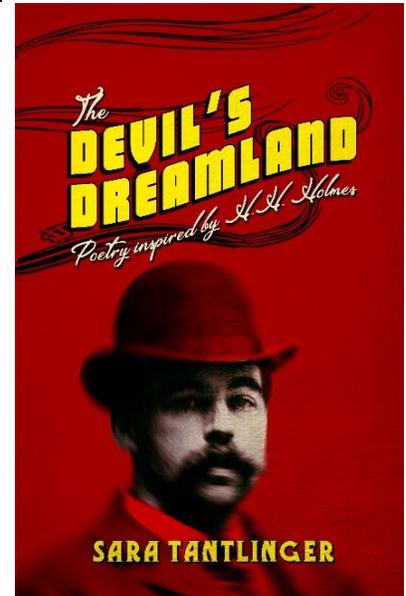
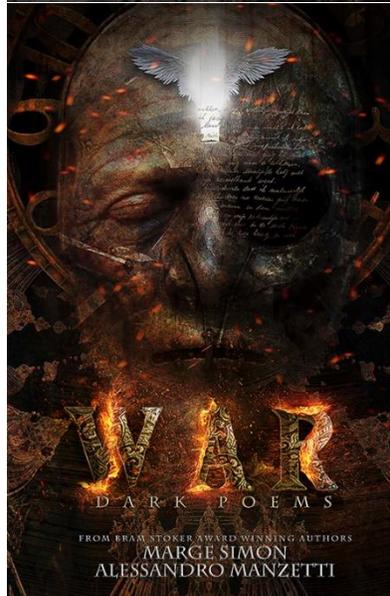
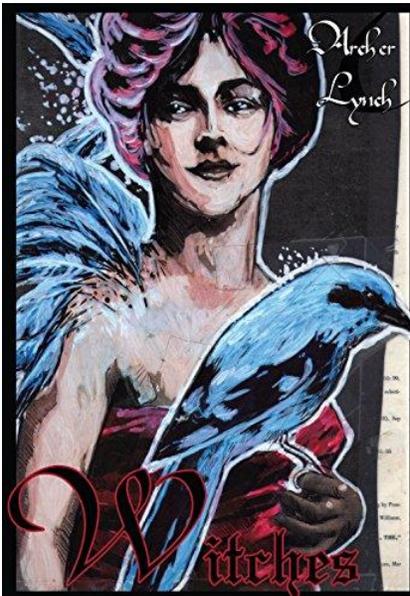
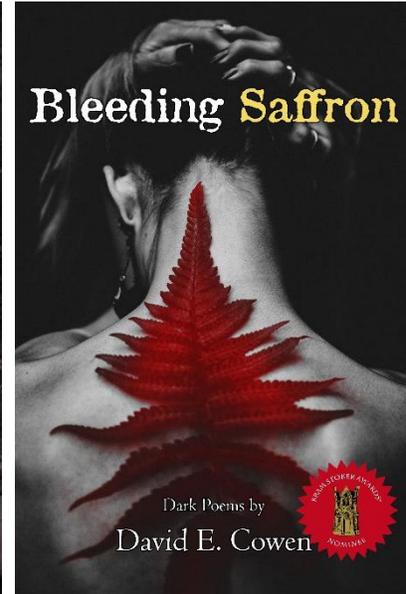
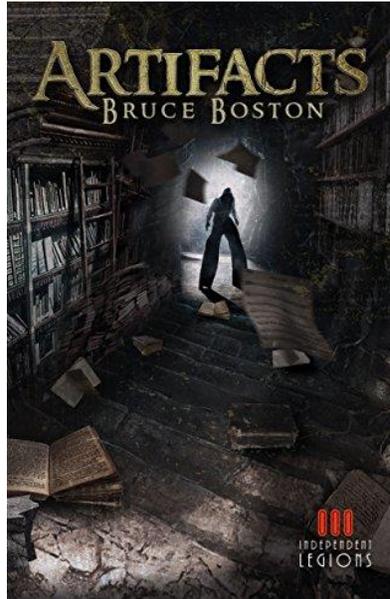


