break off from his inspiration.

The greater part of Redgrove’s life was spent in the Cornish port of Falmouth which he memorably evoked in *Living in Falmouth*:

*The great sun-sailors  
Take liberty and stroll about the town,  
The drawing-rooms expand as they peep in,  
The hills are emerald and the cliffs sheer gold.  
Their leave is short. They one by one ascend  
The shrinking ladders of the dusk  
Into the smaller, redder, westering boat. Shall we board  
Into the night? To a man we have a ticket.*

This is airy, delightful illusionism, personifying sunbeams as sailors exploring lanes, by-ways and interiors of the seaport. Added to that is the verbal daring of paralleling their loss of light to climbing rungs of a ladder and getting back aboard the sinking solar vessel. The ticket at the end is commission. It is miracle how deftly Redgrove applies a last lick of celestial paint before wrapping up the journey.

#### POPPIES IN OCTOBER

Between Hughes and Redgrove was an empathy beyond their both attending the same university, marrying gifted poets (Sylvia Plath and Penelope Shuttle) and liking each other's work. They both conveyed sensation as if they were a live cable or wriggling eel, shockingly reactive and electrically immediate. But it was Hughes who lauded over the publishing scene, for he had the advantage of looking better than most male leads in films and the drawback of a wife whose suicide overshadowed his own achievement. Though meticulously crafted, the poetry of Sylvia Plath (1932–1963) flaunts a hectic, primitive, slapped-on imagery allied with a broody, malicious exactitude, a glinting, sick irony that reflects her self-disgust and nerve-shelled fury at a life and marriage that turned out tempestuous and tragic. Replete with séances, transformations, moon-magic and nose-dives into wittily controlled hysteria, she throws out amazing, jagged connections that can literally make flowers scream, such as in *Poppies in October*:

*Even the sun-clouds this morning cannot manage such skirts.  
Nor the woman in the ambulance  
Whose red heart blooms through her coat so astoundingly...*

*O my God, what am I  
That these late mouths should cry open  
In a forest of frost, in a dawn of corn flowers.*

Boundaries or defining lines are drawn to prevent humans losing themselves in the infinite, and this is as far as this present piece may stray. Lacking totality and natural conclusion, I hope these observations have drawn attention to some angles and aspects of this literally spellbinding art.

*A Moon's Daybook*

A moon's daybook is where she writes her dreams.  
She loves the upstart earth.

*Ah the earth,*  
*always turning up like a bad penny.*

A moon's daybook neither toils nor spins.  
She lets her dreams wax and wane,  
they are her kinswomen and her cares.

She has the oceans on her side,  
goes where they go,  
scholarly pearl amid clouds.

A moon writes down her dreams  
before they happen.

Nowadays, they're a litany  
for the beaten and abused, trudging back

where they came from,  
in long convoys, on bad roads,  
without their menfolk.

*Oh the earth,* she sighs,  
writing herself to the full.

JOHN HARNESS

*My son is clothed in blackbird*

My son is clothed in blackbird  
he eats clay, he eats clay  
In the Place of No Returnings,  
he eats clay.

O Lion – Nirgali!

My son is clothed in blackbird  
he eats clay, he eats clay  
In the Place of No Returnings,  
he eats clay.

*The Talking' Tree*

This is the talking tree  
Song-of-the-stones  
The fungal mind  
Arboreal drone  
The grammar of dolphins  
Book of the fields  
This is the lost night of  
birds  
in the sullen, sand abode

The severed dragon's-tail  
The thawing shadow  
This is the well-sprite  
The nest of winds  
Council of immortal flowers

Wait by the skull-blossom  
in the deep caves –  
womb of the mounds

Chiseled from the haunch of clay,  
Newborn fish slip through mud-made bricks  
into the rusted cup of dew

Along the billion-year-old  
wet stone surface  
Is scratched these words:

“Dwell in the peace of the Ancestors;  
abide in the voidness of the Dream”

This is the beating drum  
The raving bard  
The bubbling pond  
offering signs  
through a thick, airy gabble  
of riverside reeds  
This is the palimpsest of grass

Breast of wisdom  
The trailhead  
Arrow-shaped eye of the hearth

Here are the chewed roots  
of this World Tree  
Wading in a spring of stars  
Here is the breeding ground  
Clamor of the tikes

This is the quietness  
of having never arose  
This is the moon-marrow  
The tidal-mirrored rainbow  
Voice of the Mother

An inscription shimmers  
below your bare-skinned feet:

“You do not walk on this Earth,  
nor does it walk upon you

You and it are both  
one meeting  
in the silence of the Ancestors  
The sap of this tree”

Vanished in the water's face,  
each question is drowned  
when it asks itself "Why?"

Basked in the wellspring  
of telluric telemetries,  
in a blanket of moss  
from the Infinite Times Before –  
*Waking and sleep are one*

This is the lodge of kin  
The buzzing lamp  
of the First Wanderer  
These are the bellows  
of a slow, galactic breeze

Watch here the raindrops  
trickle in Her palms  
like the words to a disappearing book  
Watch here, the verdant jewel  
kept in the flower  
at the center of All –  
Every door closed by its shine

No one comes back from here  
But what always was  
still will be  
And the jewel falls  
like a seed free of its fruit  
only to plant another tree

For to leave forever  
is to start all over again

This is the secret of the eldest stars  
The awesome Mystery  
This is the tiny hand  
of a child by your side  
The boundless great ocean  
of an unnoticed sound  
It is the bread  
of thundering hunger  
The peace  
of the Ancestors' Song

There is nothing to take  
nor give up  
Only a soft, summer wind  
whispering:  
"Play"

Only abiding  
in the Dreaming of the Earth

From the bus I  
gazed at the corrugated  
iron walls of the hut near  
the airfield in  
which the redeemer  
lay hidden. His girlfriend  
sat outside, smoking,  
wrapped in a blanket  
of fine wool  
to insulate herself  
against ghosts. A phrase  
heard in an empty room,  
the oracle misheard,  
interpreted by a  
stupid man: *I trade gold  
for wood.* So he had  
lessened, wandering  
alone by night to  
stand naked among weeds  
and rubbish in order  
to greet the first  
dog to climb the sky:  
not Sirius but Procyon.

*In the Quarter*

she leaned over the table and when  
she leaned over the universe curved  
with the curve of her spine  
as she bent to whisper to me  
“don’t you know me”  
and the scent of her was like honey  
wine and oranges and smoke  
and her voice in my ear sounded like  
a pomegranate seed tastes

I think I do I said  
or at least I’ve heard you mentioned  
Pomba Gira is the name I’ve heard  
but other than that you might have  
many names and to be honest  
with that voice of yours you could  
tell me anything and I would believe it  
and listen and remember probably  
till the end of time

she laughed and said “aren’t you the one  
who has a way with words”  
I said I try, very hard sometimes  
and she laughed again and took a drag  
off her cigarillo and arched her  
eyebrows at me just  
so

*Hunt*

when death kisses you  
it burns and you wonder  
if flesh can endure

it won't of course  
blood and breath  
all end in bone

but still you stand  
with face turned  
into the winds of time

they say he likes  
it  
like that

they don't  
know him  
at all

the women have not  
come  
to claim them

speared  
the heart stilled  
blinking dumbly

shadowed darkneses  
upon the planes  
of form

breath belongs to him  
heart replaced with stone  
beats at his behest

as fury rages  
poetry spilled  
scarlet

by killer  
old and dark  
deeper than mortal

crooked yet gentle  
skins twined  
about the cup

i am to become  
as smoke  
some season soon

across the  
autumn evenings'  
woodburnt sky.

*Enlil*

Stories down in Kaymakli  
Carved of living rock that rings  
Sweet notes in the night  
on top of the natural.  
Mu a gâ  
Name of my power.  
Cut to the bone I scarcely bleed.  
Your man watches – and he a storm, sweeping  
yelping dogs and stones before him, down the dry rivers.  
He had to taste me to know.  
His eyes in the cyclone  
And the twilight spiraling echoes of muezzins down the valley  
From the Four Quarters of Your Lordship.  
And at last –  
You are even more.  
Lord of the Storm,  
Your breath on my lips  
Mine as incense rising  
Beyond the passing fancies of flesh  
No skin between us,  
Just presence and delight,  
A silk rose blown to my feet,  
A jewel garland in the sand,  
A woman dressed in love.  
A sky of holy joy  
Which I will to the world  
And change it.  
Still – I ask why you love me  
small as an atom in your eyelash?

You say, "Because, like a lyre,  
When I touch,  
You resound."

~ *Dionysos Trieterikos* ~

“Bathe the Vine disconsolate in tears:  
The Grape is Dead! We didn’t know.  
Mix the blood with dust and fire!  
Where once all was honeyed water,  
The Kid has fallen into milk.  
What was roasted must be boiled,  
Saved only be the Knowing Heart.  
Listen, listen to the rapt of the pipes!  
Dancers, frenzied, raise your blades:  
The Horned Babe beguiled, bleeds!  
Zoë! Zoë! King of the World,  
Before even you swell, you die!  
Atop crossbar one cubit wide,  
Of the Mask’s unblinking stare  
The stony voids fill with awe.  
Anoint the tripod wood pillar,  
Erect ~ yet: not erect!  
Bring there at the appointed time  
The goat, the Vine branch, the Khous,  
That by Eros the wine be poured  
To quench the thirst of Poseidon.

Oh! The Fox that stole the grapes!  
Your blood, Divine scapegoat,  
Brings solace to mortal sorrows.  
Mourn the Wolf, the Liknites!  
Shrouded be the Liknon!  
In the long winter of His soul,  
Virgins expectantly swing  
Burn, burn Butterfly!

Phales Phanes! Weep,  
Weep, Seilenos, Maenades,  
For the Agathos Daemon when  
On the Shore Theseus betrays  
Honey sweet Ariadne of Naxos.  
Tear your hair, Arianna, despondent  
My wandering Priestess Queen,  
Over thy starry nuptial couch  
Heartbroken and disconsolate  
Tie the noose round your neck  
For Freedom, thy Divine Consort.  
Yet laugh you must as the blown goatskin  
Splits at the seams to ribald songs,  
Turn the bleats tragic of the goat  
Into comedy and chansons!  
On a chill day in November  
When first the Pleiades arise  
Cry mournful shall the Salpinges  
Like the roar of a wounded bull  
Haunting eerie the Keros,  
In trembling expectation  
At the Swamp Zagreus  
Bakcheutos is called!  
The Mistress is coming.  
Kaleite Theon!”

*Red Veils and Black*

Hot desert wavers, builds towers of illusion and disdain  
An oasis choked by time  
Temples laid bare before the sun  
As fire spirits whirl and jangle fast to cry out with one voice one name  
Dry as choking dust and old bone  
Needle friction grit and grain  
They are as much the sands as the winds – *khamzin*  
And the storm begins, spirit lightning and faltering rain.

Their eyes are veiled and where they walk no prints remain to betray  
*Daughters of Set*  
Of the scorpion and of the jackal, kohl and lapis  
Old stolen gold from the lap of the Gods  
They move as serpents move  
Follow the smooth and crooked way  
No more wicked than the eye of the sun and no more tame  
For the lion that is their mother was born from the immortal flame  
As a blade as smoke as blood  
The Goddess of seven thousand names and one desire  
To Her they aspire.

The air opens and they are there  
Still and watching as predators must watch their prey  
The smell of dust and musk surrounding them  
Faint decay from withered flowers whose blossoms  
Once were given to the tomb of Kings  
The trinkets of the world departed  
Bright playthings for the underworld  
That they already know so well

Its art of painted spell and plague set upon their skin  
In red and yellow and grey and other darker rings.

No words no sound, just stone ground down to the smallest sense  
Leaving bone and blue beads to whisper  
As sharp sickles relentless spin and bleed the light  
Leaving men to dream the moon was eaten  
By the wandering terror of night  
Silver scarabs woven in their hair  
Living jewels to whirr and buzz and sing  
They raise their arms to dance the fire  
By date wine and barley sweet inspired  
Their names the hidden secrets of the air  
But all *ifrit*.

*Stoking the Four Fires*

Portentous sky last night, with Venus  
Kissing crescent's lofty lifting dark.  
This morning's sun rose into blue and  
Your face carries the light of this new day.

You are the spark in the belly.  
You are the lamp that guides the soul.  
Your heart the beating rhythm of the forge.  
Your life is the tool being formed.

*Fire of the mind.*

*Fire in the heart.*

*Fire of the will.*

*Fire in the sex.*

When did you forget these sacred things?  
And when do you remember your new name?

**The price for life is the singing of your hands**

Working needle and trowel, keyboard and caress.

You are the spark in the belly.  
You are the lamp that guides the soul.  
Your heart the beating rhythm of the forge.  
Your life is the tool being formed.

*Fire of the mind.*

*Fire in the heart.*

*Fire of the will.*

*Fire in the sex.*

Light the fires inside you.  
Wait on this for no-one else's word.  
Speak. Listen. Know your life.  
Take up the task at hand.

# BECOMING POETRY

Erynn Rowan Laurie

IT BLEEDS OUT OF US ONTO THE PAGE. The work of a poet is made of blood and breath. Sacred poetry in particular puts soul into sounds, defying the indwelling silence and darkness of our experience with spirit, magic, and deity. To be a sacred poet in the early twenty-first century is to embrace a passion lost on most of the world. We are exiles in our societies, unwanted yet unable to depart from the path of poetry.

No one embraces the path of sacred poetry because it is convenient. Each one of us has a soul-deep longing for it and a love of sound and word that transcends our ability to keep silent. Poetry is the only language in which we can express the depths of our lust for sacred experience, for ritual, for the gods and spirits who live in the center of our existence.

My own poetic experience lives in the context of my spiritual practice as a fili, a sacred poet in the Celtic Reconstructionist community. It grows in the soil of my experience as a Navy veteran, living with the results of trauma in nightmares, flashbacks, and the other symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. It is this spiritual cataclysm that forced me into poetry, pushing me to ritualize and express both my pain and my desire to heal. My poetry is deeply influenced by the literary and folk traditions of Ireland and Scotland, drawing imagery from tales and song that are engraved upon my heart as much as the results of my rituals are engraved with ink upon my skin.

The process of *filidecht*, the practice of sacred poetry in the Gaelic tradition, works deep within three cauldrons in the body. These cauldrons turn, spin, brew and boil. They contain and overflow; their action sparks inspiration, immersed within the language of myth and vision. By reading and reciting Gaelic myths, stories, and poems in ritual and magic, I make myself a part of them, bringing their ethic, wonder, and worldviews into my life.

I burn juniper in the small room I have set aside as an incubation chamber, purifying myself for visionary rituals, seeking inspiration for my own work and for my community. I lie on my cushions in the darkness as Scottish poets once lay in darkened huts composing their poems, proving themselves to their communities as seers and singers of tales.

Poetry is at the center of my practice; all the work and ritual I perform, all the vigils and the wilderness retreats, all the study and sacrifice I make are intended to engender poetry. When I am tending a fire by the edge of the sea throughout the night, miles from the nearest civilization, cut off from everything by the tide, and my eyes swim with the aura of flame for hours the next day, it is poetry written in my pupils. It is an engagement with the edge of my physical abilities, pushing myself beyond my endurance in hopes of sparking understanding and, through understanding, a healing.

When those moments of healing magic happen, when those connections are forged between myself and the Otherworlds, poetry expresses my sense of liberation from suffering. The body is still weak, but the soul becomes stronger and, in that strength, pours forth on the page. The tattoos and piercings I have endured are poetry marked out on my body, affirming transformations that cannot be spoken in ordinary prose. Only the patterned, flowing, formalized speech of poetry comes close. Only repetition and alliteration, assonance and consonance, can express some fragment of these realizations. Only poetry draws forth the magic of the ephemeral instant embraced by eternity and vanished within it.

