2020 Bram Stoker Nominees for Superior Achievement in Poetry

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

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

Superior Achievement in a Poetry Collection
Manzetti, Alessandro – *Whitechapel Rhapsody: Dark Poems* (Independent Legions Publishing)

McHugh, Jessica – *A Complex Accident of Life* (Apokrupha)

Pelayo, Cynthia – *Into the Forest and All the Way Through* (Burial Day Books)

Sng, Christina – *A Collection of Dreamscapes* (Raw Dog Screaming Press)

Tantlinger, Sara – *Cradleland of Parasites* (Rooster Republic Press)

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

**Cradleland of Parasites by Sara Tantlinger**

**On a White Horse**

I am the rider of the white horse
enigmatic in interpretation

I do not ride as the Holy Spirit,
you will find no gospel spread
beneath my horse’s hooves

I do not ride as prosperity
nor as war, but you could find
both, if summoned correctly

In the name of Pestilence, I ride,
your sacred lord of contagion
bow down beneath divine damnation

As my horse gallops on, I draw back my bow, a bleeding sun overhead turns sky to crimson as my brass quiver demands death; arrows poisoned with disease fly through the world, spreading epidemics abroad in devastating silence

Noble demise in hallowed ground beckons, come to my earthen embrace sleep forever in bodily betrayal as organs shut down, as blood runs infected and uncured -- follow white mane and tail through the darkness to me, your blessed liberator gifting kernels of bacteria to burrow inside skin

In the name of Pestilence, I ride

Cradleland of Parasites

You will walk in blood after the birth and the very violence of such a thing, how an origin shreds through membrane how copper stains your lips and tongue, will terrorize each atom in your body.

Sickness has always been here, waiting in light and dark, hovering in your air, and swimming through each breath and drop of water,
did you ever think something as microscopic as a germ could hurt this much?

You will take my hand when the air aches when clouds have only acid lakes to absorb, before your organs break down into dust before life exits your body in an angry burst, shut your eyes, tell me what bacterium curses you.

In the cradleland of parasites, beginnings are always brutal, the way plague rips venomous disease from contagion’s womb spilling her gore across a vermillion wasteland,

does love still exist in this place where flesh spills open and the maggots come to feast?

You will walk in blood after the birth, taste spores sprouting through atmosphere, remember the origin must always be violent remember humankind will not survive this, we will rebuild our cradleland from their bones.

**Medico della Peste**

This will pass as medicine, for now morbid work must always exist, but how much death will God allow?

We haunt the streets, blackbirds on the prowl, seeking out hacking coughs, lumps, and cysts; this will pass as medicine, for now.

Overcoat soaked in suet, a belief to somehow repel plague’s lure, its miasma in the air like mist,
but how much death will God allow?

Wooden cane in hand, we walk and they howl
patients broken by hellish agony plague enlists;
this will pass as medicine, for now.

Bound to remedy and coin, we must disavow
conspiracies set forth by the traitors in our midst
but how much death will God allow?

Between bloodied beaks, we turn and bow
complimenting each doctor the infection missed;
this will pass as medicine, for now,
but how much death will God allow?

**When My Lover Gives Birth to Plague**

When my lover gives birth to plague
her twisted spine warps further, sending
seizures to coil around her bones,
perverse contractions as boils burst
allowing pus to seep down sallow skin
where diseased fleas bathe in her sickness

When my lover gives birth to plague
black rats swim from her broken water,
travel down a blood canal after gnawing
through her raw uterus, tasting the cervix
as a cherry treat for their months spent
engorged inside her pustule-covered belly

When my lover gives birth to plague
infestation spreads with mucus-covered mayhem
seeking out every crevice of flesh to wedge
dark globs of gangrene horror beneath,
to morph skin into rotting froths, fizzing off
skeletons who once had names, homes, lives…

but when my lover gives birth to plague
there is no escape, no hiding one’s self
from omnipotent pathogens come to collect
what is promised; all the ruin and devastation,
all the science and medicine in the world won’t
protect you when pestilence breaks free of its womb

Underwater Snow

When this is all over,
let’s go away, you and I
across the ocean to new
adventures; as we fly over
the vast expanse of sea,
I will tell you of the viruses
floating in the water, how if
you lined each one up
end-to-end, they’d stretch
out 42 million light-years