*2019 Bram Stoker
Nominees for
Superior
Achievement in
Poetry*

By David E. Cowen



The Finalists for the 2018 Bram Stoker Award for Superior Achievement in Poetry have been announced they are (listed alphabetically):

Boston, Bruce – *Artifacts* (Independent Legions Publishing)

Cowen, David E. – *Bleeding Saffron* (Weasel Press)

Lynch, Donna – *Witches* (Raw Dog Screaming Press)

Simon, Marge and Manzetti, Alessandro – *War* (Crystal Lake Publishing)

Tantlinger, Sara – *The Devil's Dreamland* (Strangehouse Books)

Each of the authors was gracious enough to share their favorite pieces from their books:

Artifacts (Independent Legions Press) by Bruce Boston

A Dangerous Reading

Being a lady of diverse preoccupations,
primarily preternatural, Madame Tarot
turns her head from the street and
tells me that anything is possible.
We pass the pipe from hand to hand.
The rain rallies against the window,

softly blurring hillsides and trees.

"Darjeeling or jasmine?" she asks,
pouring from a single pot inlaid
with gold symbols on black slate.
Perhaps I have visited here more
than once too often, watching the
cards shift in the yellow lamplight.

Down the stairs shambles her pet
and familiar. Today its shaggy
coat of chameleon fur is the
pale rust of old blood stains.
It shakes itself and curls up
on the rug before the fire.

Not for the first time I wonder
what species and sex this creature
could be, but I'll not be the one
to investigate. It outweighs me
by at least twenty pounds and
I have seen rows of razor teeth
glistening in its mercurial coat.

Madame Tarot moves about the room,
drawing shades against the daylight,

switching on a lamp with a fringed
shade to counter the sudden dimness.
She lights the pomegranate incense,
Her hands unfold the velvet cloth.
At moments like this I am sure
she is The Hierophant, Reversed.

She shuffles and riffles the deck.
A blast of wind shakes the window
in its frame and the old house groans.
Her pet stretches and yawns and gives
me a hostile glance. Its coat darkens.

I raise the cup to my lips carefully
and watch the cards begin to turn.

She Walks in Yellow to Please Her Lord

after Robert W. Chambers' King-in-Yellow stories

She who serves her Lord
more than any rank courtesan
in His bloodstained seraglio.
She who severs the swollen
filaments of His deranged
desires over and again.

*She walks in yellow silk with
gold and bile and stark obituaries.*

She who wrenches love from
its appointed assignations
and calls down abominations
on its amputated miscreants.
She whose glittering eyes
once feasted on Antietam.

*She dines in yellow and savors
vintage decadence and decay.*

She who engineers the screams
of cherubim and retches on the
dreams of diminished artists.
She who expels streams of
insects, piss, and plastique.

*She seduces in yellow silk,
aroused by madness and death.*

She whose essence is embodied
in feverish yellow jungles,
parched yellow deserts,

in hydrocarbon sunsets,
in the cracked yellow soil of
bombsites and untended graves.

*She sleeps in yellow, her blond
mane thick on the pallid pillow.*

Sailors Evermore

I

First the storms come
and we do everything
we can to keep the ship afloat,
a three-masted barque bound
to Portsmouth out of Ceylon,
riding low in the water with
a heavy cargo of nuts and spices.

Dark clouds fill the horizon
and race toward us faster
than the ship can run.
Light flees the sky and
in the false dusk that follows,
a harsh moisture bristling
with electricity fills the air.

Before we can trim the sails,
sheets of rain avalanche
down, shafts of lightning
strike the waters about us,
and the wind begins to howl
like a bughouse monster.

Sometimes we manage
to ride out that first storm,
and that gives us courage.
Then there is another,
dangerous as the first,
and a third fiercer still.

The masts topple,
the hull is breached,
and we are thrown
into the icy brine
amidst the lashing rain.

As we sink into the cold
and voracious deep,
fish with long rows
of razor-sharp teeth
tear us apart bite

of flesh by bite of flesh.

It seems to take forever
before we can drown,
our mouths screaming
soundlessly as our
convulsing lungs
are filled with water.

II

Worse than the storms
are the deadly calms that
leave the sea motionless,
a sheet of blue glass on
which reflections of the
light above are blinding.