To be a sacred poet is a dedication of the soul to magical and spiritual purpose. It is a seeking of balance between vision and the ability to live a daily life in the same world with cities and pavement and genocide and nuclear waste. Sacred poetry seeks to find words to express the anguish and despair that is inevitable when one's eyes are open and one is truly aware. It is the upwelling of joy in communing with what beauty continues to exist in the midst of chaos and destruction. It is the art of communicating that beauty and desolation to others in ways that transform them.

As a sacred poet, I draw upon the words of generations long gone for inspiration in understanding and living with tragedy, for it is an eternal part of being human. But the human heart insists on survival. It finds ways to draw beauty and meaning out of even the most horrifying situations. It creates music and poetry in the midst of war and starvation. This insistence of the heart is holy. It is a commitment to continuance and the seeking of substance. Poetry is the dialectic of the soul and its result is a deeper understanding, shared with others.

The Irish *Cauldron of Poesy* text describes poetry as the fruit of the deep experience of joy and sorrow. These intense emotions turn the cauldrons within, resulting in divine inspiration, prophecy, and the power to heal and perform miracles. The true poet, in this understanding of the art, cannot help but be sacred, cannot help but make magic by her very practice. This poetic work is more than just focused attention on rhyme and metre. It is a dedication to living emotion and sensation in all its fullness, despite the risks. In a society like ours, where hatred is one of the few emotions allowed full sway, to dare to love, to feel sorrow, to empathize, to have joy – all are radical acts of rebellion.

To relish embodied physicality – enjoyment of sexual pleasure and the sensuality of all the senses, embracing the pain of illness and disability – this also is radical in western society. It is also a part of the art of the sacred poet in the tradition of *filidecht*. To fully live with chronic pain has been a formative part of both my poetry and my spiritual work, following the spirit of the enjoiner that all those things we experience have some value and can be the driving force of art.

Embracing and understanding pain has forced me to encounter my body in ways that healthy people do not, and to challenge myself to transcend that pain while still acknowledging the limitations it can impose. It has impelled me to engage my spiritual life and my poetry in ways that help me understand myself more deeply and to express myself more honestly and openly. It has taught me to value more intensely the results of the spiritual work I do that sometimes expresses itself in poetry.

In truth, the art of the sacred poet is to live wholly and fully. We are, each of us, a poem being composed by the world. When we are able to put words to that intensity of life, we have touched the face of a god. We have become a conduit of that wildness that drives blood through our veins and desire in our bodies. That god, like our own human selves, is as much animal as divine.

The sacred is not perfection. It is not disembodied ideal. The sacred is every thing that is; all that lives and breathes and is inhabited by spirit. It is all that does not breathe; the shuddering earthquake and the tsunami are sacred, the flow of lava and the whispering fall of snow. The sacred poet inhabits all of this, speaks of it, makes love with it. Vermin and disease and

death are lovers as surely as the beauty of a sunset and we will all know the kiss of death in time, penetrating our bodies and dissolving them into nothingness.

The early Irish filid knew this. So did the Welsh beirdd. Taliesin and Amairgen sang of their identities as the sound of waves, a drop of dew in the sun, a salmon in a stream, a word in a book. There is nothing inanimate in the universe of a sacred poet; all things have a measure of experience and wisdom to share and in our rituals and visionary experiences, we become them and share in that existence as stone or star or stallion. Our task is expressing what we learn in these states of being, generating compassion for the world in all its beauty and its suffering. To do this without drowning in despair or dissolving into ecstasy from which one never returns is the balance that we must constantly find. Both have the potential to drag us to death, our duty unfulfilled.

What happens when we lose, or cannot achieve that balance? Irish tradition has it that we become *geilt* – wild or mad – damaged enough that we can no longer function in society; yet even in this state, poetry remains. Suibhne, Laikoken, Myrddin and Mís are all examples of those who have fallen to despair, their minds and hearts turning on them, destroying their connections with human community because of trauma and grief that cannot be expressed or understood by those who have not suffered it. In all these tales, poetry or music become the lifeline, the connecting thread that brings the poet back to their senses. Whether through composition or through hearing and becoming one with these arts in the process of listening, poetry and music are healing magic.

Originally, poetry and music were the same. Poets were singers; singers were poets. In Gaelic tradition there were said to be three musical modes that the professional harper must know – the strain of laughter, the strain of weeping, and the strain of sleep. As with the cauldrons in the body, the strong emotions of joy and sorrow are brought out and experienced, and sleep is the trance-state that allows healing integration to happen. Again and again we are returned to these emotions and their deep and necessary role in human life and in enlightenment. It is the poet who marks and expertly manipulates them, creating change in self and society.

But internal change is not the only work of the sacred poet. Praise and satire are equally important in the tradition. What today is accomplished by comedians posing as journalists was once the sworn duty of the poet; calling power and authority to task for its abuses and praising those who are praiseworthy. The satire of a poet was said to bring physical blemishes to the one it was recited against. A leader's name and reputation could be entirely destroyed by a single poem, repeated throughout the land. Such was the magic of the glam dicend that it was governed by council and believed to cause the earth itself to open and swallow the offending party, whether that be the one satirized, or the poet cursing under false pretenses.

Words still have this power, and the words of poets are feared in repressive political regimes. Writers and poets are still imprisoned in many countries for the power of their criticism. Salman Rushdie is not the only writer whose works have caused him condemnation and threats of death. Western 'democracies' suppress free speech by the simple expedient of ignoring anything unapproved by the owners of powerful media and political weight. And so, as sacred poets, we should consider it our continuing duty to follow the traditions of our forebears and call to task unworthy authorities. If our words are magical and have power, we must act to right the wrongs of the societies and cultures within which we live.

When sacred poets work, we are often isolated in our task. We sometimes think that our temples, our desks, our wooded paths, our notebooks in a café are the only real manifestations of import. Yet we have a responsibility to the world around us. We have responsibilities to the deities and spirits with whom we work, and whose stories and powers we call upon. If we see our work as shamanic, then we hold a responsibility to the powers of the land and our words must help create meaningful change to preserve the environment that supports those beings who support us. A spiritual link with wolf or bear or eagle is more than a fleeting dream or a sense of internal presence, it is a reciprocal commitment to keep them alive, to help them to flourish. We work in symbiosis with the powers that inspire us and give us the gift of our words. To take without giving in return is a violation of sacred hospitality. In the Gaelic tradition, it was expressed as, *a tale from the host, then tales from the guest until dawn*. Metaphorically, we owe those who sponsor us both our time and our most intense effort.

Sacred poetry is more than writing. It is more than music. It is more than healing. It is more than technique, though all these things are tools we must master. It is more than making magic or offering a praise-poem to deity or making journeys into Otherworlds. It is more than singing forth our souls and returning them once again to our place in the world. To be a sacred poet is to fill our lives with profound fullness through practicing the fine art of being human. It is, ultimately, to live each moment awake, to act with wisdom and compassion, to show the world as it is in all its beauty and terror: we must become poetry.

SARA AMIS

*Rose, Stone, Star*

The rose aligned with star and stone  
Fire in the breath, fire in the breath  
The rose aligned with star and stone  
Life and death, life and death

An angel crown upon the hill  
The rose unfurls from my heart's home  
The dolmen sleeps below it still  
The rose unfurls from my heart's home

Queen of heaven, queen of hell  
Lightning's child and all is well  
Queen of heaven, queen of hell  
Lightning's child and all is well

The rose unfurls from my heart's home  
The rose aligned with star and stone

*The Drift*

Slowly I rise,  
and let my heart climb into my mouth,  
and fill it with blood.  
And the words are carried on waves,  
on their crests that hold all time,  
thrown in emptied bottles from this vessel,  
out into the squall.  
And they will wash away.

Carried on by the flood's will  
I move with currents that are unseen,  
and siren memories would shipwreck my body,  
just to hold me against the pull,  
against the passing of time.  
But I will break in ways unknown to them,  
left unable to hear their song,  
like so much sand beneath the tide.

So I shall drift into night,  
carried on a bed of waves,  
throwing words in reclaimed vessels from this tired soul,  
out, out into the squall.  
And they will wash away.

*ghost horse*

jigharzi stamp he food  
like he want take  
whole world in he stride

but I say whoaboy  
de forest all creepy creepy

an night done fall  
like shutters closing  
an all de duppies  
in de whole winding world  
be on our tail  
clanging der teeth  
like badmouth alligator

an jigharzi he say  
man it be your own teeth  
you hear jingling jangling  
and if we don hurry  
de moon up an catch us

an we run and we run  
but de vines slap he flanks

an he flatten he ears  
an I know he eyes rolling

an trees cling to de sky  
like black widow cobwebs

an we both start to sweat  
like in factory furnace

an de cooling night air  
don even touch us

but jus as it seem  
we be safe out of danger

jigharzi rear up  
till he hooves catch de branches

an I tumble off  
like de whiss pull me backward

for sudden we see  
de three-legged horse  
all dimness an glowing  
with mist in its eye

an its forleg stuck out  
from its chest like a knife

an de ghost is all whiteness  
    an silence  
        an wispness  
            an shrouded  
                an awful

an fear strike me heart  
jus like church bell tolling

an we run an we run  
but de ghost stay before us

till we come to de edge  
an fall into de moonlight

an de ghost sudden gone  
but de dread be still on us

jgharzi he shake  
by de old breadfruit tree

an I cross myself twice  
as preacher done say

go quiet to de neighbour  
steal two of he chickens  
for double protection

cut open der throats  
an scatter de blood  
de bones an de feather

where jgharzi be standing  
where I be not sleeping

an I make a full circle  
an climb fearful in it  
an jgharzi for once in he life is all silent

for we know an we know  
dat de three-legged orse  
mean evil be coming  
an nothin can stop it  
as sure as de hellfires  
keep burning  
keep burning

*Ogma's Knife*

Mother of my children  
I mother and father  
(silver of ghosts  
and gold of autumn's  
hoarding of summer leaves)

knife hand will  
cutting twig  
carving glyphs

whispering groves  
flutter of mayflies at Bealtaine  
generation of a lineage

the buzz and the bloom  
shaped but always escaping  
into new meanings  
and cycling again, called back  
by my sweet tongue, a sticky  
flow of honey and milk.

With generative hand I protected  
against the abduction of Lug's wife  
with my first seven strokes  
pressed into the flesh of birch.

*Triadic Rubaiyat of the Coal-Black Smith*

The iron door stands shut against her back  
Not locked, but bound, awaiting the impact  
Of the Maiden's knock, Her courage yet untried  
The hammer's ring sounds out into the black

The Lord of Fire toils fervently inside  
He forges destiny with strength and pride  
The Sun ablaze in the dank guts of the world  
He, gold with light and soot-smear'd, there abides

Upon his forge is weary fate unfurled  
And tempered, too, as lightning to be hurled  
Into the god inverted on the rack  
Transforming bitter tears to wisdoms pearled

She boldly knocks, not once, but three times three  
And thrusts the door forward for to see  
The coal-black Smith, in sweat soaked apron posed  
To mark his seal upon the ancient tree

The tree that bears the mill wheel and the rose  
The wheel that bears the anvil and tongs shows  
No singe of flame, no wear, naught but a sword  
And this he lifts, the space 'tween them to close

The challenge made, a kiss exchanged, a word  
His heated arms reach out to pull her toward  
His beaten form, "this blade I've forged for thee,  
To protect you when you meet Wyrd at the Ford."

“The Washer waits for you, foretells your doom  
She soaks blood from your clothes in twilight’s gloom  
And you may curse or bless her with a kiss  
Before you cross the verge of sword and broom.”

“For within your destruction is your bliss  
The Witch is only born of temperance  
The North Star points the way you are to wend  
Pure love impels me here to tell of this.”

“The strongest will not break, though they may bend  
And well-met the Witch who faces her own end  
With grace, and though she knows, does not assume  
That greatness lies in wait where she descends.”

*To the Breaker of Worlds*

I hear Your voice, cracking wildfire  
leaping from tree to brush to stem.  
Laughing in darkness, You come,  
green-eyed terror, Laufey's son  
driven wild and raving, deadly  
as a forest of spears, sharp as a river  
strewn with stone knife-blades,  
stark as the silence before a tornado  
stretches toward the yielding earth.

O Breaker of Worlds, chaos and  
destruction bound and unbound again,  
staining the fabric of wyrd like  
blood-crusting wounds re-opening,  
like bruises blossoming under skin,  
this day, with my eyes wide open,  
without hope for a reprieve, I will  
truss and wind and throw myself  
into Your storm, spinning in a halo  
of Your fury, and let You devour me  
as particles of living meat and gristle.

Though I know You will rend me  
crush me, splay me open, shining  
guts and beating heart and all,  
though I know You will dash me  
against the stone gates of Helheim  
all Your damaging words flailing  
steel-tipped whips to lash the soul,  
talons and fangs tearing out everything

that makes me feel safe from myself,  
I give myself to You, wholly, with  
the aching understanding that I cannot  
ever hope to fill You, fulfill Your  
ravaging hunger for pain and chaos.

For You will swallow me only  
once Your madness has infected all  
the known world, the world I live in,  
and the death of my sanity will be  
only a last little bit of suffering after.

*Persephone's Rising*

If the Ides of March are past  
whence comes this heaviness of heart?

He said it would be like this  
in the silver half-light  
the chariot steeds splashed across the waves  
of Acheron  
then I tumbled headlong into Lethe

No forgetfulness, though,  
for She Who Never Slumbers Above  
yet she caused the earth to slumber  
her own body to be ravaged by winter's withering  
force  
Golden poppy tresses  
trembling with rage  
as I found a new half-life for myself  
fructifying  
the dead populace  
and my beloved drank deeply  
smeared himself  
with my pomegranate juices  
nectar more precious than wine, he said

Everything cavernous  
cadaverous eye sockets  
the mask of white loveliness  
frozen onto my face like the folds of  
the *himation* molded to my breasts  
The pillars of this place

gleaming with the hope  
of untold dreaming  
the quiet denizens of this murk-world gape and shuffle towards me  
arms outstretched

Mother

Queen

The curve of the sickle

Warm lap of abundance

Fertile in fallowness

Gaze not with the imperium of the Judge

but as an unconquerable Protectress

He said I was bright

I was terrible

the maw that gapes

insatiable

in this harsh landscape

the torches

inverted moonbeams

cascading down

And did not the tears I shed cascade also?

Mutely the stirring

lips smacking off hardened nipples

the statue of myself

a gleaming shape

I floated down the corridors of time

with finger upraised to my lips

But who was I warning?

I am an enigma even unto myself.

And what dreams did you have

in the wind that chilled you

lifting up my *chiton* to reveal my marble-white thighs

You moaned

whether out of pleasure or distress

I could not say  
could not fathom your lidless, cavernous gaze  
Weren't there serpents? Red and green?  
I stood on a lowly bridge  
and sang to them  
most cheerfully  
they cocked their heads to one side  
and strained to hear  
in the crystal-clear water  
the lamentation before it issued  
from my mouth  
I peppered my dirges with laughter.

How warily you watched me  
unfold myself  
from the waning moon  
the labyrinth spiraled before me  
abdication of my throne  
for the unknown  
You stirred to lap up my life-giving juices  
An exchange  
for those seeds of yours I swallowed

The light so bright it burned  
my old self away  
in the fields of swaying narcissus  
I wept as I thought of my youth  
fledgling truth  
in the satyr-haunted shadows of cypress groves  
Can I insert a finger into my own  
stillness  
hush the din of tumultuous tides?

