

NATIONAL POETRY MONTH

A Celebration of all Things Poetic

By David E. Cowen

Bram Stoker nominated author of Bleeding Saffron (Weasel Press 2018)

“I WILL proclaim to the world the deeds of Gilgamesh.” So begins the birth of literature and genre poetry. The ancient Sumerian *Epic of Gilgamesh* is generally considered the first great work of literature. It has three elements important to what we do as writers of dark and speculative literature — it’s a fantasy, has horror elements, and it is poetry. That is right poetry. In fact, when you look at the history of fiction you find poetry at its roots. Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. Virgil’s the *Aeneid*. The epic *Beowulf* which gave us the marvelous Grendel and his loving mom. Dante’s *Divine Comedy* and Milton’s *Paradise Lost* gave us narratives of the hero/demon. Coleridge’s *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* influences still. Read *Tales of the Black Freighter* from the *Watchman* graphic novel and realize the true inspiration of that work. All of this poetry inspiring us to this day.

So April is National Poetry Month. As horror writers poetry is sometimes not in the forefront. As far as I know Netflix and HBO have yet to approach a single modern horror poet about turning a poem into a series. But did you know that many of your favorite horror poets write poetry.

Neil Gaiman has published a series of his journal books featuring small pieces, novellas and poems. [Gaiman's poem *House* is still on the Tor.com website for the 2013 National Poetry Month.](#) [His macabre *Conjunctions* is here.](#)

HWA member and Bram Stoker nominated author Bev Vincent once wrote about Stephen King's recognition of the importance of poetry to his writing

In a 2011 interview with the Atlantic, Stephen King shared his thoughts about poetry. “[Poetry] takes ordinary life,” he said, “it takes things that we all see, and concentrates them in this beautiful gem. When the good ones do that, that’s what you get.” He singled out Philip Larkin and James Dickey as poets who express life’s sometimes inexpressible beauty and mysteriousness and concluded, “poets ... do speak God’s language—it’s better, it’s finer, it’s language on a higher plane than ordinary people speak in their daily lives.”

Of course horror poets may even speak the “Old God’s language” as well. [You can see some examples of King's poetry in Vincents' article.](#)

Author Theodora Goss, winner of the World Fantasy Award and the Rhysling Award (for poetry) maintains a wonderful website [collection of links to what she describes](#)

[as Poems of the Fantastic and the Macabre](#). Ms. Goss' collection will guide you to dark poetry dating back to the Middle Ages. Going through her list you can see the wonderful foundation created for modern horror by poets.

So, what about poetry and this month? If you are a writer of speculative fiction go out and find a poetry reading in your area. Be a member of the audience who comes to hear "God's Language" as Mr. King so eloquently put it. You'll be amazed how grateful the poets are to see a member of the audience who just wants to hear good poetry.

If you really want to trip the light fantastic, write a poem. The HWA has a wonderful volume called the Poetry Showcase which allows members, of any level, to submit their poetry. The judging is by a jury of the current editor, Stephanie M. Wytovich, and two other incredible poets as judges, Christa Carman and Cynthia Pelayo. [Rules here](#).

Go back to your roots and submit your poems. Celebrate the month and the HWA's devotion to all things poetic.

See you at Stokercon2019!!