We lie slack upon the decks
in whatever shade we find,
the sun beating down upon
us from a merciless sky.
We wait listlessly for our
rations of water and rum,
our minds lost and vacant
in the unremitting heat.

When the sun finally sinks
to the horizon, we anticipate
the temporary relief of night.
Yet there is to be no night.
Instead of shrinking the light
along the horizon grows.

Glowing orange clouds come
rolling across the waters,
horned clouds filled with
frightening shapes and figures.
The sea begins to boil as sheets
of sizzling lava sweep across it.
The wood of the ship catches
fire and the decks collapse.

As we are cast into the flames,
burning over and again,
the raging fires consuming
us endlessly, our dazed
minds come alive at last,
our pasts parade before us.

Now we realize that we
have never been sailors.

We are fraudulent bankers,
bent politicians, cardsharps
and shady salesmen,
rapists and thieves,
outrageous pimps
and audacious whores,
tyrannical husbands
and insidious wives.
All nevermore.

For now we understand
full well for the countless
time that we are nothing
more than unrepentant sinners,
mandatory guests at our own
damnations, sailing upon
the seas of Hell forevermore.

Bruce Boston's poems and/or stories has appeared in *Asimov's SF*, *Analog*, *Weird Tales*, *Amazing Stories*, *Daily Science Fiction*, *The Pedestal Magazine*, *Strange Horizons*, *The Twilight Zone Magazine*, *the Nebula Awards Showcase* and *Year's Best Fantasy and Horror*. His poetry has received the Bram Stoker Award, the *Asimov's* Readers Award, and the Rhysling and Grand Master Awards of the Science Fiction Poetry Association. His fiction has received a Pushcart Prize, and twice been a

finalist for the Bram Stoker Award (novel, short story). His 40th poetry collection, *Artifacts*, is available at Amazon and other online booksellers. More info at his website www.bruceboston.com. Visit his Facebook page for recent news and poems: <https://www.facebook.com/bruce.boston.50>

Bleeding Saffron (Weasel Press) by David E. Cowen

Galahad Returns from the Holy Wars

When the flower laden chariot rolled you through Verdun's Gate
Virgins lined to offer themselves as a victor's tryst;
The bronze shielded King's Guard stood rigid in salute.
The Domo waited, purple sash bulging his frame,
A gold cup of Elderwine in hand to offer
Our fair haired hero
Trained so well by the sanguine mentors of steel.

You crossed the threshold shadow of our warm walls
And we saw your fealty to something darker than victory;
Your gray sunken face glaring,
Yellow eyes glowing; your blackened teeth bared.
The chorus stopped as your horsemen fell
From their mounts shriveled and broken.

It was then that the keeper of the gate
Realized too late,
as the last link of chain
Clinked in rest sealing the dull wrought iron barrier
That once made us safe,
He had doomed the home he had sworn to keep.
He leaped in vain hope he could escape the virulence
He had allowed to enter.

The pain that flowed through the streets
Ended only for those whose blood ran quick;
The fathers and mothers who prayed
To the gods of slaughter no longer
Exultant at the child they birthed.

The rest writhed in the cataclysmic verdict
Of the false safety of gray walls
Turned crypt by our own faith
Feeding the black ego of our darkened champion,
Still searching for the last of us who had made him,
Futilely hiding in these cold hollows of stone

Faust Waiting for Midnite

four flat screens
blaring
two silicon molded women

sleep in the round bed exhausted

the clock is ticking

the latte machine needs cleaning
the blender still slushed with green ice
tequila and limes
four trays of cold food sit
on dark green granite
opening to view the fire place
in the window lined den
the cityscape sparkles
with a new year's dawning

the clock is ticking

the credit cards still sit on the table
next to the red MAC
cycling Bluetoothed symphonies
through the wireless speakers
surrounding the flat

the clock is ticking

sixteen minutes left
and the blood words end
all the wish lists
all the appliances

all the gratification
all the things that could have been done
with this bargain
end

the old guy did keep his promise

the clock begins to chime

Hamelin

empty sheets

was she taken?