When the sun drips low  
the extent of understanding

is redness  
When my moonblood swells  
unrestrained reason  
is madness  
I drank the *kykeon*  
I played the drum  
I made an offering

I will float through silent passageways  
levitational meditation  
with my index finger upraised to my lips  
a warning, but to whom?

I am an enigma  
even unto my Self.

Pomegranate flowers within me.

(Taste.)

*At the Witch Museum*

Their great god, a dragon decorated like a church,

Her wand in the dragon's tail,  
His tongue in her tail

The child of them both arranging the complex détente,  
Screwing the utterance into place, minutely,  
Crying 'Back a little! that's it, so I can be born...'

The witch's belt hung with black discs, silver discs,  
Swivelling and fastened close so that walking  
Shows silver slices tilting into black, black slicings,  
A belt of moons changing as she walks

And her wand, a bone painted black,  
Except where a tiny clenched hand is carved  
For riveting high up into the vesicles  
That melt the jade into her of Prester Serpent.

) *Moon 6.3.06*

Her shape is the shape  
of the Woman not there.  
∴ Always there to be worshipped.

There is no point at which  
she cannot be not there  
so she is always there  
as not there  
all there  
NOT

(¿NUT?)

∴ = "Therefore" in this instance.

# MY GRANDMOTHER'S HANDS

*Defixiones & the poetic process*

*John Harness*

I LAST SAW NANA just before the end of her life. I can't remember how long she had been sick by that point, but I remember watching her that day in the nursing home and noticing those delicate hands of hers. They were curved like claws, with switchback thumbs. I realized, in that moment, that her hands were the same as my own: Along with the family 'crooked nose', I had inherited Nana's small, delicate, and once-dexterous hands, those same hands she had used to knead the lefse every Christmas; the hands that had cradled my own when she showed me the right way to write my letters, gently but with force. I remembered how, just before her Alzheimer's disease had become conspicuously bad, she had been presented with a touch-type computer and began to sob when, despite her years as a secretary and typist during World War II, her hands had become so gnarled by arthritis and hesitant from memory-loss that she could not press the keys.

Then, in the months before her death, Nana would scratch at her eyes with those hands. I thought that she was trying to claw herself out.

After Nana's death, her hands haunted me. Because of those hands, I was made especially aware for the first time of my own mortality, and of the potential terrors of age. Ghost-like, these feelings, and the image of the hands that had engendered them. They followed me wherever I went. Particularly terrible was the feeling of being pinned down, 'fixed', as if by some unseen force. I was undone. That terrible force hovered over me until I found that I could do something about it.

*Spare me my grandmother's hands,  
Those violent and tiny fingers...*

The first lines of the poem came to me one day while I worked in a field. They rose out of me for a reason that I do not know. I had never intended to write a poem about my grandmother's hands, and yet this time, when I imagined her hands as I had done so often that year, I felt some sort of peace. Recently, I had begun to describe my depression as a whirling cloud

that I could feel turning about me constantly; but, with these few words of a short poem, I began to feel as if I were no longer being *fixed*, but that I was at last able to pick out my various feelings, one by one, and begin dealing with them.



*Defixiones* (Latin, singular: *defixio*), which are called *katadesmoi* in Greek, are known as curse tablets, and were simple magical tools that were once ubiquitous across the Hellenistic Mediterranean world. Prayers or commands would be inscribed onto iron and then be folded into tight rolls and pierced with a single nail, and then this assemblage would be thrown into a grave, a well, or buried in a pit. They were magical memos addressed to Gods and Spirits intended to compel them to complete a specific task. These devices probably evolved out of earlier magical practices in which iron figurines were manipulated in certain ways (such being bound with leather thongs or having their legs and arms twisted up and bound together), and these manipulations were intended to affect another individual through what Frazier has called image magic. *Defixiones* were remarkable for their simplicity, and they could be made quickly by anyone.

The prayers inscribed upon *defixiones* are fantastic. One such device, which was discovered in a well in the Athenian Agora, reads:

BÔRPHÔRBABARPHORBARBARPHORBABARPHORBABAIÊ  
Oh powerful BEPTU, I deliver to you Leosthenés and Peios, who frequent Juliana, to whom Marcia gave birth, so that you may chill them and their intentions, in order that they may not be able to speak or walk with one another, nor sit in Juliana's place of business, nor may Leosthenés and Peios be able to send messages to Juliana!

The long 'name' that begins this command is known as a *voces mysticae*, and is representative of a long tradition of using foreign languages and nonsense syllables – sometimes just long strings of vowels – in order to call upon arcane forces or, at least, to place the spell-caster in a state of power.

\* *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World*, ed. J. G. Gager.

Due to the inclusion of names such as the above on defixiones, it has been argued that the written elements on these tablets represent recordings of oral prayers that would have been performed above older iron figurines that had been used in similar ways.

In creating my poem (which I completed immediately after the revelation of the first lines) I had unwittingly produced a defixio, or at least I had performed metaphorically all of the physical steps in a defixio's construction. Defixios are populist magic, simple and easily constructed by anyone. They were never solely the work of professionals, and because of this they have always been highly personalized, physical and raw. They are made because an individual finds him – or herself in a state of great need (whether that be to scorn an old lover or to find a new one, for example); I had found myself gasping for breath, looking for some way to pull myself out of this 'cloud' – a great enough need, surely.

*Of course I know the words, but I'll have to learn what to do as I go. That's the trouble with the big spells, isn't it? You learn what you're doing while you do it. No chance to practice.†*

Just as an ancient spell-caster would have taken up her iron plate, I sat down with paper. Just as she would have said her initial, silent prayers, I breathed deeply and thought of Nana and her hands, hoping to finally find some mote of closure. Just as she would have scraped a stylus across the iron, etching names and words and symbols, I pulled ink across the page, slowly casting my spell.

Casting is important, actually. The very phrase *cast a spell* comes from the act of defixiones being thrown into or deposited within graves, wells, or rivers, with the intention that the spirits who were expected to carry out the actions called for on the tablet would be accessible only at these points of entry to the Underworld. Learning about various magical practices throughout the years, I have often asked myself how a magician might know that his spell is finished. Here, there is no question: a nail was pierced through the center of the folded-up tablet; then, for symbolic, magical, and physical closure, the device would be thrown away.

† Heleth in Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Bones of the Earth*.

To *cast* a poem, then, is to perform it. Even if the poem is later changed, it is in the moment of performance that the spell, the poem, is set, known, complete. In my experience with *my poem/defixio*, the process of casting was the same as my process of pinning down my feelings into particular phrases (as if with a nail) and then speaking the words to myself in mantra. I was capturing the 'cloud' of feeling and then, by taking possession of it via my poem, I could cast it away from myself and back out into the world.

*Spare me my grandmother's hands,  
Those violent and tiny fingers,  
Snapped like peanut brittle  
clawing at absent eyes.*

Now, again, I cast out my spell so that it might be taken up by all the powers of the world. Poetry is not simply a vehicle for magic; poetry needs to be hot and fleshy and powerful, intuitive and real. I'm not suggesting that my own poem is evocative for people who aren't *me*. But, as far as I am concerned, those four lines encapsulate my experience, distill it in a physical way and serve as a means to effect change within myself. Thus, poetry is magic, or at least it can be. We can use poetry not only to supplement our magical practices, but our magical practices *can be the very process of creating poetry*. Just as our ancient forbearers spoke out the powerful names, we too must be prepared to make prayers in the night!

There is an infinity in poetry, and an infinity in magic.

*Aristaeus' Footprint*

It's the cells – their congress  
in the sucking vault,  
the road, the throng,  
a dance in the muscle –  
instruction – here pulse,  
here nerve,  
they muck and writhe – the  
paper of their bodies  
making semblance,  
wishing for tongues.

And that wrecking makes  
such a salty map  
for the matter of spring  
that they burst –  
the shattered rags in wings  
and onyx footprints, jewels  
stuck in clots and  
fastened on must.

They thrust and hum out  
through the ribs  
and the meat of the mouth –  
velvet and flaking, bullock tears  
and blood.

A fallen lion  
in a desert of ravens  
and locusts  
may produce the same clutch

of gentle, stinging children.  
Beasts are best, the  
sticky certainty of  
savage livers  
opening like fists  
of peonies and bourbon roses,  
spilling pupae and  
pollinating the olives, the linden  
trees – fruit  
for the pastoral exercise,  
the cut in the earth.

And the bull, with its  
engorged and weeping eye,  
is shocked,  
not knowing it held  
such madness in its  
great hollow bones

And the red bees,  
once rioting in the hot pipeline  
beneath the skin,  
locked now in the dark tumble  
of the hive,  
wet from their  
monster birth,  
wing away  
on the breath of the bull,  
and leave marks on the flowers  
for years.

*Orpheus Ascending*

Leaving you to the rock's safekeeping  
in the basalt lung  
of the dreaming mountain  
might have been preferable –  
not braving spaces  
where the music ends  
and world begins. Out there  
migrant notes carve  
actions and alternatives;  
dreams open wounds  
seeping into the pond  
of imminent history.

Your love has wandered off  
into witless mist. Having jilted death,  
Eurydice now seeks deeper ruin  
in the tramping bedlam of a cause –

but you Orpheus surface from the escalator  
into a town where the river draws down the sky,  
grasping only your name,  
your passport stamped with shadows,  
your memory of her lost in the sobbing night.

So razoring the blue of the sky  
scarcely can you take in that building site  
cumbered with bricks and piping,  
across which a digger loudly rips  
entrails of bright red earth. Nearby, on a bench,  
a young man offers a girl a ring.

When with joy his proposal is accepted,  
you shake your head, roll your eyes  
as if your brain is firing like a sparkler –  
meanwhile the stalking metropolis  
goes pouring on  
down tunnels and subways of innumerable outcomes,  
criss-crossing lies and airways,  
orgasms of apes and blowflies,  
and your heart gutters, pauses,  
thrilled, fearful,  
tensely taking in,  
the jauntings of a busker  
fixedly strumming  
outside a cathedral that is burning.

*On Seeking Dreams*

dreams dwell in the high places  
the deep places        the far places  
your desire for them  
illumes  
their faces specks the night

with their firefly breath  
you must want them  
          need them  
enough to cry out  
wail the song of the wind  
the screeching cry of seabirds  
pour out the wine of your soul  
to discover their names

dreams are hidden  
beneath stones  
in the garden of the moon  
white as grubs or the thin    angular roots  
of poppies  
rise like cicadas once in seventeen years  
climb the pale ladder of dry rib bone

make your eyes the eyes  
of chameleons            of bees  
eyes of moles  
perceiving shadow  
the color of thunder the edge  
in the voices of the mad

you must want them  
enough to burn  
with the phoenix in her nest  
knowing that you will

not

rise  
your desire  
fills them with incense dances  
on blue lotus feet before the altars

of ancient gods  
need them  
seek dreams among the silent  
feathers of owls among the tunnels of ants  
in the fur of bears on the river                    styx  
in the spots on the sides of salmon  
returning  
in the middle month once in seven years  
drink from the spring  
and the five rivers flowing

hazel-grown    your desire  
feeds the mouths of hungry dreams  
opens their tongues of fire burns  
their memory  
on shards of glass  
you must want them so much  
that  
mountain spirits wake  
cougar spirits lick your hands  
          jay spirits cry your name  
need them  
like floodwaters  
forsaking their banks with need of valleys

to seek them  
you must learn the slow rumbling speech  
of dreams  
it has no grammar  
no runes  
carved on stone it is found instead  
in strange symbols  
painted in ochre and charcoal  
deep in the underworld  
painted on feathers on hides  
in the hearts of glaciers  
painted on

mandrake roots  
the petals of orchids the wings of  
mayflies  
cry for dreams  
rend your clothes with wanting  
tie rags on the branches of hawthorns  
that the spirits hear you  
pity your need

fill you with stars

*Hymn to Inanna*

Attacking from shore, she defeats them.  
Attacking from the sky, she defeats them.  
Attacking from below the water, she defeats them.  
Inanna moves her hand and all are defeated,  
She is the possessor of 'me', she is the daughter of Enlil.  
Lightning! Meteor! Hailstorm!  
These are the jewels of her Tiara.  
Amethyst! Raindrop! Blackbird!  
These are the threads of her divine Garment.  
Mother! You who wear the Tiara and the Garment!  
Do not move your hand against me, for I am your son.  
Mother! You who are my mother's mother,  
Do not move your hand against me, for I am your son.  
Let me carve a silver Throne for you,  
Let me carve a crystalline Bed for you.  
Lady of the Igigi-gods, daughter of the Sky God,  
Let me carve a silver Throne for you,  
Let me carve a crystalline Bed for you.

*Agni*

Dawn brings blazing saffron embers  
Through the thrown-open, rose-colored  
Throat of her sky.

She blows them over the city with an airy whisper,  
Through each wiry passage of its alleys and roads.  
Past collapsing mud huts,  
And rooftop bands  
Of whimpering monkeys and dogs –  
Until all the morning smells of her hands.

She wears the sun  
As an emblem from her neck,  
And hangs it over the river  
Where bathers secretly await.

Once her breath runs out  
The world begins to burn.  
Sweet milk boils in the heat  
And sugar runs down the trunks of trees.  
Priceless blossoms smolder in the streets  
And cloud the hills in smoke.

A madman runs to tell you  
What's behind it all.

Vessels and shrines, smashed up beyond everything,  
Statues of copper and bronze.  
Clay figurines, fresh-smoothed rocks,  
All start to shine.

The music of ghosts lifts through our hair,  
Buried behind,  
Sunken under the boards,  
Long forgotten  
In this house of tricks.

We string our threads  
Through-and-through,  
Edging past the trapdoors  
And dead-end turns.  
As silkworms twist  
Around smoking incense-sticks.

But just as we're able  
To push our eyes above the surface,  
Our needles through the cloth,  
She's already drawing the sun back down,  
Deep into her flesh,  
Its breaths clasped tight between her palms.

The shattered mirrors,  
Circumambulated by  
Beaks of dead birds,  
Beards of oil-smudged tinder,  
Thrashing snakes, crumbling bones –  
Beads of dough  
Grasped within a frightened hand.

*This is the crack between worlds.*

The madman presses in a corner,  
Touches his tiny gratification.  
But before he can even blink:  
One more breath, the strongest breath,  
And the flame is out.

Bells and chalices grip half-buried in the sand;  
But silent.

All the corners of the Earth are black,  
And the cradle is groundless.  
This is the world,  
As it has always been.

This is the world.  
Until you hear the sound of  
Water,  
And she lets out one of her breasts...

*Moon.*

Mama,  
Mama:  
Moon's milk to guide you through the night.

She murmurs:

*"Cultivate a breath*

*To fan your flame,*

*To burn through worlds."*

*Thresholds*

By her fatal egg, the heron stands;  
Abstractionist spirit  
In an artificial sky,  
Driving out devils  
Where lightning stars are born.

The trouble with being born  
Into this dark journey of sand and myrrh  
Is waiting in the future  
For the past to come.

Oedipus, Prince of Shadows  
In your passion perfect tower,  
Ivory Chrysalis  
In your Ra Ra Zoo,  
Will you march with tigers?

In a sultry month  
The green carnation flowers;  
Wolf-trap enchantment.  
On a paper bridge  
A shorn woman waits for a rescue train.

