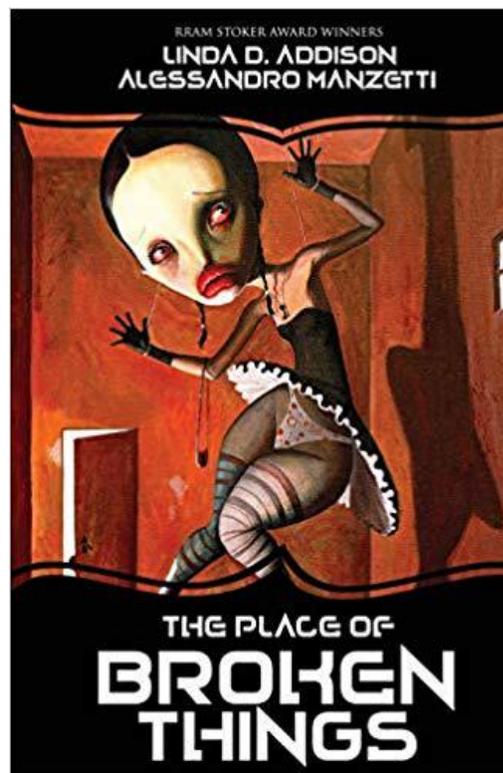


Poetry's Dream Team: An Interview with Linda Addison and Alessandro Manzetti

With David E. Cowen, Bram Stoker Nominated Author of Bleeding Saffron (Weasel Press 2018)

Let's skip the sugar and spice. We know who they are. We've loved their works for a long, long time. But poets Linda Addison and Alessandro Manzetti would seem to be oil and water, a combo that can blend but never truly mix. Linda's lyricism and ultimate optimism seems an odd partner with the street beat grit of Alessandro's stark imagery. Yet in their current collaboration *The Place of Broken Things* (Crystal Lake Publishing 2019) Linda and Alessandro merge into a single voice of dark surrealism. The poems flow together with homages to literary figures and artists old and new. Linda and Alessandro composed a number



of pieces jointly. This volume is a true collaboration and melding of voice. They agreed to talk to us and share their thoughts on the book and the art of collaboration.

Q1: The accomplishments of you both are almost legend in the field of speculative poetry. The merging of your talents for this volume may yet be another. How did this collaboration come be?

LA: The idea was born in 2016 at StokerCon by Alessandro over breakfast after he had won a HWA Bram Stoker award. We love each others poetry and got along very well in person. Alessandro wrote on a napkin that he and I would collaborate on a poetry collection which I signed. I proposed the title (which Alessandro loved), THE PLACE OF BROKEN THINGS,

from a document of lines that I keep of poem/book titles.

We got busy with separate projects until 2019 when Alessandro told me about the opportunity to do the collection with Crystal Lake Publishing. We worked together to find a slot of time with our other work to start.

Q2: Did you worry that your styles would be too diverse to work together in a single volume.

AM: Working on a project in collaboration means to work without following an individual well-defined style, so I didn't worry about the difference of our styles, because we created a new one, without much thought or defining at a table, like a cold calculation. It simply

flourished, born spontaneously between the lines. We're talking about poetry, where there can be no frontiers and walls. But you need a great feeling with your 'poetry mate', and this was the case.

Anyway, I believe a poet can't always use the same style in all its compositions, solo poems or collections. It depends on the kind of project, the moment of your life, the sensitivity towards certain topics, and the desire to experience new ways of telling or showing something to the reader.

Q3: In collaborations I've tried in the past I found that one or more of the poets I worked with fell into the habit where one of us became the dominant voice in the work. I don't sense that here. How well did you work together? What did you do to resolve disagreements as to

word usage and style? Given you live on different continents arm wrestling and virtual coin flips would not have worked so I suspect you had to jointly develop a style of working together.

LA: Collaborations are a special relationship, we both started with having a deep appreciation of each other's work and an instant friendship from in person conversations at 2015 World Horror Convention and 2016 StokerCon.

We easily agreed to the following structure:

- we wanted the collection to contain about 30% individual poems each; 30% collaborative poems.

- each of us could present the beginning of a poem to the other, if the other didn't want to pick up working with it, that poem would become an individual poem.

-for collaborative poems, we would each be allowed to suggest any changes to writing done by either. There was an inherent trust/appreciation between us for any feedback shared.

-if we made suggestions/or questioned word usage it was always with respect and being open to suggestions not being taken.

It was very easy for us to agree to changes. Even though our separate styles are different, somehow writing together we found a third voice between us that was easy and inspiring for each of us.

Q4: Many the poems in this volume are jointly written. What fascinated me about these joint pieces is that I could not tell which parts were written by either of you. For example in the title poem *The Place of Broken Dreams* I find

elements of Alessandro's works and Linda's but truly cannot guess whose words I'm reading. The poem is a surrealistic vision of the horror of collisions of automobiles and bodies and Christmas presents all repeatedly invading the mind of a solitary driver as she passes by "that hook in the road" triggering this nightmare. Similarly in the poems *Observing the Fragmented* and *A Clockwork Lemon Resucked*, with obvious homage to *Clockwork Orange*, the lines are tight and flow as if written by one mind and one hand. How did you plan and prepare to write such seamless pieces? Can you now identify which lines were written by which of you?