Our brains unable to make
sense of such numbers,
but I’ll trace my fingertips
against your skin, tell you
of bacterial blooms, the way
algae breathes and releases
precious gas, seeding clouds
that help cool the planet

When we arrive we’ll go see
those impressive White Cliffs
of Dover, marvel at such splendor
formed from morphing tiny
algae skeletons to chalk,
waiting all those years
below sea level, only to rise

In the grassland we might find
jackdaws and skylarks,
rare buds of spider orchids,
the tell-tale brightness of red
admiral butterflies fluttering
about our heads, and we will
know how all this exquisite life
stemmed from seawater viruses
ripping open a host, sticky
molecules snagging carbon
bits down into the underwater
snowstorm -- how sometimes it takes
great pain and darkness
to seek out even greater beauty

A Collection of Dreamscapes by Christina Sng

Allegra

Her name soothes
The mighty beast, enthralled
By her ethereal song.

A tale
Extending far beyond
Our collective memories,
A relic of echoes
Unbound by the years
And retold

By Allegra,
The protagonist
Of songs.

*

It began with love,
Of Prometheus and
Allegra, his love.

They danced through time,
Entwined in a symphony
Of fire and ice,

Swirling amid
The ancient stars
They called by name.

They were there
At their christening,
At the birth of the world;

Our universe,
Their interstellar playground.
And Allegra sang,

Her song stirred
The heart of life
Into bloom,
Planting barren planets
And moons with
Seeds from her hands.

Prometheus, jealous
Of Allegra’s passion,
Returned to raze the land.

Ignited, his fires burned,
Annihilating flourishing worlds
Allegra had sung to birth.

And Allegra,
In silence and grief,
Departed from him,

Fell to Earth,
With whom
She fell in love,

And sang,
Stirring
The muted land.

For Prometheus,
She built a pyre, a promise
To spare Earth his fire.

And for a million years
Life sprang up, painted
In incandescent colors.

Her hands shed corpuscles.
She’d been clawing the soil.
And Allegra,
Exhausted,
Fell into eternal sleep,
Enveloped

In the red and green
Flowers and leaves
She’d beckoned awake.

*

The cycles pass
In a harried frenzy.
But her song

Endures the twisted
Passage of time.
It is our voice

That echoes it.
A plea to the fire bearer,
To him who destroys peace.

And again,
The symphony of ice
Quenches the flame.

Prometheus, redirected,
Leaves us
Untouched again.

Never Happy After

It’d be so poetic to stab them
With my old glass slippers,
But that would leave far
Too much evidence behind.

Instead, I bide my time,
Wait till the stars align,
Find my way back to the castle,
Where you’ve made a home with her,

The courtier, infamous
For destroying families.
For fun, for sport, no one knows,
But everyone condemns her terrible deeds—

Mere whispers in the castle till today
When I slice her in two, head to groin,
Both halves falling onto the throne room floor,
Creating a path for me and my scythe

To reach him, cowering in a corner,
Begging for his life,
Which does not move me
But fuels my rage at the waste,

At a decade’s worth of indignities
And his dark, callous cruelty.
I do not hesitate,
Slashing him into pieces,

My scythe making graceful strokes,
Imitating the masters, splattering
His blood all over the marble wall.
It is still an art piece I marvel at today,

Walking to the throne, scythe returned
To its rightful owner who was glad
To take a break and lend me the reins.
“Well done,” Death says,
Patting my arm as I put on the crown,
A faint glimpse of pride beams in her face.
From that day forth, my dreams are sweet,
Covered in blood and sleet.

And oh, do I welcome it.

**When There Are Monsters**

When there are monsters in the house,
You learn to move silently in the dark,
Tread lightly on tiptoe, make no sound.

You learn to lock doors behind you,
Slowly and softly so they won’t
Follow you in and surprise you,

Corner you and maim you,
Invade you and desecrate you,
Then discard you when they are done

With what’s left of you,
In bloody shards, broken and burnt,
Most of you lost in ashes.

You awake the next day,
Raw, in pain,
Gingerly

Walking and talking
Like a person,
But there is nothing there. Not anymore.

When there's a monster in the house,
You learn to duck behind doors
And walk with the shadows.