*Abraxas*

As shepherd of stars, Abraxas herds the  
Bright ones, gods and former mortals  
Lighting from distances where even light  
Appears to be darkness, ineffable, yet  
Nearer at hand is the great mover,  
Abraxas, than our own heartbeats and thoughts.  
Through winds invisible he moves,  
Assuming the forms of other deities:  
Neptune and Jupiter, Sol and Bacchus,  
Aion and Iao of the Lordly Hosts.  
Legs of serpents, head of rooster, arms  
Brilliantly winged like the gryphon winds;  
Artist among deities, shaper and shepherd.

Abraxas knows no “native” or “foreign,” by his *numena*  
Becomes all gods – a provocative barb –  
Realizing power, reifying virtue, thereby the fear  
Assuaging in they who are in the agora  
Xenophobic; divine herder of the ox  
Across broad celestial plains, the endless vista  
Streaming with the efflorescence of heavens.

*Moon and Sea*

First she arrives by rumour,  
by legend, by falsehood,  
by hope

Next she arrives by rain,  
by longing

She arrives by longing,  
and as if  
she can't help  
herself

She arrives by cloud,  
and in a mask of  
sky

She arrives  
like a craze for  
mirrors,  
a fashion for  
weeping

She arrives by longing,  
as if she really can't help  
herself

She comes to the sea  
in a rush,  
a huff,  
a tailspin,  
a snit...

Do not call her bald, do not call her  
wild,  
do not say she is not a door,  
of course she is a  
door –  
Do not insult her by saying  
she is anyone's  
mother –

She travels without maps,  
by not giving a damn,  
she comes by fullpelt  
longing

She comes at her full  
with a scorpion in her hand,  
a knife at her breast, a price on her  
head,

unannounced,  
and not always  
welcome,

arrives with her bibles that never speak of God,  
with her bitch unicorn,  
with her heart on her  
sleeve

She arrives without witnesses,  
without fuss,  
without a care in the world,  
without a backward  
glance

She came by legend, by rumour,  
she came to the sea  
    by inclination,  
        by invitation,  
            by right,

she rested her Mary-sweet hammer of light on the sea

*for John Greening*

*In which we discuss descent*

Once there was a tree, in a garden. Once there was a woman.  
Once there was a serpent, who was wise.  
He said, Know this. The sweet taste of apples. The bite of a sharp tooth.  
If you want to be alive, if you want to know your own mind,  
If you want a will of your own,  
If you want, if you want, if you taste desire –  
You will feel joy. You will feel pain.  
You will know love. You will know regret.  
That's how it is.

You can share my power, O Woman,  
of drawing spirit into form,  
of making the world anew, giving birth  
to a will independent of your own  
entrained in matter like yours, and mine.  
If you do this thing, you will also create death. That light you give, *dar a luz*,  
Will one day be extinguished. You must choose  
not only for yourself, but for all of them.  
And some, who do not love their freedom  
will despise you for it.

The woman shrugged. She was only three days old,  
but she knew a setup when she saw one;  
A chessboard with only one move.  
She could stand in that unchanging garden forever,  
pretty figure in a tapestry, or she could get going.  
Elder Sister, all dust and whirlwinds,  
had already blown this joint, red hair waving like a pirate flag: No quarter.  
The least she could do in her turn was take a bite.

*Kastalia*

Nine columns stand at Kastalia  
Round the sweet clear spring  
Bronze

For the daughters of Memory

Leave flowers first fruits honey and wine  
Drink the cool waters  
Sing

*I was nine years old when I saw the Wild Hunt for the first time; a small boy on the porch of the family home that lay half way up the side of the Vale of Lanherne on the north coast of Cornwall. I heard the rooks cawing first, their nests hanging blackly in the thick trees reaching up from the valley floor.*

*Something had disturbed them that evening. The sun had sunk below the horizon and the purple twilight deepened into a darker blue, just before the stars began to appear. The birds were up in the air, myriad shapes swirling around the church tower; a mass of flapping wings and raucous voices that seemed to flow as one singular creature. There must have been over a hundred, streaming into the sky as they flocked and wheeled.*

*I remember shivering at the thought of so many beady eyes, sharp beaks and sharper claws moving at once, my book forgotten on beside me, on the bench with its peeling green paint. Then they dived so very low, to clamp those same feet into nest and branch, abruptly silent. The air was still warm, and seconds ticked by, as if everything was trying not to breathe.*

*I saw them come like smoke, those dancing figures. Some on foot, others on horseback – all as black as night. They flexed and twisted, flowed and curved - like shadows playing across the wall of the sky. Flickering cave-paintings from ancient times, my breath caught as they streamed over the treetops and tower in deathly silence. And in that silence, I heard within my heart, my very soul, their voices lifted in skirling song.*

*A song of thunderous joy, of howling gale and roaring storm; of fierce vitality beyond even death itself. Something woke within me then, something wild and watchful, and it is with me still, years later.*

*I hear them sometimes, in the night, calling on the edge of hearing..*

CREATION IS NEVER TAME, and neither is its twin Destruction. Yet poetry is often seen as something tame, something learned in schoolrooms or used in pithy demonstrations of one's learning. But in truth, it is often a private thing, a solitary thing. The poet composes their work, taking down and providing a gateway into an experience – a sense of 'being-there'.

Drawn into such spaces, the audience enters a reality, which, far from being a simple representation, is imbued with a living vitality. Such potency is often hidden from us, the everyday maintenance of life a curtain patterned with comfortable familiarity. But the poet pulls back the curtain, and with his art shows us once again that we are not divorced from the world, but inherently, inextricably enmeshed within the flow and play of that numinous quality. It is this numinous quality that inspired this essay.

We begin with inspiration, as all art does. The breath which quickens and enlivens, drawn inward to the self, to stimulate and enflame the faculties, to stir the mind and feed the soul. It is an intoxication that sets pulse to beat and skin to tingle. Make no mistake, this is not a draught which sets one to slumber, save only when the dreams are deep and full of meaning.

The author makes no bones about his qualifications – no peer review to gain validation is required. As the reader has already seen, his initial contact with the Wild Hunt and one of its leaders was unlooked for, and yet in retrospect, has influenced his whole life to date.

*Throughout this essay are scattered touchstones of experience whose sole purpose is to allow the reader awareness that this is by no means a dry dissection, but a living, and dare we say, breathing quest.*

It is a quest for the mastery of that which is called *wōd*. It is the madness, the fury of the poet. So it is perhaps unsurprising to the reader to learn that the author is often guided by a figure whose primary name means just that. Master of the wōd. Wōdhanaz Wuotan. Wodan. Woden. Oðinn.

It is a matter of some debate whether these names refer to the same entity, at least within Germanic neo-paganism. Ultimately, the author's view is to shrug and trust to his own relationship with the Old Man and it is in this spirit that we continue, noting that one of his heiti, or titles, in Old Norse is Grimnir – meaning *Masked* or *Hooded One*.

A shape changer and sorcerer, his mantic powers and shamanic knowledge, along with the winning of the runes, render him a potent force within mythology. But an essay such as this, as with its author, is not content to let such things lie within the comfortable definition of mythology.

As a sorcerer, one's status is a living ambiguity. Even today, admitting to such practices puts one at risk of derision at the most mild, and hatred at the most extreme – outside of a relatively small group of like minded folk with which it is hoped the reader is on at least nodding acquaintance.

In times past, this ambiguity was heightened, and it is the wise sorcerer who seeks to keep it so – it does no good to remain in one shape, one seeming; adaptability is the key, for by definition the true sorcerer must be as impossible as the things he does.

Yet as with poets, regardless of subject, there is a uniqueness, a voice, a quality that permeates all shapes and works. This is the mastery spoken of, wherein there is no distinction between poetry and poet, or sorcerer and sorcery.

*I am lying on the dark hardwood floor, carefully etching shapes, speaking them aloud, telling a tale between the lines of printed text. I am three years old and have not yet begun to learn my letters with any skill, but I understand that these shapes are responsible for the story that the pictures and the cassette tape tell me again and again. I am bored with the story, and we are on holiday away from my other stacks of books.*

*I have seen the grownups make their strange spider-marks that only dimly resemble the clearly printed text, so I decide to make my own, and listen to my own voice. I slip away, somewhere else, taking myself into the land of talking trains and mishaps and lives on a small island.*

*I am aware that I am telling the tale but it is as real as real, the pictures assuming new meanings, diverging and twisting into something else. My hand moves, each new line sandwiched in the spaces between, organic and scrawled, a filling of raw creativity.*

*When it is done, I turn the page and start again, yet more stories, And when my hand begins to ache from the unfamiliar effort, I put down the pen and turn back to the beginning, drawing yet more from my own glyphs.*

*Over a decade later, I found that book, buried in a box, just as I began to wonder about the existence of sorcery as something real again. The scrawl was unreadable, lacking in sense, and even in spite of that, I was propelled backward through time, into that same creative space.*

The faculty for creation, for inspiring where no breath was before, is a primary component of the Old Man. According to the Eddas, Óðinn and his two brothers gave life to the first humans, found as trees on the beach – imbuing them with the unique characteristics of mankind.

It is this comfort with walking the world, with stirring up the furious processes of being – even in the depths of the darkest places – that is an inexorable fundamental of the sorcerer's crooked path. Across all the worlds and dreams of men he must stalk, from the deepest hells to the highest heavens, experiencing and communing with the quintessential force of the wōd within himself, and his environment.

A truism of magical lore is the notion of like calling to like, and the wōd is certainly no exception. Both sorcerer and poet are drawn to those things which incite beauty, sadness, awe and terror. These are the extremes, states and places of being full of potency that sets the blood to sing, the mind to reel and the soul to soar like an eagle – shrieking in the joy of the flight.

But to the true master, the wōd may be recalled within the humdrum – that store of strength within the belly and bones, blood and other fluids – may be concentrated until the surging energies are turned inward, magnetizing the sorcerer-poet and setting the very world itself to call out and reveal itself. Once again, from that primal cauldron, that seething, roiling well at the deepest roots of things, is drawn forth the ever shifting *prima materia* with which new things may be made. From *Hávamál*:

*Wounded I hung on a wind-swept gallows  
For nine long nights,  
Pierced by a spear, pledged to Odhinn,  
Offered, myself to myself  
The wisest know not from whence spring  
The roots of that ancient rood  
They gave me no bread,  
They gave me no mead,  
I looked down;  
with a loud cry  
I took up runes;  
from that tree I fell.*

Here we see the words of the High One, speaking of the shamanic ordeal undertaken in order to gain the runes. Sacrificed to himself, he is now set apart from all others, acknowledging none higher except the larger pull of his true nature. The personality is infused with the wōd in totality, and the World Ash, that fundamental axis, is now named as Yggdrasil, or *steed of the Terrible One*.

Truly, it is said that the union of horse and rider causes them to flow as one thing – there is no division, only a mastery. Thus the body of that wily old shaman has become inseparable with the World Tree, hearkening backward to the tale of mankind as trees. The breath of the gods once again suffuses the flesh, enabling an ancient atavistic resurgence, a method of recalling into flesh the atavisms long since buried under the back patio of humanity.

The English sorcerer-artist Austin Osman Spare was one of the first to set down in writing the notion of such atavistic behaviours, something known since ancient times by the earliest sorcerers. His charmingly named ‘Death Posture’ echoes the sacrifice made upon Yggdrasil.

It is this ability to draw forth from memory, to hold whole worlds inside oneself that made poets so prized in ancient times. The ravens that perch on the shoulders of the Old Man are named Thought and Memory, and it is said that he fears more for the loss of Muninn, or Memory, than Huginn, or Thought.

Without the ability to ‘look down’, as the Havamal puts it, there is no material for Thought to work upon. Only in union betwixt the two is the wisdom revealed; the runes as glyphs, sounds and shapes that open up the primal Mysteries which enable the sorcerer to work his will.

*It is midnight, and I have been in Hanging Town for five years, four of those at university, studying philosophy by day and blowing my mind with magic and utmost strangeness by night. I pass through the Priory graveyard, the brooding presence of the Castle on my right. Tonight, I am not going to sit and meditate in the Gallows Corner.*

*Tonight I have good whisky in my hand and I am nervous. It has been two years since the Old Man smiled at me and told me to learn every trick I could, and the lwa of Vodun gently told me my own ancestors were waiting.*

*I sit and look down on the town, sulphur streetlight and cobbled roads. The impetus to cast a circle dies, and suddenly I am aware I am trembling slightly. My breath is uneven, the words halting at first, then bursting free like a roaring icy torrent. I see the shadows out of the corners of my eyes, thickening, becoming more present.*

*I dare not turn. I dare not stop, despite the terror that suddenly seizes me, freezing my muscles solid and heralding a wave of agony.*

*Rigid, sopping with cold sweat and speaking to something that was never ever human, I somehow resist the urge to bow my head, as I yank the stopper out the bottle with my teeth and neck a long pull. The burn nearly makes me pass out, my eyes stinging, lips drawn back in a half-snarl.*

*I gasp out the words, croaking like my throat has been cut, and suddenly a dim memory of the cord binding me to my mother surfaces. It is wrapped around my neck, and I am dying before I am even born. Then later, amidst the artifice of man, death reaches out again to slow my heart and stop my breath, and I am almost gone.*

*Then once again I am upon the hill with streaming eyes, sacrificing myself to my Self.*

*The second pull sets my tongue to twitch, and I spew out whisky to the four directions, uncaring of the massive presence which always seems to be standing behind me whichever way I turn. Slowly, returning to myself, I find my left hand is dripping with whisky, though the bottle is gripped in my right. As I feel myself falling backward again into an even deeper trance, I do not recall how it occurred...*

The poet becomes the warrior. The battle fury rises up and the wolf and the bear uncurl from their lairs and fill the world with their cunning and strength as men fall like wheat under a scythe. And all the while, the raven's circle, plucking up the choicest morsels.

Amidst it all, he stands, grim smile upon his lips, spear at the ready, as men scream in their death-throes, blades shattering. He is old, and weary, and they are young and full of fire, yet is they who fall, the powerful ended by the old one-eyed man.

For it is not about power, or weakness – but who is to be master.

He is called *Chooser of the Slain*, this god of poetry, war, sorcery, madness, sex and death. His wisdom can sway armies, his charms turn aside blades and ensnare lovers. His words turn brother against brother, and unite broken lands under the raven banner. His is the voice that calls the Wild Hunt to ride and the Einherjar to battle and rise again. His are the feet that cross the icy wastes of the underworld.

All these things and more are his, and yet, they are not him. He moves through the worlds, only ever as himself – known by the living and the dead. And it is to these last we turn now, for the wōd stirs even in the most ghostly of hearts and reveals ways of communing with those long since gone from the pathways of the living, and drawing upon their wisdom.

For even in the most terrible of battles, the inspiration may be found. Even in the dustiest mausoleum, most rotten ruin, most horrific tragedy, comes that thrum, that heady drumbeat pulse which is beyond and within all things.

Along the coffin paths the sorcerer walks, unafraid, for is neither living nor dead but a thing of the in-between, the liminal spaces. It is that liminality which enables him to cast a blazing eye over the ranks of evil spirits and have them quail as he smiles and bids those awful things welcome without fear.

From the paraphernalia of death comes the wisdom of corruption, the knowledge of the monstrous held as equal to the paramount beauties of the age. From these untouchables, the sorcerer makes himself untouchable, an equal worker of both hands – not a practitioner of the so called middle way, but rather a creature of flight and burrowing both – the Old Man became both wyrm and eagle as he stole the mead of inspiration from its keeper and her jealous father.

In the same tale, he murders men casually, blatantly titling himself Bolverk, or *Worker of Evil*. Such admittance of the ambiguous nature of the working of sorcery exemplifies its nature as an alternate mode of existence.