AM: This is the nicest compliment you could give us. Like I told you, something new was born inside this book, a weird creature, a poet with two heads and two heart, but only one pen and soul. So, I can identify some lines written

by me or Linda, but they came from the same spring of water, and inside each drop I can see mirroring connections. It's a special, unique flavor. My lines would've never been written without the Linda's ones. We worked sharing words and phrases, little and incomplete visions, in a kind of dance. At the end, we found the balance and the sense of each poem, sometimes in a mysterious way. Nothing that strange after all, we're talking about poetry, right?

Q5: A number of poems are glittered with references of literary figures such as Aleister Crowley, Charles Bukowski, Janis Joplin and painters such as Van Gogh and Goya. All of this takes this volume beyond a strict boundary of "horror" or speculative poetry and horror. Was your intent to transcend genre? Are these artists and authors formative in your development as writers?

LA: There wasn't a conscious decision to transcend or define the genre of our book, everything flowed very organically as we wrote each poem. We are both inspired by other authors, art, music and shared our inspirations with each other. The ones in the book are deeply personal and meaningful to both of us.

One of the first 'call & response' poems I wrote was after reading *Kolkata's Little Girl* by Alessandro. I was deeply struck by the images and music I heard and started jotting down a poem that later became my poem inspired by him, *Philly's Little Boy*.

Q6: I want to focus on a couple of outstanding pieces in the book. First is *After the Ordeal* written by Alessandro.

Who am I? A psychedelic pinball
with sparkly bridges and steep ramps,
and a grenade rolling on my belly
tattooed with the mouth of Mary
Magdalene? Did you ever see the Master of
Pain?

It likes the same brand of beer as Bukowski.

Another, already mentioned earlier is a joint poem entitled *A Clockwork Lemon Resucked*, a seemingly homage to Anthony Burgess' book, which begins

What's it going to be then, eh?

I was a poet, I was insane,

I was the radioactive milk, a virus

with green head and long tentacles.

I had never used black BMW, a spaceship, a
time machine

and it was so good to walk with Keats,
Blake, Ginsberg or old Hank

along the river.

In both these pieces I am reminded of Dylan
Thomas' poetical play *Under Milkwood* which
begins with

It is spring, moonless night in the small
town, starless

and bible-black, the cobblestreets silent and
the hunched,

courters'-and-rabbits' wood limping invisible
down to the

sloeblack, slow, black, crowblack,
fishingboatbobbing sea.

The houses are blind as moles (though
moles see fine to-night
in the snouting, velvet dingles) or blind as
Captain Cat
there in the muffled middle by the pump and
the town clock,
the shops in mourning, the Welfare Hall in
widows' weeds.
And all the people of the lulled and
dumbfound town are sleeping now.

I see how your poems carry on the beauty and
grace, even with stark and bold imagery, that
Thomas presented in his works. The cadence
and flow of imagery fills my senses when I read
your poems and realize that there is a classic
literary focus at work. Tell us about how you
planned out this book and how you so
consistently achieved this in your poems.

AM: Well, you mentioned Dylan Thomas, one of the great... I'm a little embarrassed by the comparing. I think each poet has its own kaleidoscope, full of colored glass and plastic fragments, that constantly rotate and blend in billion different ways. Those fragments are our memories and pains, our so deep abysses, but you can find between them (also) pieces of lines and words, the readings of a life, and all that stuff, in full color, show to the poet, the owner of the kaleidoscope, something new, what it can call 'my way of poetry'. When I plan a book, I use my kaleidoscope, simply looking inside it. It's not a project, but a need, an experience, you can't think to build something like an engineer, with measures and rules.

In this case, working in collaboration with Linda, we used our kaleidoscopes, sharing them. All the rest it's just a matter of music, because words know well how to move, with the right rhythm. I think I share with Linda this vision of

poetry, regardless of styles; I imagine both of us on stage, without never having played together, starting a good jazz. No measures, no rules, different instruments, same music. This is how our book was born; you can hear it.

Q7: What's next for you two? Any more collaborations? Fiction even?

LA: I'm excited about my work in 2020: *Miscreations* anthology (Written Backwards); *New Scary Tales to Tell in the Dark* anthology (HarperCollins); *Weird Tales Magazine*. As well as "Mourning Meal" film release (inspired by my poem of same name) by producer/director Jamal Hodge. I'm working on a science-fiction novel, which is a new length for me. I definitely see Alessandro and I doing collaborations in the future.

AM: My new collection in English, *The Radioactive Bride*, including all new stories, has been released in January by Necro Publications. As for poetry, shortly I'll start working on a new solo poetry collection, titled *Whitechapel Rhapsody*, coming in June (Independent Legions). Also, I planned a collaboration with Bruce Boston for a new poetry collection to be released in 2021, something that has to do with 'Grand Guignol'. We'll start working on it in September.