The dark is far safer than the light
Where monsters can see you,
Seize you and destroy you

When you let your guard down
And forget just for a moment—
They always move faster than you.

So I have joined the darkness.
I have joined the shadows.
No one can touch me in the dark.

**The Tooth Collector**

Some people collect stamps.
I collect teeth,
Mostly from terrible people.

You see,
I was born
With a capacity for violence

And in the world
I grew up in,
It was necessary.

I haunt the streets
Where monsters hide
In plain sight,
Waiting to seize
Young girls
In broad daylight.

Here's where I step in.
I grab his hand
Holding the girl,

Snapping back his fingers,
Breaking his hold.
I tell her to run

While I twist and pull,
Breaking every single one
Of his fingers, knees, and toes.

A sharp punch
And I dislocate his jaw,
Pull out my pliers,

Clamp open his mouth,
And yank each tooth
Out of its root.

I choose the nicest one,
Drop it in a candy tin
Before I take it home,

A reminder of the good
That I do
And the lives I rescue.

Today, a girl does not run
But asks me, “Can you teach me
To do what you do?"

I smile
And nod.
Now we are two.

Soon,
There are others
Who do what we do.

Crime is down,
Shockingly,
For the first time in years.

But like roaches,
The monsters
Always stage a return.

I've collected
Countless jars of teeth
While the girls

Collect other trophies.
A museum's worth,
It seems.

**The Girl and Her Wolf Dog**

I follow your tracks to the deserted road.
They lead me to the deep forest.
This is where we loved to roam,
In a time not too long ago.

Your paw prints end near the broken cabin
And behind, there, your bones.
I pull out my scythe from its tattered sheath
And enter the killer's home.

Here he sits, surrounded by bottles,
Your collar around his wrist.
In a single blow, I cut off his arm
And catch your collar in my fist.

He pulls out his gun and I sever that arm
And stab him till he is finally dead.
I gather your bones into my arms
And breathe life back into them.

Slowly your flesh knits, layer by layer
Till you are good and whole again.
I return you your collar and hold you close
As you deeply inhale and lick my nose.

I kiss each head and whistle your name
With our common refrain,
"Come, Cerberus,
It is time to go home."

Whitechapel Rhapsody by Alessandro Mannzett

Bloody Rhapsody

Deep Red, Deep East End
smell of men and women
of misery, sweat and then the rainbow
of blood right after the knives's storms
and all shades of red, see,
violet, purple, amaranth and vermilion
splashed on the sidewalk
by the Titian of Whitechapel
who knows well all colors
flowing inside people
arteries, veins, ventricles, secret boxes
odalisques with white, warm skin
porcelain trained from life
in the universities of the alley
between cold kisses and whistles of policemen
wearing stiffened mustaches
with their heart always scared.

Deep Red, Deep East End
the ghost with the razor, Death
with a black and white face
and a necklace of sharp oyster shells
reading Shakespeare's sonnets
around every dark corner
blowing storms of hanging clothes
and the first five symphonies
of the spectre that everyone calls
The Ripper, tall and thin, short and fat
alive and dead, Jesus Christ and Lucifer
an angel with a blue tongue
or a demon with a long, coiled tail
lit like a fuse and ready to detonate
grenades of shouts, prayers
waking pimps in underwear and braces
who're sleeping under the sharp roofs
of London slowly dying, bled out.

**ANNIE**

September 8, 1888

An alley that crosses two buildings,
a bloody courtyard, a five-foot high palisade
some coins on the ground, an abandoned leather apron,
and then, in the middle, Annie's corpse,
like the sculpture of a red and violet still life,
with an handkerchief around her neck,
what she had waved, a few seconds earlier,
from the imaginary balcony of a black ship,
to greet the planet earth in a hurry.
She had beautiful teeth.

A man who crosses an alley, running,
powered by a wind which smells of strawberry tree honey.
A knife in his hand, with a long and thin blade,
and a coat, full of treasures of pleasures, soft and warm, which seems winged, able to making him disappear as fast as a shot, leaving there the last traces of his cascading thoughts: "She had beautiful teeth"

*Annie, can you hear me?*

Asks her Fortune 199, her drunk guardian angel rushed to the spot with its curled up wings and the crazy, errant, confused gaze of a tramp. She can't hear, no more, [try another way, poor angel, with your golden melody] she can't stop staring with dead blue eyes at those four lighted windows which hide figures of sacred people. *She had beautiful teeth*, thinks the angel.