The Wanderer, the Outlander, the Dangler on the Gallows – all these speak of someone outside the apparent mutuality of society; the poet as social critic is a milder manifestation of the same current, a social appropriation.

Such a man as the sorcerer is an outlaw. This may be tempting to romanticize, until one considers that an outlaw is literally bereft of rights, and all the benefits that they ensure. Unless he bands together with other outlaws, he is literally on his own within a world that is unyielding, and where survival is *not a right*.

Therefore, his sense of self must be just that – there is only ever himself to sacrifice to.

*I am 23 and soon to be homeless. My time at university is nearly over and all but the last half of my Masters thesis is complete. Academia has become suffocating, and I have nowhere else to go.*

*Driving home from a friend's house one night, the traffic lights are green and my mind is only half on the road. Something makes me reduce my speed, and then my eyes catch up. Sat on the pavement, tongue lolling out pinkly in the summer darkness, is a large shaggy black dog that appears to be waiting to cross the road.*

*The road is clear, it's 1 am. So I slow to a stop, engine idling, waiting. After a moment it trots across the road and disappears down a side-street. Amused, I continue the drive home to campus.*

*Two nights later, a friend of mine is stranded by a cancelled train in the next town over. Its twenty minutes up the motorway. I and two others volunteer to drive there and get her. It's 1 am again, and I indicate to come off of the motorway onto the slip-road, slowing down from 70 mph. As we peel off, something crunches in my shoulder and there is a flash of agony down my arm.*

*I lose control, only for a moment, but it is enough. The car swerves, fishtails and I vainly slam on the brakes, steering into the skid. Everything slows down and I swear once, deadpan. We hit the offside barrier at sixty, then bounce across the dual carriage-way to plough into its brother, then back again to crunch to rest some distance further on.*

*The airbags have exploded. The smell of cordite and plastic and dust hangs thick in the air. There is a heavy metallic thud as the engine drops. The car is utterly destroyed, and we are all unharmed.*

*Three hours later, shaky and sleepless, I remember the black dog's lazy amble, and wonder if I was due to die tonight.*

There is no rabies in the UK, no risk of dying at the hands of a frothing creature with madness in its eyes – animal quarantine has seen to that. But somewhere, that madness still lurks as a fear – the beast that knows no rules, and is immune to chastisement, wounds and pain.

Somewhere, deep down under the thin veneer of the civilized world, lies a memory of monsters. Of giants hungry for human flesh. And as the knife twists and the scarlet droplets kiss the earth in the night, from somewhere rumbles the grating voice of something with teeth the size of tombstones.

*'Fee-fie, fo-fum, I smell the blood of an Englishman. Be he alive, or be he dead, I'll grind his bones to make my bread!'*

Under a cold moon, shapes run in ancient forests, big and bad and hungry. Four legs or two, the shadows flowing over dog-heads, wolf-heads, boar tusks and ululating howls. From the sea comes fire and axe and death and horn's winding song.

Yet, I say to you, the poet is always ever there – the wild man of Myrddin, of Taliesin the twice-born thieving bastard, of Bolverk dripping stolen mead upon the tongues of men. The sorcerer reaching out and fusing the chain of days together, making Once and Future bleed into each other like the most glorious of dreams.

Flesh and fur ripple and flex, and the beast and man conjoin in a coupling of the most obscene beauty – the wheel turned back, groaning in ecstasy. Squatting by the graveside, whispering urgently to the corpse that leaps upward like a knife, cold and dead and filled with something alien.

A worm-eaten kiss of ice, met with the fire of lust.

The innocence of a primordial murder, blood drowning countless kin, as the gaping void plays host to a furious dismemberment. And from those cracked bones and shattered skull, a world is made.

Such is the way of the old tales. In blood and death and graves of kings, in dark nights and darker deeds. Such things remain, long after the 'Happily Ever After's have turned to moth-eaten dust. This is not to extol them above the brightness, but to illustrate the fact that, long after the fire gutters out, there still remains an incontrovertible nature.

Long after the fuel runs out, and the ash is cold; after the metal corrodes and the blade crumbles, something remains. It raises its hoary head and smiles with sharp teeth, and gathers the night about it like a cloak. It moves from house to house and kisses the brows of sleepers, sending them strange and feverish dreams.

That way, there will always be poets.



*An Electrical Hex*

This body is a hive  
and its thoughts are swarming  
they come out of the dirt  
and out of the swamp  
and they will not give heed to your warnings  
no, they come they come they come.

We come  
of legion and desperate choir,  
to burn into the roots of desire,  
to sow our seed into your will,  
and let it bloom into the deeds you fulfil.  
And to our hosts we propose a toast  
of broken dreams  
and lifetimes of ghosts  
that follow you all along to your rest  
where epitaphs are empty of distress  
and midnight keeps flashing  
from an electrical hex.

We cut it to pieces and we rearranged,  
we tied one to the next until it fit the frame,  
we took broken English and ran it through our filters  
until it came out in an approximate syntax,  
we collected all of the necessary facets  
so it could talk itself up into grandeur,  
and we clothed it in some simple desires,  
all basic colours  
and shades of canned laughter.

So, sick with will it moved to entertain,  
its deviant structures were given free rein.  
And so, sick from will it collapsed into corners,  
away from this light that broke down its borders.  
It began to lay traps all 'round itself  
to justify its constant cries for help,  
as its confusion, it locked itself into a groove  
that collected up dust like its cold, rented room.

They, they, they stick their fingers in  
and they, they, they flick the switch.

All this  
All this  
You  
Reduce to distress.

Now that I've found myself a vice,  
I work its grip until it holds me tight,  
and I close it off from all the prying eyes  
that might have a cause to question its rights.  
Well, the gestures to which you have grown accustomed  
come forth from a tired old store of assumptions  
that carry your vision with quiet command  
and keep you from feeling all the sleights of hand.

They, they, they stick their fingers in  
and they, they, they flick the switch.

All this  
All this  
All this  
You you you  
Reduce to distress.

Now my organs they wear me so weary,  
so I take you scraps whenever they're near me,  
and I wash myself in all your frozen images  
that move me backwards through all of my past pillages,  
and give me access to all of those times  
that memory refuses to let me define  
for fear that I might forget all of the actions  
that keep my fingers reaching towards that button.

All those  
All those  
Little deaths  
We'll  
Reduce to a hex.

We move through all of your machines  
that calculate all your words and all your needs  
and grow to recognise all of your actions  
so that they might be broken down into patterns.  
And I hear your voice and I know your name  
as it filters out to me through your sick refrain  
and gathers up dust in its narrow groove  
as it turn and turns in its cold, rented room.  
And I've grown weary of your tired dreams  
that have become just another part of your routine  
and you seem to function like a dead machine to me.  
You seem to function like a dead machine.

They, they, they stick their fingers in  
and they, they, they flick the switch.

*Hymn to Anat*

'Anwat

(among the Arabians)

'Anat'Ashtart

(among the Syrians)

'Attar'atta

(in the Aramaic tongue)

'Anta 'Antu

(so named in Akkadia)

'Anat 'Anath 'Anata

(so named in Ugarit)

Anit Anti Antit Anant Antart Anatanta

(so named in Egypt)

she who is

The Maiden Who Lives on the Mountain of 'Inbib

(batalat, sexually free, owned by no man)

but also

Heifer to the Bull of Ba'al

(mother of seventy calves)

and

Qadashu

(holy one of love)

but also

The Destroyer

(she wades through hip-deep blood and piss)

(she slew Yahm of the Abyss and Mot of the Pit)

but also

The Weaver of the Purple

(she crushes the murex in her hands)

but also

The Self-Anointed

(balsam on forehead, throat, wrists, belly she leads the sacrifice)

but also

The Refreshing Dew

(glistening in the early morning)

Lady

Many-Named

Who is the Strength of Life

and the Mother of Nations

*Blood-Fed Tree*

I have divined your shadow  
By the curve of bone by the  
Glass falling from the sky  
By the taste of all your venom  
Seeping past my teeth.

Legs tattooed, thigh to heel,  
with poisoned prayers  
to goddesses that seek revenge.

*Annihilation beneath her dress*

Through her hands one could see  
Bitter milk pouring from the stars  
And the perfume of death and desire.

I will wrap the words around your fragrant skin  
Will pull my ink from the tales  
Dangling from your tongue.  
Ribcage humming, pelvis aflame,  
While insects climb in your hair.

*Dried roses pressed into muddy pages*

And for this moment  
The abyss is at its loveliest.  
She's a rush of static  
Licking the edge of a cup  
Full of crushed skulls  
And hot, honeyed water.

*The pulp of her heart stains our hands*

All the water in the sea would not suffice to  
Claim my desire or dispel my need to scream.  
The sea could not consume  
The women I have been, despite my efforts  
To give them away  
Or drown them.

*Beautiful thighs mummified by scars*

Engraved collar bone, wounded with secret languages, the waiting, and  
the moment.  
A stone such as this  
Knows no freedom.

*The fingers crackle with the friction in between*

Blooming with black painted betrayals,  
Perfumed lies.  
How I long for the embrace  
Of your cruelest lie,  
My tongue a memorial  
To things unspoken.

*The exhalation of abysses*

*Room of Wax*

The witch pulled the lever and her cellar filled with hot wax,  
The mice, the boxes of nails, the live matches,  
The well head, the altar and the human sacrifice:  
The girl with the welling heart, and the goat-headed man  
With dagger dripping on the return-stroke –  
Before they knew it, in a flash-flood  
Of hardening wax of bees, caught for ever in the act.

The carpet made of her friend's skin, 'Is it not better  
To remember him?' the small pizzle lank and empty.  
She would walk over it barefoot, remembering him.  
It is like brown suede, we make love on it. On the shelf  
The young black cat sat in the jar pickling  
A smoky wine: 'If you want to be a witch you must drink it.'  
I did, and I am; the cellar door swinging open on the smooth wax room,  
The secrets running away like water in the blueflare blowflame.

*Moonspeed*

Very quickly the moon shuns  
the massive domes and rounded arches  
of Byzantium,  
the centre-fold cities of America,  
Russia's cross little citadels,  
by-passes backmost lakes,  
all waters, cornerstones of rivers,  
moon rushing  
over orchards of peach and plum,  
shoving clouds before her  
in a cosset of shadow,  
dashing over linens  
draped on tenement poles,  
over all your old addresses,  
skimming the brightness  
from each port-of-call, carrying  
tomorrow's news in her breast,  
along with the latent weeping of all living things,  
and glittering fast, very fast over the South Pole  
where the key to understanding Art Nouveau resides,  
over the great Alps  
in their snowy hair-shirts  
and over Europe, which she salutes in passing,  
coming to rest above my garden,  
bringing me, whether I like it or not,  
the first rain of the summer-end.

*Abrasax*

The first angel of my wrath cries out  
with the tongue of a bird –  
ARAI! ARAI!  
Bright spears of fire and stars rain down.

Golden Helios walks before me  
crying out the dawn  
singing my hymns  
singing LAILAM with a voice of flame  
burning on his lips.  
He blinds my enemies with his voice.

I encompass all  
my body the bright horizon  
my body is radiance and the light of creation  
my body the brilliance in the soul of all things.  
The fire of my being purifies all evil.

I set the stars in their places  
still in the night sky  
holding the pin of heaven about which eternity revolves.  
Even Horus must cry out in wonder at my power.

I am the number and the days of the year –  
I am time itself  
my foot like a serpent weighing down the necks of my enemies.  
Thoth raises his paws at my coming.

I am the cry of the cock at dawn  
the red wings of the eagle

bright with the blood of my prey  
and upon my breast  
holy words of destruction  
holy words of creation  
holy breath that breathes with all that lives.  
By the seal with my form, work wonders.

~ARIEL

EGRE~GORE

\* ~ *Morgen of Lyonesse to the Sunset Bound* ~ \*

Tendrils of Magick seep from the Internet  
Twenty-four ~ seven, nights and days.  
Tantalising ectoplasmic effervescent tentacles,  
Spinney phosphorescent fern fingers  
Languorously unfurl, penetrate my slumber.  
Log-on! And I, the little cyber Match-Girl,  
With precious few matchsticks left  
Like Rapaccini's daughter under her Datura  
Inhaling their otherworldly scent,  
Hooked by indefinable longings  
For unnameable things, become restless.  
Famished amorphous etheric Shades  
Poke my dream, probe my flesh,  
Crafted by Will of disembodied strangers:  
My faceless hierophantic Brothers  
With Pantagruelian appetite  
Exuberantly roam in Cyberspace,  
Where the Laws of Gravity don't apply?

In the prosaic confinements of a dull existence  
Pervasive phantasmagorical Emanations  
A gem-like kaleidoscope of astral corollas  
Seductively unfold, entwine, caress  
Tantalise and uproot. And I,  
Thoroughly modern Moonchild,  
Mesmerised, entranced by their convolutions,  
Forgetting for a time both Nature and Nurture,  
Melt, merge, dissolve,  
Engulfed by this Great Tide.

Psychic waves swell tangible as the scent  
Forbidden of blood and roses,  
The smell of burning tallow wicks,  
The spice of leather upon flesh,  
A heady Open Source psychotropic draught  
Bleeds from the Internet.  
Talismanic gales blow by numbers  
Relentlessly rock my boat.  
No matter how tight I have myself  
Bound in solitary confinement  
To the rickety mast of my banal shipwreck,  
They prevail: For the whole  
Is greater than the sum of its part.

Pervading mists penetrate my stranglehold,  
Rousing herds of long chastened  
Unshackled heraldic Beasts  
Sleuth of primeval atavistic urges,  
Shoals of unspeakable feral instincts.  
In the disquieting twilight of a Dawn  
That never quite breaks into Day,  
I beg the Shongmaw mend my broken heart,  
But He doesn't come. Instead  
Bilge water oozes, bitter as tears,  
Droves of addictive yearnings like Golems unleashed,  
Hack at my safety net, the wilderness of brambles  
Where I murky Chalice of Air, Water, Earth,  
Swamp awaiting the kiss of Fire, slept.

My hand, languid, rests upon cool metal of laptop.  
Carmine peonies in broken blue vase slowly die;  
Yesterday: engorged, tight and tumescent,  
Shedding a lush carpet upon the dusty floor,  
Their slow fall like a clock disquieted at first  
The precarious comfort of my little Abyss.

Now greedily I bury my face  
In the faintly scented petals,  
Hungry for their soft, moist, cold caress  
As the occult cyber peep-show twirls,  
Night and day: Memetic novelty-shop Arcanas  
Spell swirling neoteric Mayas over Gaia.  
Death-Posture! Nimble reptilian fingers  
Animate a writhing theatre  
Of artful Mandrake Servitors,  
Conjure a Typhonian Pick-and-Mix  
Of sharp sygilised Urban Myths.  
Exalted, they arise like Baron Samedi  
From the juicy bone yards of Pop Counter-Culture.  
A kaleidoscope of foxy Masks, cloaked  
In voluptuous shreds of bewildering Paradigms,  
Shimmy in the Shadow of the Tree:  
Papa Legba waltzes with Eris,  
Cthulhu tangos with Madonna,  
O! Ancient Mother: Mercy!  
The Universe: a whirling Street Carnival.  
Utterance of forbidden names in raucous fractals  
Rips diaphanous feather shrouds, reveals  
Glimpses of cryptic Nightside Temenos.  
Polyamorous hermaphrodite Heroes  
With heterochromic irises seek  
Chemycal Wedding at the Torture Garden.  
Prometheus, arise! I wanna live forever!  
You know Al-ad-Insane was a junkie.