*no signs of forced entry
there is no blood*

there was no way for us to have known

the soft twilling of the wind
a mummer's pipe
sweet on the cold flow of air
the confusion granting time for the deed

*no one heard anything?
did she follow that tune—*

*that rat caller's song?
is she a whimsy of his prickly whistle?*

candle by candle
the windows alight
cries interrupt the sunless square
despair replaces the greed
that disparaged the stranger's work

they're gone –

all but three---

*one lame
one deaf
one blind --*

he could not leave even one good one

the Rattenfänger's trail
ending at the edge of dark Weser
scores of overlapping footprints
following the mark of his boots

*he had his fill
there is nothing but ripples from his wake*

we will blame it on the rats

*so no one will know we slept in the stupor
of false triumph
while he did his work*

David Cowen is the author of four books of poetry, *Sixth and Adams* (PW Press 2001), *The Madness of Empty Spaces* (Weasel Press 2014), *The Seven Yards of Sorrow* (Weasel Press 2016), the latter two being named to the Bram Stoker Award Preliminary Ballots and *Bleeding Saffron* (Weasel Press 2018). David has been published in journals in the United States, Great Britain and Australia and his poetry was featured on a Canadian Broadcasting Corporation radio tribute on 9/11. David's fiction was included in Volume 5 of the award winning *Exotic Gothic* series and Thisibelieve.org included an essay of David's in their volume *On Motherhood*. David was also the editor of the Horror Writer's Poetry Showcase Volumes III and IV. David will be featured in the upcoming *Speculative Poets of Texas Vol. II* by House of the Fighting Chupacabra Press in 2019. David is a lifetime member and former 5-year president of the Gulf Coast Poets, the largest private poetry organization on the Texas Gulf Coast.

***Witches* (Raw Dog Screaming Press) Donna Lynch**

The Harpy

From the unit, she could see through wire mesh-encased windows, the forest where her winged sisters fed.

Though the sisters were hungry, she could not force the hands of the lost, only encourage them to follow through with unfinished business.

The forest was beautiful, she'd tell the them.

Their souls would live in the trees.

No more grief.

No more lingering in the cold, locked wards—these earthly preludes to the Seventh Circle.

And while all these things were true in the Wood of the Self-Murderers, Nurse Celaeno would forever neglect to mention the pain of being stripped of your new leafy flesh by clawed feet and slowly devoured, entombed in swollen, feathered bellies.

Possibly the Wrong Choice for an Evening's Entertainment

Everyone knew the tricks by that era:
how to make the table levitate and shake, how to make the

candlesticks move, the automatic writing, the cold readings.

By then it was all done just for a bit of fun.

So imagine everyone's surprise when Lady Ashton called in the wolves

and made them dance upright like men,

rewarding them after with the organs and meaty bones of her most pretentious guests.

The Dolls of Bridget Bishop

Those little poppets of yours were no child's play,
but the games of vicious girls are crueler.

They sold you down the river, girl,
before you even finished the final stitch,
so next time, throw them straight into the fire.

And get rid of the dolls, too.

Donna Lynch is a horror/ dark fiction author, poet, and spoken word artist, as well as the lyricist and singer of the dark electronic rock band Ego Likeness. She frequently collaborates with her husband, artist and musician Steven Archer, their most recent joint effort being the Stoker-nominated illustrated poetry collection *Witches* (Raw Dog Screaming Press). Lynch and Archer live in Maryland.

War: Dark Poems (Crystal Lake Publishing) **by Marge Simon and Alessandro Manzetti**

THE GREEN LADY

by Alessandro Manzetti and Marge Simon

In this forever jungle; death hangs
almost palpable in the humidity.
Never mind the napalm—
if you don't get bitten by snakes,
it'll be one of their goddam insects you can't see,
like the one that got the kid from Kansas,
bloodsucker's poison went straight to his heart.

We've got smokes, we've got weed
and some other stuff, but no acid, man,
this surreal hell is on the US army.

Twilight's the worst—there comes
a silence terrible and incomplete,
when your piss freezes
in nighty-five degrees.

Snipers in the bushes,
you can't see them, but you know

someone's going to take a hit—
you pray it won't be you.

Finally morning comes,
time to move out, Sarge's order,
so we do, each on our own weird trip, man—
a Ulysses patrol and one Siren,
I guess make that my Siren.
Now I see you, now I don't
but I know you're following me,
I hear your feet stepping on branches,
the click of your pointy rice-grain teeth,
your voice inside my helmet,
a Harpy's song, like the sea in a shell.