Annie, a too modern sculpture for both the living and the dead, something never seen before by Phoenician or Victorian eyes, a motionless dancer with legs drawn up, and feet resting on the ground. No one can see her music, her beauty, she got sucked up by a vortex and shot up into the sky, like an iron bird,
toward a new constellation, where
her slashed throat and the mutilated Venus' equipments
are not so alien, where good satellites
they start spinning around her beautiful teeth,
like flies in love.
Look up there, those distant ivory lights.

[29, Hanbury Street]

**THE ANGEL IN BUCK’S ROW**

August 31, 1888

*Don't do it*, says the blue-eyed boy
from the rooftop playground of the Board Shool.
Afternoon, Jack sniffs the gray air
of Buck's Row, observing his shadow
on the line of cottages on the left,
inhabitated by ghosts still alive.
Here, he thinks, here you can smell the honey
of what is fading, fading away.
Honey, chestnuts and dark bread.
The life which tries to shorten the legs of Death.

*Don't do it, it's a pity*, says the blue-eyed boy
over there, behind the rusty railing.
Jack looks up, hears that subtle voice
haunting him for hours, a curse
with a mouth full of baby teeth;
such a stupid divine spell.
Here, he must be here, he thinks,
tonight, when Buck's Row will transform itself
in a forge of cheap lovers and diamonds,
making the street swallow man's juice.

Don't do it, she will scream! says the blue-eyed boy
up there, rising from the building
with his wings made of newsprint.
Jack lowers his eyes, that angel
shines too much, blinding his special vision:
she, Magdalene, Salome, Olympia,
on the sidewalk, with the throat cut,
and the night dancing around her
dressed in a skeleton suit,
with the North Star gripped between its teeth.

[Buck’s Row, everywhere]

LICE
[LITTLE IS KNOW OF YOU]

July 17, 1889
Little is known of you, Alice
but I counted all your freckles
one by one, for whole days.
Nobody pays much attention to me,
I'm so ordinary, thin as air,
and I always go unnoticed
like the death of a stranger.

Little is known of you, Alice
but they should remember
that July night in London
when we couldn't breathe from the heat
and inside the Whitechapel nest
three eggs hatched, one after the other.
Poison, the blood of misery.

Little is known of you, Alice
and of the snakes born that night,
young, inexperienced reptiles
with a great desire to live and bite.
One of them crawled up to you
attracted to your French perfume.
You were dressed like Olympia.

Little is known of you, Alice
and many think it was me
to take your life away, together with
a piece of your Mount of Venus.
But nobody blinks twice at me,
evanescent like a summer dream,
not even a snake on its first hunt.

Little is known of you, Alice
of the many days I spent following you
and all the nights waiting,
motionless like a quadrant of sky
when you offered yourself to all,
jumping on the first boat coming along...
That captain, looking for any star,
had never seen you before.

Little is known of you, Alice
and of that snake number two
yellowish, already sick for some time,
left-handed like the devil,
which cut your left carotid artery
as an amateur, like a lover who
after having spent ten years in jail
stands finally in front of his aged Diva.
Too much haste, and too little depth.
Little is known of you, Alice
but I saw you dying
and your left breast blooming blood,
but no one notices me, you see
I'm a frameless mirror
into which that serpent had looked
to see his name written in the newspaper,
to kill another useless day ready to start.
Friend snakes, killers and rippers, crawl
and bring my name to history,
like the Mona Lisa.

[Castle Alley]

**WHITECHAPEL RHAPSODY**

Deep Red, deep East End
overcrowded houses strangled
by hanging clothes, ropes and beads
green painted insane asylums,
hordes of toothless poor people
riding horses, locomotives and whores
fast as razors and slow as cancer
in the faded alleys of Whitechapel
under the chimneys, the reddish roofs
among the rows of rusty graves of people
still alive, where it comes from
scent of chestnuts, and a big man
with the white hat of a cheesecutter
who's the king of those four ways
a cross of passages, of upside down shops
a sign that shines like a diamond
the opium den, next to a pub
showing a denture made of black pots
and red flowers, with its shop windows
capturing passersby, equine and human eyes
hearses, skinny bicycles.