Ohm Namah Shivaya! Dionysos is on DMT

And all the Spheres blur, veils upon veils.  
Ouranian thunderbolts tear down  
The rigid equilibrium of my precarious Tower:  
My ancient Lions flee!

How I long for the Red Chamber,  
The birch, the Cup and the Liknon!  
I hide my lantern under a bushel:  
I will fly away with the Old Gods  
Upon the wings of an Owl.  
Do not unplug your computer  
It will turn off automatically.

*1: FAUNUS / FELIX*

My co-walker  
traced the lemniscus  
around two black –  
bird eggs my daughter's cat  
had left out –  
side the back door.

I did not share  
his delight in clouds  
and unemphatic asexual  
nudity but sank  
down into the mud earth:  
wet, humid, stagnant, occult.

Too wayward to heed  
the slow thought of metals,  
I adopted the death posture ...

# CHARM MAKER

*Lover's speculation & inbreath*

Ruby Sara

*The Charm Maker wakes up to the sense of winter outside the window, a presence, unseen. Through the blinds she sees wrens in the naked bush outside, against a backdrop of snow. The breath whorls in her blood, the welling up of Moment – her cold fingers press against the glass, the weight of her skin, the sleep still clinging to the wooden bed frame, the quilts. It is only a small music, a brief brush against the Veil. It pools in the lamplight and eddies around the cold floor. The day begins with a message and a risk, that the Moment will be lost, and become only a ghost in the skin...*

THE WORD POEM HAS ITS ORIGINS IN GREEK, from the word *poema*, meaning a thing made or created, from *poein* to make or compose. I find this hilarious. I think not even the Greeks knew how to define poetry – it was as ineffable to them as it is to us... something known when it is seen. Something made. A spell also is just a string of words, in the right combination equipping the crafter with the power to enchant (to ensorcel in words), to charm (incantation). A charm of making, then? A poem. A song. The tongue of god.

The poet, therefore, a maker. A maker of things. A creator. A do-er, a crafter, an artisan. What does she create? What does she make? Why, that which is made. Naturally.

We deal in primal mess when we seek to grok poesis. Bedrock, feral truths, poetry is so vast and so deep that it is almost impossible to communicate except through itself; in other words, poetry has only been best defined through poetry. It resists quantification – this is its ineffable beauty and its insanity. We may spend all of ourselves, our lives, rolling over a grassy bed of poetry forever, turning it one way and the other, making mountains out of it, and then cutting them down piece by piece. We can thrust ownership stakes deep within it, parse out a claim, say that we know what it is, that we can define it, make out its boundaries, dress it up and dress it down, but, not unlike theology, this is really only a lover's speculation, weighing ceaselessly the heart-muscle of that which is loved, to gauge its depth and

measure its breadth, but happily knowing at the same that this is not one life's work, but all of them, Life's Work, and cannot ever be fully plumbed, finished, exhausted, or spent. The perfect lover in that way, really. And a devil lover on the other.

This process then, this lover's speculation, is also the process in the Work. And through the application of this alchemy, burning the marc down to its most potent form and reintroducing it back to its liquid essence, the art of the poem in process becomes also the art of the human in transformation. The embodied and enchanted soul.

It's something of a fractal – a metaphor built of metaphors, when we seek to define poetry in terms of alchemy, or pentecost, or supplication, when we look for a house of images that will say also what is tucked in the heart of the Great Work. A confusing, contradicting, messy venture. It may be a house of cards, or sand in the end. But we do it anyway, we human animals. It is in our nature, like morning hustle of birds in the wood, or the curl of a feral dog's lip.

*The Charm Maker watches the light feel along the crooked tree with needle fingers, tricking out each nuance and shadow; watches it bleed along the bed of grass, the swollen water, the mourning dove's pearl vest and banded throat. The day bends towards her, whispering. She licks her thumb and fixes it, fast, against her heart where she examines it, turns it over to look for its occult fruit beneath the surface. The fog in the poplars that morning, the sunlight on the oaks now; she invites them into her home like clients seeking love potions, the brindled cat lies in a pool of sweet warmth and tucks its nose into its paw. The day says to the Charm Maker: there is a need.*

Here, in brief form, is the process as I have experienced it:

Catalyst. Pentecost. Write. Despair. Edit. Despair. Edit. Read out loud. Despair. Edit. Read out loud. Laugh. Make tea. Close eyes. Reopen eyes.

Edit.

Edit again.

Stop and pray: *There but for the grace of my god goes this poem... for it is finished!*

Wait three weeks.

Edit.

It is indeed a forever process with no discernible endpoint. Each step is a bonfire – sometimes glorious, sometimes painful – though the bonfire seems from a distance at times, and the work can be grinding, mundane, and slow. Are they wrens or sparrows out the window in the morning, exchanging night gossip and the flotsam of a city street breakfast? Does it matter if they are one and not the other? Does ‘sparrow’ sit so well within the poem that sound trumps truth in pursuit of illuminating Truth? And the ugly moments, the heavy crushing weight of a sluggish poem, an obscured message, the wrong words, an off-rhythm. Sometimes the fierce blaze of giving up – a death, a corpse, some verse stashed away in cobwebs to await a chancy and unlikely revival, perhaps years later, perhaps never. But through the fire, beyond the ash and dream, there are some that live and glitter and dazzle, and the process tunes them to a divine frequency, and this is worth it.

All of these movements together is a lifetime lived under the burn of a light, a late night, a mess of paper, bliss and nightmares. Distilled down to three and put under the poet’s microscope – they become a dance in meditation: drum and tambourine, the making of charms.

**INSPIRATION:** Pentecost & Burn; the Whiskey in the Words

*The Charm Maker sits in an expectant hush. She is waiting on her lover, a beam of grace, a shower of gold, the brush of petals against her cheek. She is a student of an ancient yoga, the drawing in of breath, inspiration. There is a pressure on her body, she feels it, the temperature rising, the kindled star in her chest. It is close, the wall, the veil, the thing up against she brushes when she sets to this holy waiting, this opening to the Word. There is need. There is always need. The Charm Maker waits to ensoul the moment, to ease it into being, give meat and weight to its grace and air, make it known. She is taken, laboring with sweat on*

*her brow and at the same time swept up in an unquenchable fire. Those who look at her in these moments look away again quickly. They blush, feeling they have seen her without her clothes on. They have.*

Inspiration has been considered the most elusive of all the stages of poetic alchemy. From whence does it come, and how? In a recent presentation, author Elizabeth Gilbert shared that the poet Ruth Stone had once explained that her poems would come to her in the form of enormous moving *trains of air* thundering over the landscape – and when she felt one approaching over the fields, she would have no choice but to drop what she was doing at that exact moment and *run like hell*. If she made it to a pen and paper by the time the poem moved through her, then she was able to capture it – if not, she would feel it barrel through her body and move out again over the hills, looking for another poet. This description made me breathless and filled me with amazement, but it was not an accurate depiction of my own experience. Inspiration comes to each and each differently – sometimes so intimately and so uniquely that the artist may even be loathe to share... feeling perhaps that they are kissing and telling, drawing back the curtain on something so treasured and personal that it should never be seen by another.

And these are just the unexpected moments – when something ineffable reaches out its golden paw and rakes the poet upside her skull, the dove descending. In the marriage of occult knowledge and discipline together with the art of poetry, there is also the matter of seeking that inspiration – of claiming the role of hunter while at the same moment owning fully that one is also most assuredly and forever the hunted. The hunter-poet has a treasury of tools and tricks available to her – maybe the flicker of beeswax candles, perhaps the summer sweetness of saffron... the world at sunset, the smell of tobacco and coffee at midnight, the curve of a leopard's hind leg in leaping, lights and stars, taxonomy, astronomy, a woman with eyes like dark jade dancing, the fact of moss, cardamom, tragedy. It comes from everywhere, this strange and decadent god. It comes from nowhere and all things – perfect and ugly. All things, the merging of opposites, the horizon star. Poetry is bigger on the inside than on the outside. And Inspiration is the master of its key, the keeper of the Word. The Word is a god. The Word is God.

*I am the first and the last.  
I am the honored and scorned.  
I am the whore and holy one.*

*I am the woman crying out  
and cast upon the face of the earth.  
I prepare bread and my mind within.  
I am the knowledge of my name.*

*Hear me, hearers,  
and find out about my words, you who know me.  
I am the hearing all can reach;  
I am speech undecipherable.  
I am the name of the sound  
and the sound of the name.\**

It would make sense then, to court inspiration as one would court their god. See how easily it becomes a spirit, a personality, a daemon – this verb, this breathing in. The Greeks famously called the spirit-god of inspiration a Muse and catalogued nine of them according to their notions of art. So in keeping with the holy task, the hunter-poet may also seek wisdom in prayer, in supplication, in the processional. On the altar of that god she leaves bay leaves and some dark smoke – a glass of wine, a bowl of rosebuds, blood from the tender pad of her left thumb, and the knife that cut her.

The hunter-poet, wrapped in cloud, armed with moonlight and juniper, circles her prey – the hulking beast, as uncommonly graceful as the forest floor or a humming volcano. She sharpens her weapon against night granite and steadies her heart. She strikes.

And the moment she pierces its heart, she is struck. Half dumb with the wash, the midnight sun, the fountain. The Word.

\* *Thunder: Perfect Mind* from *The Gnostic Bible*, Ed. Willis Barnstone & Marvin Meyer. New Seeds Books, 2003.

EDITING: Words, Wining, & the Work

*The Charm Maker unfolds her poem puzzle box and sifts through the contents. A thimble, a feather, a tumble of scarlet glass beads, a blue marble. Her beloved has left her, and the light is different. Now she bends her skill to the work, arranging each piece in accordance to an inner rhythm she feels in her marrow. The wind rifles through her papers and she smells incense. A rag made of linen and younger memories comes unfurled from her toolbox; with it she polishes and shines this new animal, this beachcomber collection, this rosewater/lake-fire/shadow/melt/newness/burning/crackle and illumine/numen/journey/seed/star in a boneshell/breathfog/laughing/deer at water/life in leaves/curl/shimmy/nightfall/handsdovesapples/nightmare/waste*

*sweetness  
beachlight  
narwhal*

*sleep*

This is the less glamorous task. The chop-wood-carry-water, the coming-down-from-the-mountain, the post-coital reckoning, the make-something-of-it-now-and-do-not-disappoint. The Work.

There are those who believe that divine inspiration is not to be trifled with. That if it came shooting down from the great vault or up from the whirling abyss, its gospel nature cannot be polished. But the truth is that the roiling, shattering bliss of inspiration is only the beginning. The raw materials are sustenance enough maybe, but they are not a meal. So the hunter-poet submits her work to the primeval oven, mouth of fire, to temper her kill and make it a work of alchemical art – an ancient transmutation, the application of human toil to the astonishing, effortless arc of the divine. And the word becomes bread.

In peasant mythology the oven had a magic dimension, and ritual propitiators presided over the rising and baking of bread... The oven was where food passed from the raw to the cooked state, and like all transitional places (chimneys, doors and so on) it held a powerful

magic: the rising of dough was associated with the rise and ‘growth’ of the solar orb in the sky...

The smoky chimney with its black cowl was a sort of astral conduit through which the interior communed with the remote vastness of the sky: down through that funnel into the kitchen came the *befana*, talking crickets, cosmic and solar fragments, the voice of the wind bearing gifts or messages of fear; and through it they all rose up again and returned to the empty sky. The wind made the flame waver and lightly stirred the ashes, in which old folk read the ‘signs.’<sup>†</sup>

The poem needs the poet – her skill, her craft. That *wild, silky part of ourselves without which no poem may live*<sup>‡</sup> can be read as the voice of Inspiration itself, but in the light of the occult artist who perceives an animate and mysterious world outside of the self, this is something else altogether. In the editing process, in the meeting, we find that the god that slumbers in the Word needs to dance with the wild and silky poet herself, so that the two together create something both sublime and accessible. Fermentation, that mystery and holy god, needs the human imagination to make bread.

So, the baker-poet again finds that she has a host of tools at her disposal. Measurements, ingredients, recipes, experimentation. Sound, alliteration, rhyme, rhythm, form. The fire of concentration, where, as Jane Hirshfield comments, we enter the state of being *quietly physical – a simple, unexpected sense of deep accord between yourself and everything... time slows and extends, and a person’s every movement and decision seem to partake of perfection*.<sup>§</sup> This is the deep meditation, the physicality of ritual, of performing seemingly mundane actions in aching, exact sequence in order to illuminate the Real.

And the work can be painful and slow – the kneading and mixing – globe after globe of dough on a board, exhausting the arms, face rimed with sweat from the blistering oven. And the dreaded moment, when the yeast has died and the bread is lifeless – the retirement of so much effort and care, a

† Camporesi, Piero, tr. Joan Krakover Hall. *The Magic Harvest: Food, Folklore and Society*. Polity Press, 1993.

‡ Oliver, Mary. *The Poetry Handbook: A Prose Guide to Understanding and Writing Poetry*. Harcourt Brace, 1994.

§ Hirshfield, Jane. *Nine Gates: Entering the Mind of Poetry*. HarperCollins, 1997.

failure. But this too is needed. Before even the grain can be milled it must be threshed, and so it is the process that leads, that:

*takes me to the fields,  
plants me between the rows, fills my cupped  
hands with grasses, shows me how to blow and rub  
until the chaff floats free like a cloud of peeled  
insect wings, pale and papery in the blue dusk.<sup>9</sup>*

So we find the baker-poet in front of the stone hearth, twisting out braided loaves by the light of that perfect, timeless fire, the grain winnowed and threshed and ground, the poem fermented and risen, ready to be thrust into the brick and orange-throated mouth – for the mutable to become fixed, the raw ingredients to become the Meal.

**SPEAKING: Enchantment; Voice & Morning Light**

*The Charm Maker opens the door on her client, the Moment, the Day. The words rise up from the page and slide through her breath, mixing with the vapor there and becoming. The air changes. The wrens have turned to larks and swallows. The Charm Maker feels the song lifting her clavicle, the stony melt of earth, the shifting of rock beneath the bed of the planet. All singing, all music. The sounds vibrating in her throat – the electricity collecting on her lips. She has evaporated, become prayer – the sky jewel, the bright coin of space, the unmatched gem of that bowl of heaven, this concert, this wedding. The Charm Maker is unmade. Her heart, a dark grain and a hardwood, snaps open. And all the world is tuned to the sound of her body's instrument.*

And throughout the process, the vital braid of the voice. Not necessarily a stage as a bending and twisting through all stages: the importance of speaking, of enchanting, cannot be overlooked. Poems were meant to be spoken aloud, to be embodied – to roll around the tongue and the throat like a cordial made of plums and thunderstorms. The bass notes rocking mountain and earth crust, the flute of the high notes echoing the laughter of wild cats or human lovers.

¶ from *Harvesting* by Siriol Troupe.