Through a glimpse of multi-foliage I see
your smooth green thighs opening slowly,
a purple vanda orchid blooming, shaking its petals,
its stamen beckoning like a lover's tongue,
but you disappear again.

Now I see you, now I don't,
but I know you're making yourself beautiful,
combing your vine green hair,
while we sink to the waist,
wade these black waters

holding our rifles over our heads
as if surrendering to your beauty—
but wait, this is my fantasy alone,
each of us must have his own.

Now I see you, now I don't.
Nightfall, we're still on the move,
and as some beguiled and crazy Wise Man,
I see between the heads of the trees
your dazzling napalm star.

Maybe you're back in your Mekong
fishing for dead bodies floating,
going through their pockets,
scattering black-and-white photos to the wind,
kissing Viet Kong soldiers one by one
as they glide through the mangroves.
Many linger in your sultry uterus
absorbed into your verdant hell,
while the helicopters of the living
slice the clouds, searching casualites,
all for nothing.

LADY D'ARBANVILLE

by Alessandro Manzetti and Marge Simon

Paris June 14, 1940

She enters his room,
slender legs encased in silky net,
small flowers caught in webbed designs,
stockings most women would sell their bodies for,
but she is not most women.

A single diamond on a chain around her throat,
faux gems woven in her hair, a shade of blonde
that has to be real as her gray eyes,
the color of ash on war torn ruins.

My Lady D'Arbanville, why do you sleep so still?
I'll wake you when the tanks move further on,
when the blasts and the bleat of shots dies down
and the moon is low in the western sky.

*You think you've taken Paris,
but I assure you we're not done.
Das Fuhrer is a monster, soldier boy.*

My Lady D'Arbanville, I know it's you,
my comrades brag they've had you many times,
but with you in my arms, their words I can't believe.
They say French girls are easy, pay them in cigarettes.

But all you ask is to kiss my Iron Cross—
liebchen, das Eisernes Kreuz is yours,
for just this night, I place it in your hand.
and drink your wine until my mind is fogged,
tell you anything you ask.

*The dawn is near and you must go,
but first let's lift another glass,
and I will spread my legs once more.*

My Lady D'Arbanville, sleeping on so still?
Why do you pretend to lie as dead?
Wake and move beneath my loins again,
kiss my chest and grasp my neck,
for dawn is coming soon and I must go.

*My brother is résistant Joseph Barthele,
he rages that your men have such contempt,
a scorn that sears us deeply, soldier boy.*

My Lady D'Arbanville, open your eyes!
I pull up my pants, put on my boots,
and take the hand of my friend winter,
who follows me everywhere,
blowing horrendous thoughts into my ears.

*We've cut the Eiffel Tower's cables,
your swastika will never fly so high,
nor any flag besides our own, soldier boy.*

My Lady D'Arbanville, still you slumber!
I must resume patrol on your black-and-white city,
while from your brothels' balconies, laughter—
champagne pours down into the streets
cleansing the night of what we've done.

*It is you who sleeps now, soldier boy.
Cold and clean as winter wind, this dagger's kiss,
et merci for your secrets, soldier boy.*

She leaves his room,
slender legs encased in silky net,
small flowers caught in webbed designs,
confounding eyes that linger there,
the Lady D'Arbanville.

WHITE SIEGE

by Alessandro Manzetti and Marge Simon

"Stalingrad is no longer a city.

*By day it is a huge cloud of blinding smoke.
And when the night comes, dogs dive into the Volga,
because the nights of Stalingrad terrorize them.»*
(Diary of a Soviet soldier)

Stalingrad, December 12, 1942

A woman is wearing a black coat
and snow jewels on her cold breasts;
She has crumbled bones,
and two children to feed,
up there, on the seventh floor
of the building, ornated
with the 24-carat holes
of the machine guns,
slaughtered like the last
giant hog on Earth
—a mirage of flesh —
after so much hunger,
and long times of mud meatballs
and gas broth.