Deep Red, deep East End
the factories, the anguished gates
lips smeared with charcoal
a potato soup and a wife to beat up
who sells postcards and their own breasts
on the shore of the morning when
prayers in Russian are spilled on the street
together with buckets of blood and soap
jump between pools, steal a donut
the whistle of a policeman, the whisper
of a whore wearing a hussar hat
and the cries of hospital's wards and floorboards,
where Madame Syphilis walks on tiptoe
fucking you at night, with her magic hammer
the relief, the night shift and the out of hours brain
of a madman at the window at dawn
who counts his fingers and the eyes already awake
who meet by chance, to live or die.

Into the Forest and All the Way Through by
Cynthia Pelayo

Remember Me

Into the forest and all the way through, I ask you to follow my voice
Across the stream and through the hills, you’ll find a copse of trees
Unknown to many, lost to time, and tucked behind a bare branch
A ball of twine, a cigarette butt, a crumpled polaroid, you hear a
giggle
The crunch of leaves, and the dread stabs your insides, and your
breath
Oh! Your breath, how your breath catches in your throat, and you
Fall all the way down, into a hole so long ago hidden there, and now
You are within the ground, you smell the damp earth and pain, and
When you hear her voice you spin around and gain all the terror she
holds,
Before you there, a girl who no longer is a girl, a girl who is bone and
moss
Leaves tangled within her eye sockets, stretched down to her finger
bone
Pointing above and pointing you out, and you climb against the rock
And stone, and she bids you adieu, begging you, pleading you, to
make it
Safe, all the way home
You Are Not Looking, I Am Right Here

In a shallow grave. Your skin smelled of oranges, bright
And warmed by the sun, streaks of luminous hair
Blemished by earth, tainted by the touch of someone
Who did not love you. The medical examiner could
Not find you, within your breaks, and so thought both
Were separate, the missing and the murdered. You
Skipped school that day for the beach, and no young
Girl should be rewarded with terror in search of adventure
For twenty-seven years you were one of many, Jane Does
Databases cold. In cabinets. Yellowing pages of dried ink.
Have you seen her? Tell me have you seen her? Almost
Thirty years is a long time to wait. Your mother died
After twenty-two years of waiting. And when police
Officers finally approached the man suspected in your
Murder, in the murder of Elizabeth, and Tammy and Mary,
And Rosario, and many more — he killed himself, because
That is what cowards do.

Name: Colleen Emily Orsborn
Remains found: Daytona Beach, Florida
Race: White
Age at disappearance: 15
Year missing: 1984
Case status: Remains found, unresolved
Investigating agency:
Daytona Police Department, 386-671-5100
Doe-Eyed

The littlest doe, doe-eyed, Jane Doe. I want to paint your nails, Red, but not the red that stains Your cream-colored knit sweater I want to play dollhouse with You, but not the moldy, brutal Mildewed house whose basement You were found. I want to comb Your hair, your beautiful hair, I Can only imagine it was smooth As a spider web, but only those Insects know where your face is Now, as that was missing when They found, you there

Name: Jane Doe
Remains found: St. Louis, Missouri
Race: Black
Age at disappearance: 8-11
Year discovered: 1983
Case status: Unsolved
Investigating agency:
St. Louis Police Department, 314-444-0100

Discard the Words
High-risk, that’s what police call it when they insinuate
Your murder was meant to be, justified, yet what they
Do not call high-risk, whose life styles they do not question
Are those skilled with the ways of bloodstained bath tubs
Who stab, cut, slice, dislodge. Who trace steps. Track humans
And carry dismembered parts of a body, wrapped in
Plastic, a present, an offering for dumpsters and landfills
Humans most foul who are unapologetic for those they have
Castaway, whose screams thrilled them and filled them with
Joy, who subsist and sustain themselves on terror, let’s bury
The words “high-risk lifestyle” and instead replace them with
The man who murdered you, a man, who is not just a man, a
Serial killer

Name: Audrey Lynn Harris
Missing from: Woonsocket, Rhode Island
Race: Black
Age at disappearance: 33
Missing since: 2003
Investigating agency:
Woonsocket Police Department, 401-766-1212