I think in the future you'll read another book cowritten with Linda.

Please share your favorite poems from this book.

LA: One of my favorites is the collaborative poem, *The Yellow House*, that was initiated by

Alessandro (and I have always loved Van Gogh's art).

THE YELLOW HOUSE

by Alessandro Manzetti & Linda D. Addison

The Dutchman is painting his house
in chrome yellow, like the sun,
like the golden teeth of an archangel.
A bell rings in the distance,
the holy scent of candied fruit
is floating all around.

No, she can't find me here, thinks the man,
— so far from Paris, and its demons.

The Dutchman is painting himself,
on the walls of the Yellow House,
sunflower's petals bloom from his head.
The light of Provence, in a moment,
walks in the window; a glimpse on the canvas,

then through an empty glass, becoming
a memory of the transparent red of wine.
Not a place of broken things, thinks the man
— so far from Paris, and its screams.

Evening, stars, and revelations.
What is the Dutchman afraid of?
Eternity. He can feel it on his skin,
sucking days like a cold leech.
That limitless space, he can't paint it all,
too much shadow, too much to take.
Someone knocks on the door, repeating
the same words: *Vincent*.
You again, thinks the man,
crawling under the table,
— she's waiting outside, pregnant.

The Dutchman found a path to the next
world in the walls of the Yellow House,
like the first memory of a dream, bright
still life captured by imperfect human

hands, fighting isolation, weeks ago he found her in the field. And now: *Vincent*.
Not you again, whispers the man, squeezing his eyes closed, hands over ears, —still she waits, refusing to leave.

The Dutchman found a road away from the roaring city, from the broken. Why are they afraid of him? Alchemy. He can feel it under his skin, humming in each breath like a newborn, suckling ideas from his noisy brain. She knocks again. Please, he prays, pressing his forehead against the rough wood floor, —in his memory, her face is bright yellow.

Daffodils cover every inch of her skin, obscuring the details of her face. Blue irises seep from her fingertips. The knocking stops, an echo of pleading rings in his ears. Was this a dream, left by the moans of crowded

buildings, of their need to change him,
—in his memory, their faces are blurred gray.

They: faceless, would-be teachers, with
hands frozen in muted palettes. He crawls
from under the table. She was never there,
his ears deceived him. The cracks in the
walls began to weep. I will give you color,
—I will give you stars, and revelations.

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MA: One of my favorites is the collaborative
poem *Like Japanese Silk*.

LIKE JAPANESE SILK

by Alessandro Manzetti & Linda D. Addison

Why are bells ringing at this time of night?

I wake with two crazy diamonds
embedded in my eye sockets.

I don't need to turn on the light,
I can find my way following the
shining red stripe (blood?) dripping
on the floor, toward the staircase
coiled like a watch spring.

Why are bells ringing at this time of night?
Maybe I already know the answer,
it must be the strange curse of this new
home, the only one in these hills
with a direct view of the church,
over there, in the middle of nowhere;
a bronze cross above the faded roof,
—which looks like the God's antenna—
of the old romanic building.

They told me to be careful
when I got here, like an apocalyptic pilgrim
without faith, without a wife,
no longer myself, after seeing
—It was Monday night, one year ago—
all that blood sprayed on asphalt,
the extravagant, surreal sculptures of
twisted metal and crude bones,
and her face—*look homeward, angel*
surprised to be dead.

I follow my red stripe, straight downstairs,
feeling no pain; whose blood is that?
There should be a wounded giant around here,
or maybe my crazy diamonds, my brand new
eyes

don't work very well, and I'm seeing through
the misleading prisms of heroin,
my brand new wife—*an unfound door*.

I feel the grass between my toes
and the garden, the green tongue of my house,
seems to move each leaf, stones and roots
building a border for the little red river
which is pointing toward the Church
with its so smooth back, like Japanese silk.
Why am I walking outside at this time of night?
I should be asleep, my crazy eyes hidden
behind the shroud of strange love from my
reborn doctrine, in the stone arms of heroin.
Instead I step softly, following this flow of
scarlet, the full moon dancing on its maddening
surface—her eyes, craters trailing me.

Why am I walking outside at this time of night?
The bells still echoing—bring out your dead,
moonlight revealing/hiding the Church as
clouds
dance overhead—I ignored the warnings,
hungry
to forget a year ago, on my knees, my old eyes
staring at her ruby lips, one last time. Am I the
strange curse, stumbling back to the resting
place?

Why aren't the bells ringing as I kneel at the
edge
of the Church entrance? The rubicund path ends
here, leaving my palms dripping, my eyes
hollow—

still I can see that I can not leave, the bronze
cross

waits patiently for my confession, like Japanese
silk.

Bios:

Linda D. Addison, award-winning author of four collections, including *How To Recognize A Demon Has Become Your Friend*, and the HWA Lifetime Achievement Award. She has published over 350 poems, stories and articles and is a member of CITH, HWA, SFWA and SFPA. Her site: www.lindaaddisonpoet.com.

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