A German Panzer
is lying in the middle of the street,
looks like a mammoth
without teeth and fur,

that barely breathes,
inflating its veins and tracks.
It swallowed its Aryan driver
—cooked by molotov —
one week ago,
and is still digesting
his square jaws and iron medals.

An old man near a stack of boots
with a blanket on his head
and a bullet in his brain,
convinced he is dead,
is crawling on all fours,
—sniffing his nephew's red t-shirt—
listening to the grenade's jazz
and the barking of dogs—
their tails in flames that illuminate
the shadows of the street,
macabre, elusive traces
of what once was.

Mamochka stewed our dog,
but Yeva was very thin,
so his meat was spare.
Our baby brother,
born after the troops came,

he is too weak to eat, doesn't
cry, his diaper goes unused.
There are three of us to feed,
Mama has no choice.

Winter's wedding ring,
a red bruise around her neck.
In the mirror a full bellied man's reflection
that moves like a mad monkey in his guts,
chasing him to the white building
on the paradox corner fragmented
by the blast of his blame, his wife's remains
still screaming in his stomach.

White souls, white uniforms
white weapons, white pain
(the shock of each dawn)
eating snow, while Beauty
is trapped in a block of ice
with mouth open, arms still up
(shouting 'please, just stop this!')
and frozen hairs sticking out
from the roots of dreams,
white like a painting just started.
While they're dying. 'Why?'
(asked a little girl in front of a big pot)

A whine, out there. Then a thousand.
It's the White Siege soundtrack.

Beyond the city,
Winter wears long hands,
miles of white on the horizon.
We've become stickmen in uniform,
sunken faced and hollow eyed;
hunger clawing at our guts
like a cat trapped in a bag.
We no longer feel the cold.

Kreuger falls, won't get up, won't talk.
He's been sick for days,
frostbite has claimed his feet,
already he smells like a dead thing.
As we stand around him,
Bucholdst begins tapping his bowl
against his bayonet.
I won't let us start on him
before his last breath.
Das Fuhrer would approve,
it is a matter of pride.

About the Authors

Marge Simon lives in Ocala, FL. She edits a column for the HWA Newsletter, “Blood & Spades: Poets of the Dark Side,” and serves on Board of Trustees. She is the second woman to be acknowledged by the SF &F Association with a Grand Master Award. She has won the Bram Stoker Award, the Rhysling Award, Elgin, Dwarf Stars and Strange Horizons Readers’ Award. Marge’s poems and stories have appeared in Silver Blade, Bete Noire, Urban Fantastist, Daily Science Fiction, You, Human, *Chiral Mad* 2,3,4 and *The Beauty Of Death* Vol. 1 and 2 —to name a few. She attends the ICFA annually as a guest poet/writer and is on the board of the Speculative Literary Foundation.

www.margesimon.com

Alessandro Manzetti live in Trieste (Italy). He is the author of more than twenty books in English and Italian, including works of fiction, poetry, and nonfiction. His poems and stories have appeared in Dark Moon Digest, Splatterpunk Zine, Disturbed Digest, Illumen, Devolution Z, Recompose, Polu Texni, *Rhysling* Anthology (2015, 2016, 2017, 2018), HWA *Poetry Showcase* Vol. 3 and 4, *The Beauty Of Death* Vol. 1 and 2, *Best Hardcore Horror Of The Year* Vol. 2 and Vol 4, *Splatterpunk Forever* —to name a few. His poetry collection *Eden Underground* won the Bram Stoker Award 2015, and his poetry collections *Venus Intervention* (with Corrine De Winter), *Sacrificial Nights* (with Bruce Boston), *No Mercy*, and *War* (with Marge Simon) has been nominated for the Bram Stoker Award.

www.battiago.com

The Devil's Dreamland (Strangehouse Books) by Sara Tantlinger

How does the Devil dream?