The Demons You Live With

Mom and dad said not to speak or the demons and vampires
Inhabiting us would break through our skin, and take over
The smoke that went into mom and dad’s mouth, they spoke of
Possessions and spirits, cleansed only by a concoction of bleach
Drank daily, burned back beatings, burnt feet, cigarette lighters
And visions of a pale little girl on the floor, limp and cold
The twisted sickness of parents who ingested poison, saying it
Was their children who needed cleaning and not them, monsters
Addicted to vice, culminated in a closet with a pruning saw
Incinerated in the family’s fireplace, remnants scattered across
The Sacramento River. A year of abuse continued on, and it was
Not until a teacher found chemical burns on my skin that I
Could finally tell the story of the little sister I had and the
Demons who threw her away and told me never to tell

Name: Alexia Anne Reale
Missing from: Elk Grove, California
Race: Asian, Biracial
Age at disappearance: 5
Missing since: 1997
Investigating agency:
Sacramento County Sheriff’s Office, 916-443-4357

Fields Solve Nothing

Your murder as reality show
Crime scene, crime news, crime
Cruises, but has anyone solved
The crime? We worship the death
On screen, but need to know more
Information, overwhelms about the Programs, but not about you, who Were you? Show me more, the fields The killing fields, where your head Ached, and your body slumped Kidnapped and decomposed, human Fertilizer, harsh isn’t it? It’s grueling To think of a beautiful woman, gone Dead, skull fractured, questions, so Many questions, but if the questions Are all answered they cannot profit From your murder

Name: Eugenie Boisfontaine
Missing from: Iberville Parish, Louisiana
Race: White
Age at disappearance: 34
Missing since: 1997
Investigating agency: East Baton Rouge Police Department, 225-389-2000

[CONTINUE TO NEXT PAGE]
A Complex Accident of Life by Jessica McHugh

Bent Branches

my body. And fired with anger, I had saved a human being from destruction, and as a tremendous fire, I had defeated the mighty, pain of a wound which shattered the flesh and bone. The flesh, ligaments, and muscles, which I had sustained, were in a state of pain, before I was able to stand. The edge and gnashing of teeth, explained by pain, I vowed never to harm another, and was forced to sit on the ground. But the agony of my wound, overcame me, and I passed passage, pale and faint.

For some weeks I led a miserable life in the woods, and was waiting to cure the wound with the help of nature. The hardships of my life had led me astray, and I was forced to make a decision about my future. I had no option of returning to my old life. My sufferings were accompanied by the immense sense of the injustice and ingratitude of my situation. I felt the necessity of revenge, a deep and deadly revenge, which was to heal the wounds of my spirit and anguished heart.

After some weeks, my wound healed, and I returned to my daily life. The duties I endured, no longer troubled me. I was able to live a peaceful life, free from all mockery and laughter which had previously insulted my dignity and made me feel more painfully than I had felt for the enjoyment of pleasure.

But my past, month by month, seemed to be erased from my memory. The townspeople of Virginia.

It was evening, when I arrived, and I entered the house.
Cultivation

LETTER

2

To Mrs. Sabine, England

Archangel, 28th March, 17...

Nearly every day the time passes here, encompassed as I am by frost and snow. Yet a second season is taken toward my enterprise. I have been engaged in collecting wax gallows, the main of which had already appeared to me on what I can depend, and am certainly possessed of dauntless courage.

But I have not yet been able to satisfy Margaret, whose friend I am, of the object of which I now speak. She is much concerned, and for good reason. I shall continue in the same manner, and if there is no success, there will be none to participate of my joy.

I am advised by those around me to reflect, and I am not inclined to do so. The communication of feeling is desired by the company of a man whose influence on me is strong, and whose advice I would not disregard. You may deem me unworthy, but I have no one to whom I can turn for advice, possessed of a cultivated as well as of a suspicious mind, among others.
miserer on its bridal bier. Could I behold this and live? Alas! Life is obstinate and clings closest where it is most hated. For a moment only did I lose recollection; I fell senseless on the ground.