As promised in the Mithras Liturgy of the Greek Magical Papyri, *yoke your speech and breath to these prayers, and you can ascend to heaven and become immortal.*\*\* It may be that the pronunciation of the name of god bears more weight than the name of god written. On Pentecost the gathered peoples spoke in tongues, they did not write in them. And the Romans spoke of the magician's glossolalia as *voces magicæ* because this application of the human voice *disengages the intellect, eliciting an altered state of awareness, more potent than, though perhaps not different in kind from, the hypnotic effect of ordinary chanting and singing.*†† And why is this? Perhaps because the Word is not the Word until it is spoken. Speech is ancient. The written word is only a bare baby newcomer – squalling in hieroglyphics and phonetic marks. In speaking, the poet weds herself to her creation, takes up the mantle of responsibility, and becomes the Singer, her poem and her body the Song. The poem is transformed, and transforms. It becomes music, theatre, flesh. As Federico Garcia Lorca says, *Theater is poetry that rises from the book and becomes human enough to talk and shout, weep and despair.*\*\*

Sing, O Muse! Poetry is a living art. Throughout the centuries it has been sung and spoken by traveling bards, plying their magical art and binding people to their spells and enchantments. To condemn a poem to the page only is to allow it only a half-life. And in the process, there can be no more galvanizing a moment then to stop and read a work-in-progress aloud. Something is alive in it that was not previously, and the flaws and perfections within its agate depths can only be fully grokked when wed to the voice.

So we see her, emerging from the fiery gate, the singer-poet standing on her feet and opening her mouth, to see, in its fullness and its mess, all that she has created. The thing made flesh, the incarnate Word.

## THE FISHER KING

So it is that the thing which is made has been made. The poet has been the hunter and the hunted, the bread and the baker, the singer and the song.

\*\* Zaleski, Philip and Carol. *Prayer: A History*. Houghton Mifflin Company, 2005.

†† *ibid.*

‡‡ , Lorca, Federico Garcia. *Selected Poems*. Ed. Christopher Maurer. Penguin Books, 1997.

The only and final question left being much the same question that Perceval failed to ask the Fisher King: whom does the poem serve?

Poems are not written for nothing.

*The Charm Maker dreams of singing in a peach tree lashed with rain. She wakes and eats honey on rosemary bread and wipes the crumbs off the counter with her hand. Dust falls through the light from the window and flashes out its eternal pattern, chanting old rhymes and half-spoken fragments of ancient verse. The Charm Maker draws up the hem of her dress and looks at her shoes, wet with rain on a morning when there has been no rain for weeks. She smiles. She hears thunder out over the sea.*

*The Charm Maker moves her hand through the light, and the dust dances.*

*pan in fallen arcadia*

the evening is a gleaming horn, the  
great brass swell of its opening  
sloping beneath the grass,  
the mellow, brilliant wing-and-seed color  
of wood before the day fails

gold-green sky, the  
downy leaves and indistinct  
pollen of narcissus or orchids  
stuck to his sweat, the  
lightning dark in back of the world

this place that exists  
inside of him – the swift boat  
that turns around the island  
is a signal in the fibers  
of his skin

say it with conviction: he is dead –  
but wait then in the space between  
that breath and this next, and he will  
have rung out like a bell again,  
against your legs and up your back

and the wind will rifle through your house  
your collarbone, the flower of him  
stepping with a delicate  
destruction through your music

his hand, curled around a fox kit,  
around the night storm,  
like a sail

She had been earthed  
(had I earthed  
her by my intrusion?)  
eyes no longer turned

upon phenomena I  
could not locate.  
She considered me a  
plunderer, a fecund man,

a madman: one who  
sries alphabets  
of daggers, of arrows.  
Zigzagged tights in a

knot in her pocket,  
the tip of each  
hair luminous as fox-  
fire or rotten wood,

she opened the violet  
gate at her throat  
to release the fractal  
silhouette of Pan.

*Helios*

Not yet, the rising of the Sun  
Not yet, the radiance of my Lord –

birds i hear birds!  
ecstatic song  
is it time?  
is it time?

The coming of the Sun  
The coming of my Lord –

light i see light!  
painful sweet  
he is come!  
he is come!

My Lord Helios is come!

(after Antal)

*Matres*

Three goddesses to rule over  
hearth, home, and health of children,  
three Mothers, nurturers all.

One to stoke the fire,  
one to boil food over it,  
one to feed hungry mouths.

One to sow the seeds in soil,  
one to tend the shoots that grow,  
one to cut the crops that come in time.

One to teach a child to walk,  
one to show the skills of life,  
one to send them out the door.

One to tend the sheep's fold,  
one to watch the cows' byre,  
one to herd the pigs' running.

One to give the cat cream,  
one to break the wild horse,  
one to train the door's dog.

One to sing the babes to sleep,  
one to tell the tales of triumph,  
one to lead the men to battle.

These three mothers, elders all,  
mature, alike in age and aspect  
differing in their appointed tasks.

None born is not a child of one,  
none living is not unknown to one,  
none dying is not mourned by one.

*The Emerald Bird*

Before the dawn of the first day  
When there was neither up nor down,  
Great nor small,  
But only a dipping plane of silence  
Recoiling from what had yet to come –  
A chartreuse goose  
Jeweled in wet-blue night  
Stopped here to find some sleep

She slept so long  
Leaves and brambles grew all around her  
Roots and vines brocaded her every feather  
Each into its own coppice of her great dormition  
Which are now forests, canyons  
And windswept fields of color

She slept so long  
An egg passed through her body  
An egg she had saved for so long  
And her only one – made to hatch another in her form

It fell from her slumber  
And cracked upon the wood that now surrounded all  
By this sound, she shuddered and awoke  
Only to watch the ever-swelling rent of her creation  
Give way to varied forms, so strange and beautiful  
And full of terror

Her yoke split and bred in different shapes  
As it tumbled through the maze of knots and thorny boughs  
It is said, that in its shine

She could see the light of each star in space  
Fall away to its source  
So that what once had glowed only by its own self-radiance  
Now bounced back  
A shattered reflection,  
Frozen in its fleeing-home

This yoke of melting mirrors still fell and fell  
Acting out each position and path  
Of countless creatures and forms,  
Until again it reached its starting-point  
And so hardened and wrought the wheels of the worlds

The chartreuse goose then uncreased her wings  
From the mossy blood-soaked wheels  
And raised her feathers, one from every world

But attached by the vines  
To the wheels that formed  
With the egg descending,  
So that as she flew  
The worlds spun faster  
The fracturing web tightened and thinned  
Until its filaments burst and  
Galloped across space  
Like gossamer in the wind

On the sunset-pink glimpse  
Of her live-clam tongue  
There floats a flower of pure fire

She is carrying it home to the Milky Center:  
Fluttering fish kaleidoscope  
Shimmering green bird coming

Above, her friend the Dog Star calls:

Matrix Creatrix

Offer your fire-kiss back

Final Summer

Wrath of the Unhatched Son

The dragonflies call,

The swaying trees call,

The burnishing breeze calls,

The beautiful face calls:

Shimmering green bird coming

Shimmering green bird coming

*Bean Sidhe*

Hunching down beneath a willow  
I use my finger to stir a pool of stars  
Unquiet memories give chase  
To the white hart that bounds out of the forest  
Worn etchings sigh  
On the loose cairns toppled on the black heath  
Blackthorn  
Pricking  
Studding the night with rumors of forgetfulness  
But the rags are tied above cloutie wells  
Faded-color prayers tattered by the winds that swell  
Unchecked  
Across the browning moors

Untabulated by me the hours  
Spent unsullying the tunics of heroes  
Washer at the ford  
Unseen  
Between the lanes of megaliths  
I stand, compass-led  
By the welcoming light of your paired bale-fires  
Grievances of years past  
Sizzle like mutton fat roasted upon a spit  
Sun and moon orbs flit beneath my eyelids  
Spinning pale enchantments  
    Foretelling storms  
    Foretelling storms  
With arms upraised to hush the growing reverie  
Woven by slumbering stones  
I trod the hoary heather beds

Clad with dying elk's moans  
Slumped sigh of earth-kissing antlers  
As the spirit flees the bones

*Blóðmonath*

I grin and cackle  
Among the parched fields  
Blood still trickles  
Lapped up by the tongue of moonless musing  
In green robes  
Amidst dazed worlds  
Mist-mantled and slow  
I stride along the paths carved out by men  
    Foretelling storms, you ken  
    Foretelling storms, you ken  
Slittled cloud-bellies pour forth their tears  
Harsh caw of swooping rook compounds the meaning  
As I pull back my hood and start the keening

*The woman of seven stars goes hunting*

Do you regret turning your ear to the dark,  
you who were born the morning star?  
Do you regret it, peacock woman?  
Did you forget yourself in your descent?  
Did the gold rub off your skin?  
Did you consume your warrior's heart?

Queen of heaven they called you, the woman of largest heart  
Your heavy scented hair grows dark  
and curling like vines across your skin  
We look up at the falling star  
Burning even in descent  
And say yes, that is a woman.

All lights may be extinguished, even yours, star woman.  
You surrounded emptiness with your heart,  
and listening, began your descent  
to the no return, the dusty dark.  
You came down like a visiting star  
Like a royal barge, a queen, perfume on your skin

I know you felt it on your naked skin  
The disdain of that envious woman  
For you, the morning and evening star.  
Your pride, your arrogance, your willful heart  
Like hers, the woman whose home is the dark  
This is where you come to in your descent

You struggled to rise, in rage from your descent,  
attacked her, and she removed your skin

Hung your corpse above her gate in the deep dark  
All lights go out here, even yours, sky woman  
This is what happens when your heart  
eats dust and emptiness. You forget you were ever a star.

Two companions come to guide you – only flies, not a star;  
Small and wily enough to follow your descent  
without notice, wise enough to weep and turn the heart  
of your dust gathering sister and beg from her your skin.  
Let the water of life turn you back into a woman.  
Let your woman's feet bring you up from the dark.

A heart can be shaped and burning like a star,  
It can open up the dark and plunge into descent  
As I am a woman, this is my return, my holy skin.

*Arcing Toward Heaven*

I need You to be my skeleton,  
to feel the frame of You around my heart  
like a building with girders of steel,  
buttressed by faith on every wall,  
stone and wood stacked tightly enough  
so that the earthquake of my despair  
never rocks the whole structure apart.

*I need you to be my cemetery,  
where the graves of my griefs rest  
quietly and unsurprised by any harsh light  
tunneling into their coffins and tombs,  
your gentle hands taking moss from headstones  
and never letting this one or that one  
fall into forgetfulness and unmemory.*

I want You to be my whirlpool.  
Be my vortex, yank me below the surface  
into the heady bliss-fear of drowning,  
drifting to the ocean's bottom, ecstatic,  
my lungs full of Your surging wildness,  
all Yours as I settle down among other bones  
gone particulate and tiny with time.

*I want you to be my field of wildflowers  
turning their colored faces from the soil,  
wind caressing petals like fingers through hair,  
your sweet, dusty scent blowing to me  
from far away to wherever I am,  
your fragrance always around me,  
ghost-wrapping me in memories of you.*

And You are my metronome, counting off  
the seconds of my life one by one by one,  
small steps leading into a vast emptiness  
beyond which I search for You, peering  
into the last night, listening for Your voice,  
straining for Your hands in the shadows,  
my heart beating in time to Yours.

*And you are my lantern, tiny and glowing  
in a vast darkness of my own making,  
your warm light alive like sparks above  
a raging, searing, devouring bonfire,  
arcing towards heaven, leaving this world  
for the one that lies unseen nearby,  
with you and I joined hand in hand.*

*Prometheus Shall Rise*

I

Tired of the constancy of battle  
I wish the world to teach me a new start,  
A way to dance the longest night one winter,  
Instead of mourning all the dead of war.

I am waiting for a world to show me beauty  
For a smile that breaks a footless soldier's heart.  
I am waiting, waiting, waiting, for the morning  
When sun ascends the sky from star shot core.

Is this, then, our condition, to be wounded?  
Lonely, heartsore, limping from the start?  
I will let the brine assuage me, frigid ocean,  
Swimming out 'til dawn shall reach the shore.

Enough though, that hyperbole is broken,  
I shall not swim night's ocean, but my heart.  
And look to you, my shining loves, for kisses,  
Desperate bodies twining. Always. More.

And when the sun shall finally come a dawning  
Surpassing earth, a large, Promethean dart,  
I will grab that light from sky and learn to kindle  
Some new promise, and from this, shall fashion Art.

## II

Every Angel who has taught us shall be present,  
Those who poured out steel and whispered grass.  
And light shall rise inside us, light shall triumph  
When we see, clearly, God within the glass.

What will it take for Godhood to come knocking?  
To topple towers of avarice and shame?  
We must be here to greet them, grove and temple.  
We must have learned the breathing of our names.

Rise, rise, my fine magicians, heed the calling  
Take up your work and summon up your wills  
In readiness remake the moldering shadow  
And light the fires on every waiting hill.

Open the door, your Godhood, she is waiting  
Diotima's legacy at last  
Will walk us through the velvet dark of learning  
Into the shining future from the past.

To waltz upon the graves of all the fallen  
To conjure up the speakers for the dead  
To build a new world's will out from the old one  
Extracting gold from shards of ancient lead.

WHAT IS DIVINE INSPIRATION AND WHY DO WE NEED IT? Why do we put ourselves through the efforts of creation, giving and giving of ourselves over and over again, when it sometimes seems there is so little return? Why do we feel compelled to write, as through our very blood and breath, our bodies and our spirits, couldn't live without it?

As though we have little choice but to dip into that divine well and drink of it as best we can and, in so drinking, surrender ourselves to what comes after. The words surge through us and we can't just help ourselves. We must write or die.

As poets, it's true that we can't help but be inspired by the wonders and horrors of the world around us and our own experiences in it, both sweet and the bitter, but poetry that comes from a divine source is clearly something special. It seeks to cast a light darkly through a stained glass window, a light that otherwise might not be seen. It seeks to tell a truth that can't otherwise be told. It seeks to transform all who hear it, spreading change in both creative and destructive ways. While the poet who becomes the conduit for that light, that truth, that transformation may not, at least at first, even be consciously aware what it is we've gotten ourselves mixed up in. We may not know we've essentially become a priest or priestess of the Muse.

Words pour through the hands of a poet like drops of crystalline water, sparkling and sparking off the outer world, looking for purchase in the physical. Poetry wants to describe what is difficult to describe, hard to capture. It tries to hold the shimmer of the dying sun on the waves, the gleaming arc of the stars across an impossibly deep night sky, the smile and scent of a newborn baby, the energy rising up within you as you dance around a Beltane fire, something you can't otherwise grasp and yet are intimately drawn to. As Yeats puts it, *the true poet is all the time a visionary...*

Divinely inspired words carry an even greater charge, one that resounds through all aspects of prophecy, magick, and witchcraft. These words have power because they remain closely linked to the web that lies behind the physical form of things, a shining web that some call Wyrd or destiny itself.

Of course, all of destiny cannot be written in words, cannot be captured in a physical shape. Yet destiny must, by its nature, find its way into this world and the only way to do that is to take on form.

This current of power is the bright darkness and the black brightness that hides behind divine poetry, divine song, divine prose, all of them paeans to the Goddess Muse. They are prayers to destiny, seeking to grasp what cannot otherwise be grasped. We know its there because we've felt it on rare occasion. We've caught a glimpse of what is really real through the cracks in the world's skin. We've dreamt and danced it, and yet seen it slip away as soon as the dream ends or the dance dies.

Of course, it means pain to hold the truth of these words, these feelings, even for but a moment. It's an ecstasy and a wonder to behold, just for a breath or two, what lies behind the window they make on the greater universe. But then for a poet to be a channel for the divine, we must live in pain and wonder for the time it takes to write those words down – knowing the whole time that they can never be enough, never tell the whole story. All we can do is brave the pain and not let ourselves be carried too far adrift into the wonder. All we can do is struggle to submit ourselves and our meager talents to the gift we have tapped into.

True poets often die of this gift. We are torn apart by the forces we have unleashed upon the page, the canvas, the world. We wear ourselves out by rushing ever after that singular experience; often giving up what most others think makes living worthwhile. But then what can food and family, fame and fortune, mean to us when compared to the glories of drinking of the divine essence? Better to be a bright light and burn out than to live on in the slumbering dark.