In soot-tinted, skyscraper tall clouds
polluted with gothic maladies of the damned

he conjures up the acerbic blueprints
rotating counterclockwise within
his labyrinthine mind
constructing philosophies made of blood-thread
warped into a web where contorted
passageways and secret chambers
fester like a breeding ground of silken torture

from the outside, the fortress's dead space
seems something akin to normal,
a turreted roof overlooks Jackson Park,
street-level shops line the ground floor,
columns and designs mesh well with
Englewood's surroundings
hiding the inner den of horror,

double-sided closets adjoin rooms,
bodies stashed between the doors
asbestos-lined walls padded into

soundproof spaces to muffle
the throaty, feral screams
he plans to elicit from expiring mouths

sliding wall panels leading down
slipshod hallways where gas jets
produce light that only reaches so far
into the dark, pocketed corners of his maze
intending to lose you somewhere
among uneven, veering halls,
narrow and curved,
doors that only lock from the outside
dead ends and stairs leading to nowhere

trapdoors and a greased-up chute
ready to propel victims down into
his ultimate paradise,
the basement cellar
dimly lit, and with heavy, earthen air
large zinc tank, vats spread around
meant to store corrosive materials,
acid and quicklime

a table for dissection gleaming
beside the surgeon's cabinet
stocked full of shining instruments
near the torture rack, sharpened
and waiting to pierce through your skin

in his underground theater of dissection,
nothing is wasted,
in the city of Chicago,
nothing is wasted

acid eats flesh off bones
every skeleton waiting,
articulation for the sake of culture
all easily sold
hair taken for wigs
clothes donated to asylum patients

you were never anything but
a delicious memory inside
the devil's dreamland

this building, so innocent at first
breathing and imagining greatness
where doors opened to welcome
weary travelers

such warmth was choked out
strangled into an abattoir
where he paces the halls
whistling the same low tune
over and over as he passes the doors
of guests, inviting them to see

who lingers outside in the darkness

inviting them to come play
in the place of nightmares
a house of horrors,
a chamber of dread
a murder castle

Sisters in Shallow Graves

There is a house on St. Vincent Street
where two young girls stand on a veranda
before their caretaker, of sorts, summons
them downstairs and into an uncomfortable,
fake-fatherly hug, a gripping of the shoulders,
like a warning they cannot process

Breakfast is served, overcooked, laced
with wolfsbane and chloroform
their sad bodies crumple at the table,
bending down like dying saplings
as if to sleep, to die,
no chance of dreaming, no nobility
in this poisoned death as the tragedies
and great sonnets would have you believe

There is only his quiet breathing,
a scuffling rhythm as he drags sisterly

corpses into a large trunk, transports
luggage down into the cellar where
shallow dirt awaits, cool and damp

Delicacy, in the way he removes their dresses,
folds each girl into the soil as if planting
forgotten seeds, but no fruit will be rooted,
only the stinking rot of pubescent flesh
flaking off into the mouths of hungry maggots

There is no pleasure in these deaths
only a driven need for survival,
in his haste he stuffs their clothes too tightly
within the chimney, and it does not burn
quite right, but he has things to do,
damn this whole Pitezel family to Hell,

He leaves behind their older clothes,
pieces of silk, scraps of paper, wooden toys,
leaves behind sisters in shallow graves
waiting to tell the story lurking within
dead bones and poisoned lungs
waiting beneath the floorboards
of the house on St. Vincent Street.

Satanical Metamorphose

chest walls concave

protrude sickly beneath
an emaciated form
I no longer recognize as my own

the body can handle
much more than the mind
but mine is turning on itself

sexual organs shrinking up
shriveling within,
turning me into something
androgynous and alien

ashen skin, hair color fading,
my smile nothing more
than a strange, lecherous curve

the Satanical cast
put upon me since birth
weaves between my paper bones
like thread through thin webbing

I deteriorate into insanity
skull transmutes between
prominent bumps
and diminutions,
like the growth of horns

knee to heel, my legs shorten,
my arms shorten,
no humanity left inside
this telescoping body

just malevolence of distortion
eyes that look into you,
reflect only irises of the dead

no more am I a man
in solidarity,
no more am I
a man, or a who,
no more am I a human

Sara Tantlinger resides outside of Pittsburgh on a hill in the woods. She is the author of *Love For Slaughter* and *The Devil's Dreamland: Poetry Inspired by H.H. Holmes*, both released with StrangeHouse Books. She is a poetry editor for the *Oddville Press*, a graduate of Seton Hill's MFA program, and an active member of the HWA. She embraces all things strange and can be found lurking in graveyards or on Twitter @SaraJane524 and at saratantlinger.com