When I recovered I found myself surrounded by the people of the inn; their countenances expressed a breathless terror, but the horror of others appeared only as a mockery, a shadow of the feelings that oppressed me. I escaped from them to the room where lay the body of Elizabeth, my love, my wife, so lately thing, so dear, so worthy. She had been moved from the posture in which I had first beheld her, and now, as she lay, her head upon her arm and a handkerchief thrown across her face and neck, I might have supposed her asleep. I rushed towards her and embraced her with ardour, but the deadly languor and coldness of the limbs told me that what I now held in my arms had ceased to be the Elizabeth whom I had loved and cherished. The murderous mark of the fiend’s grasp was on her neck, and the breath had ceased to issue from her lips.

While I still hung over her in the agony of despair, I happened to look up. The windows of the room had before been darkened, and I felt a kind of panic on seeing the pale yellow light of the moon illuminate the chamber. The shutters had been thrown back, and with a sensation of horror not to be described, I saw at the open window a figure the most hideous and abhorred. A grin was on the face of the monster; he seemed to jeer, as with his fiendish finger he pointed towards the corpse of my wife. I rushed towards the window, and drawing a pistol from my bosom, fired; but he eluded me, leaped from his station, and running
well content if nothing worse happen to us during our voyage.

Adieu, my dear Margaret. Be assured that for my own sake, as well as yours, I will not rashly encounter danger. I will be cool, persevering, and prudent.

But success shall crown my endeavours. Wherefore not? Thus far I have gone, tracing a secure way over the pathless seas, the very stars themselves being witnesses and testimonies of my triumph. Why not still proceed over the untamed yet obedient element? What can stop the determined heart and resolved will of man?

My swelling heart involuntarily pours itself out thus.

But I must finish. Heaven bless my beloved sister!

R. W.

Author’s Bios:

Sara Tantlinger is the author of the Bram Stoker Award-winning The Devil’s Dreamland: Poetry Inspired by H.H. Holmes, and the Stoker-nominated works To Be Devoured, Cradleland of Parasites, and Not All Monsters. Along with being a mentor for the HWA Mentorship Program, she is also a co-organizer for the HWA Pittsburgh Chapter.
She embraces all things macabre and can be found lurking in graveyards or on Twitter @SaraTantlinger, at saratantlinger.com and on Instagram @inkychaotics

**Christina Sng** is the Bram Stoker Award-winning author of *A Collection of Nightmares*, Elgin Award runner-up *Astropoetry*, and *A Collection of Dreamscapes*. Her first novelette *Fury* appears in *Black Cranes: Tales of Unquiet Women* and her next book of poems *The Gravity of Existence* is forthcoming in 2022.

**Alessandro Manzetti** (Rome, Italy) is a Two-time Bram Stoker Award-winning author, editor, scriptwriter and essayist of horror fiction and dark poetry whose work has been published extensively (more than 40 books) in Italian and English, including novels, short and long fiction, poetry, essays, graphic novels and collections. Website: [www.battiago.com](http://www.battiago.com)

**Cynthia (Cina) Pelayo** is a two-time Bram Stoker Award ® nominated poet and author. She is the author of *LOTERIA*, *SANTA MUERTE*, *THE MISSING*, and *POEMS OF MY NIGHT*, all of which have been nominated for International Latino Book Awards. *POEMS OF MY NIGHT* was also nominated for an Elgin Award. Her recent collection of poetry, *INTO THE FOREST AND ALL THE WAY THROUGH* explores true crime, that of the epidemic of missing and murdered women in the United States. Her modern day horror retelling of the Pied Piper fairy tale, *CHILDREN OF CHICAGO* is available by Polis / Agora Books. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in Journalism, a Master of Science in Marketing, a Master of Fine Arts in Writing, and is a Doctoral Candidate in Business Psychology. Cina was raised in inner city Chicago, where she lives with her husband and children. Find her online at [www.cinapelayo.com](http://www.cinapelayo.com) and on Twitter @cinapelayo.
**Jessica McHugh** is a novelist, poet, and internationally-produced playwright running amok in the fields of horror, sci-fi, young adult, and wherever else her peculiar mind leads. She's had twenty-four books published in twelve years, including her bizarro romp, "The Green Kangaroos," her YA series, "The Darla Decker Diaries," and her Bram Stoker Award-Nominated blackout poetry collection, "A Complex Accident of Life." Please visit JessicaMcHughBooks.com for more samples of the McHughniverse.