Like prophets of old, we can't quite help it. We can't resist that bargain, difficult and dangerous though it might sometimes be. That beautiful light is just too terrible to resist, and to make the attempt to put it into words becomes a quest as great as any hero ever undertook. But then we are heroes in our own way – going Out There, experiencing the edge of what is normal and safe, and then going even further, into the dangerous Abyss. Trying to find a way to bring back what we've found there and give it purchase in this world. Through our efforts, what is supernatural might become quite natural. That is, the odd may well turn into the norm, the strange becoming

the accepted way of things. And then, the poets of the next generation must do it all over again, pushing the envelope, sparking the continued evolution of the human spirit and collective psyche.

Many artists have found themselves on that bittersweet edge, riding between ecstasy and despair. John Keats, Edgar Allen Poe, John Wilmot, Sylvia Plath, Jim Morrison – there are many names, many gravestones, some well tended and some forgotten, scattered along the battle line of the Arts. And yet how could they not fight the fight? They were all drawn to it, unable to resist, unable to be anything else but whom they were meant to be. They chose to live until they died and to not demean the price, to not deny their gift.

This is our shared journey, the journey of the poet and the madman. It's much the same journey as that taken by the practitioner of the occult, the seeker after what is 'hidden', what can't be grasped by mortal means. For magick is an art like any other and needs inspiration and so must seek to court the chancy favors of the Muse. Ritual may be the expected method rather than the pen or the keyboard, yet they are all but tools in the end to touch the source and bring about transformation.

We, as poets, are the Witch, the Magician, the Prophet, the Shaman, the Star. We are all wanderers in the dark, seeking to bridge two worlds through the sheer power of the word, allowing that bright current to flow through us. Destruction, change, rebirth, passion, fear, heartbreak, hunger, need, bravery, seduction, daring – all must pass through the page and out into the world. As ideas and spirits and forces far too great to exist in their present form and be intact in the physical find their manifestation through the arts.

We do our best to open that door for them to enter in, even if it means we pay a great price for the effort. Even if, sometimes, that price means everything. For we hold the door open through our life force, bleeding to bring to the world of form something that's never been seen or known before. Out of love, we make new what is most needed. We do it because we can and because we must. For that creative force, once felt, no longer allows us to turn back. We've tasted the divine and we want desperately to share that essence, that experience, as best we are able.

Who are we and why do we do this? We are poets. We are madness. We are desire. We are prophets. We are witches. We are the evolutionaries of

the divine and revolutionaries of Wyrđ. We are the glitter in the hundred thousand eyes of the great spider who sits in the very center of all that is chaos and empty and nothingness and weaves all that is real and there and perfect. We are the darlings of daring and the servants of the art, an art we would willingly allow to break us, if only it lets something truly special into the world.

# BIOGRAPHIES

## ANNA ELIZABETH APPLGATE

Chicago native Anna Elizabeth Applegate is a devout polytheist whose poetic consciousness has been informed by a lifelong affinity for the outré, the numinous, and the liminal. Anna holds an M.A. in English from Loyola University Chicago and is inspired by Western literary works that reflect pre-Christian beliefs and values, anything and everything from *The Homeric Hymns* to *The Saga of Grettir the Strong*. Anna thinks there is no such thing as having too much amber jewelry or too many editions of *Beowulf*.

## ~ARIEL

Priestess of the Ancient Mother & free spirit ~Ariel weaves an eclectic synergy of ancient Lore that IS: telluric, tantrick & stellar alchemy within the crucible of numinous Matter. Her words appeared in *Mandrake Speaks* and *Silver Star*. She envisages magic as relational Art: conjunctio with the ubiquitous Nature of an iterative Genesis & hierogamic cosmogony by intimate, kinaesthetic experience, rooted in Place and Heart. She approaches metaphysics as subjective non~linear systems in sensitive interdependence with socio~political context. Mediating the Cassandra predicament, she lovingly weeds out obsolete monadic principles as, shifting, liminal, she walks barefoot at twilight amongst the Stones of Cornwall with the Dragons of Lyonesse; entering her secretive Fogou may well lead you to the Graal.

## CAROLINE CARVER

Caroline Carver is a National Poetry Prize winner and has since won or placed in many other competitions. She has published three collections: *Jigharzi an Me*, from Semicolon Press (in West Indian dialect), *Bone-Fishing*, from Peterloo Poets, and most recently *Three Hares*, from Oversteps Books. Her work has appeared in many magazines and anthologies, both here and overseas, and a number of her works have been translated into Italian and Romanian. Caroline is a Hawthornden Fellow and currently poet-in-residence at Trebah Gardens in Cornwall. She lived in Bermuda, Jamaica and Canada before settling in the UK.

CHRIS PAGE

Chris Page is a magician, poet and musician, working under the black flag of Closed Circuits. The poems in this collection are derived from his recorded work. A young man from an old island, he knows that Chaos never died, and that we can be free.

CHRISTOPHER GREENCHILD

Christopher Greenchild is a young artist, philosopher, and multi-instrumentalist from the Pacific Northwest of the United States. When not gathering poems from attics of moon-speech and fog-filled valleys, he composes the music they float in. He is currently preparing for the first releases from his large archive of songs, which he began when he was around 14. His first published collection of poetry is planned for release in early 2010. The poem *Agni*, which he has contributed to this anthology, comes from the manuscript of this incipient book. For more information on his works or how to contact him, visit: [www.christophergreenchild.com](http://www.christophergreenchild.com). Christopher believes in gnomes.

MR. VI

Mr. VI – commonly known simply as VI – is a cipher for a writer, philosopher and sorcerer residing in a town in the North West of the UK known and nicknamed for its prodigious executions and witches. As a Radical Agnostic he doubts everything and allows for its possibility, leading to strange journeys where notions of interior and exterior go a little bendy and in-between. Within such spaces, he hunts the alien and primal sorceries which inspire the myths, stories and songs of cultures the world over, digging down to locate alternate modes of being... He wears a broad-brimmed hat, has a beard, and likes cats and the deeply strange bits of the world that people would rather not think about. He can be reached at [grandfatherp@gmail.com](mailto:grandfatherp@gmail.com).

D.B. MYRRHA

D.B. Myrrha is a 40 year old woman, Traditional Witchcraft initiate of the Second Admission, and Awenyddon (in some words: an ecstatic/inspired Bardic Celtic Deconstructionist with a healthy dose of what can only be la-

beled 'Gælic-Brythonic Discordianism.'). She also wends the winding Way of the Drindu, or Celtic-Hindu Syncretist. D.B. lives with Nyx, her beloved bunny, in the beautiful Pacific Northwest.

DAVID TREVARTHEN

David Trevarthen is (among other things) an Archaeologist for Love and (currently) a C\*st\*mer S\*rv\*ce Ex\*cut\*ve for M\*ney. He self-describes as a crypto-pagan if pushed and has been a participant/observer in various activities covering several flavours of esotericism. His archaeological work deals with shadows, light and colour, and our perceptions of and reactions to these. He has also co-owned and run a psychedelic light-show which used the same things in a modern setting and is keen to point out that gnomon and gnosis share the same root. He is a devotee of the written word, both in consumption and creation, and would have much more text but *sometimes it seems so sudden that the threatened thought leaves like liquid lace-work*. He really does live in a cottage with roses around the door with his wife, two children and a farm cat.

ELIZABETH VONGVISITH

Elizabeth Vongvisith is a Pagan monastic, Lokean priestess and head of a small Northern Tradition kindred. She lives in central Massachusetts and spends her time writing, reading, crafting, studying yoga and planning her next road trip.

ERYNN ROWAN LAURIE

Erynn Rowan Laurie is many things; professional madwoman, poet, ritualist, dreamer. She is the author of *A Circle of Stones: Journeys and Meditations for Modern Celts* and *Ogam: Weaving Word Wisdom* as well as many published poems and articles. Much of her work in the last twenty years has been focused on the art of filidecht, sacred poetry in the Gaelic tradition. Her website is The Preserving Shrine: <http://www.seanet.com/~inislglas>

GEO TREVARTHEN

Geo Athena Trevarthen was raised in a Scottish and Irish shamanic tradition by her mother and grandmother. The Dagda, father God of the Celtic

pantheon, told her to go *back to the trunk of the tree*, leading her to Sumerian religion. Her devotion to Enlil grew from a long series of spirit journeys and a pilgrimage to Turkey. She teaches and writes about experiential and academic facets of shamanism and magic. She is a Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Edinburgh, and author of *The Seeker's Guide to Harry Potter*, exploring magickal themes in the novels. [www.celticshamanism.com](http://www.celticshamanism.com)

#### JOHN HARNESS

John Harness is a student of Islamic History at the University of Chicago and has been a NeoPagan for eight years. He maintains a blog, *The Great Tininess* ([wordpress.com](http://wordpress.com)), and works through his writing toward deepening Pagan theological discourse. He practices Semitic and Greco-Roman folk magic, despite his better judgment.

#### MARK SAUCIER

Mark Saucier is an initiate in the Anderson Feri Tradition, a musician, a writer, a therapist and a lifelong lover of the Goddess in all her forms, Red and Green, Light and Dark, Grey and Silver, and those beyond the eye's ability to see.

#### MICHAEL ROUTERY

Michael Routery is a writer and poet living in San Francisco. He holds an MFA in Writing and Consciousness (New College of California) and teaches writing in the SF Bay Area. His work has appeared in a wide variety of publications, including *Beatitude: Golden Anniversary; f(actions)*; and the Bibliotheca Alexandrina devotional anthologies, *Written In Wine; Bearing Torches*; and *Unbound*. He is an explorer of filidecht, the Gaelic tradition of magical poetry and ecosophy. A long time pagan, he is a member of the Neo-Druidic fellowship FoDLA.

#### PAMELA SMITH-RAWNSLEY

Pamela Smith-Rawnsley was born in Yorkshire and moved to Cornwall in 1976, ing Creative Writing at St Austell College. Deeply interested in literature and folk music, she has written a novel on this theme, *Two Sisters*, which

was also made into a film script, along with poems and stories that have been published in various small magazines. Her latest venture is a horror story for the teenage market.

PATRICIA CRAM

Patricia Cram is a ritual performance artist who currently works with These Knives Exhale, Aixela, and Constructs of Ritual Evolution (CoRE), all in the San Francisco Bay Area. She collects dirty remains, dirty skin, and tenebrous books. Formerly, she managed Orbis Nex, an experimental theatre, and studied Literary Theory. As a writer and artist, she edits and designs VIAL magazine and works in the orphic arts of Automatic Writing and Drawing. Her work can be found at vialmagazine.com.

PAUL HOLMAN

Paul Holman is the author of *The Memory of the Drift*, an ongoing serial poem informed by magical practice. There have been a couple of book publications of this work, the most recent from Shearsman (2007). More of his writing is archived online at the Great Works website (<http://www.greatworks.org.uk/index.html>). He is the most powerful creature because he is headless, freed from worry and conspiracy. He is the most powerful creature because he can alter light into his blood and body. He is the most feeble creature because, being able to love, he must support his heavy heart with his forelegs.

PAUL NEWMAN

Paul Newman was born in Bristol (1945) and, after periods in teaching and factory work, turned to writing in the 1970s, since when he has published poems, short stories and titles on history, literature and topography, notably *The Hill of the Dragon* (1979); *Somerset Villages* (1986); *Bath* (1986); *Bristol* (1987); *The Meads of Love* (1994); *Lost Gods of Albion* (1998); *In Many Ways Frogs* (poems with A. R. Lamb, 1997) and *A History of Terror* (2000), recently translated into Chinese and Japanese and a critical book *Aleister Crowley & the Cult of Pan* (2004). His Arthurian novel *Galahad* won The Peninsula Prize for 2003 and his most recent books are *The Treggerthen Horror*, *Haunted Cornwall* and *The Man Who Unleashed the Birds: Frank*

*Baker & His Circle*. A monograph on his work has been published by the artist, Andrew Lanyon.

#### PENELOPE SHUTTLE

Penelope Shuttle has lived in Cornwall since 1970. She is the widow of the poet Peter Redgrove, (1932-2003). Shuttle's 2006 collection, *Redgrove's Wife* (Bloodaxe Books), was short-listed for the Forward Prize for Best Single Collection, and for the T S Eliot Award. In the autumn of 2007 she was one of three poets on an Arts Council sponsored reading tour of Toronto and New York. Her new collection *Sandgrain and Hourglass*, appears from Bloodaxe Books in October 2010. In 2007 she was awarded a Cholmondeley Award for Poetry.

#### PETER REDGROVE

Peter Redgrove was born in Kingston upon Thames and educated at Taunton School and Queens' College, Cambridge. While at Cambridge he edited delta magazine for a couple of issues, and met the poets Ted Hughes, Sylvia Plath and Harry Guest Harry. In Cambridge and London he participated in Philip Hobsbaum's poetry discussion and was thus a member of the 'The Group'. He was Gregory Fellow at the University of Leeds from 1962 to 1965. Towards and until the end of his life, Peter lived in Cornwall, with his second wife Penelope Shuttle. This is where some of his more magickal/mystical poems were inspired and written. He was awarded the Queen's Gold Medal for Poetry in 1996.

#### P. SUFENAS VIRIUS LUPUS

P. Sufenas Virius Lupus is a founder of the Ekklesia Antinoou (a queer, Graeco-Roman-Egyptian syncretist reconstructionist polytheist group dedicated to Antinous, the deified lover of the Emperor Hadrian), a participant in Neos Alexandria, and a Celtic Reconstructionist pagan. He has published a poetry book, *The Phillipic Hymns* (Bibliotheca Alexandrina, 2008), as well as essays and poetry in the anthologies *Waters of Life: A Devotional Anthology for Isis and Serapis*, *Unbound: A Devotional Anthology for Artemis*, and *Bearing Torches: A Devotional Anthology for Hekate*. As a day-job, he is a professional academic, teaching history and religious stud-

ies courses, and publishing in Celtic studies, sexuality studies, and magic studies.

REBECCA BUCHANAN

Rebecca Buchanan holds a Master's Degree in Women's Studies in Religion, with a particular focus on contemporary Paganism/s and Goddess Spirituality. She is also the webmistress and editor of *Eternal Haunted Summer: Pagan Songs and Tales*, an ezine dedicated to Pagan poetry, short fiction and reviews.

RUBY SARA

Ruby Sara is a poet and essayist. She is also a polythea/ologian, a performance artist, a maker of charms, a worker of roots, a mystic, a dreamer, and a devotee of Dionysos, though not necessarily in that order. She is the author of the blog *Pagan Godspell* ([www.gospelpagan.wordpress.com](http://www.gospelpagan.wordpress.com)), a member of the Pagan performance collective *Terra Mysterium* ([www.terramysterium.com](http://www.terramysterium.com)), and lives in Chicago with her intrepid spouse and their demon-monkey-cat, Pinky.

SARA AMIS

Sara Amis holds an MFA in Creative Writing from the University of Georgia and is an initiate of the Feri Tradition. She won the 2007 Mangrove Review award for creative nonfiction. Her work has appeared in *Maggie Magazine*, the anthology *Jabberwocky 3*, and has been adapted for the National Public Radio series *Hitchhiking Off the Map*. Her poem series *The Sophia Leaves Text Messages* was published by Papaveria Press September 2009, and she has an experimental poetry project on Twitter.com titled *The Traveling Bobcat Poetry Show*. She likes to wander from genre to genre with blithe abandon.

T. THORN COYLE

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