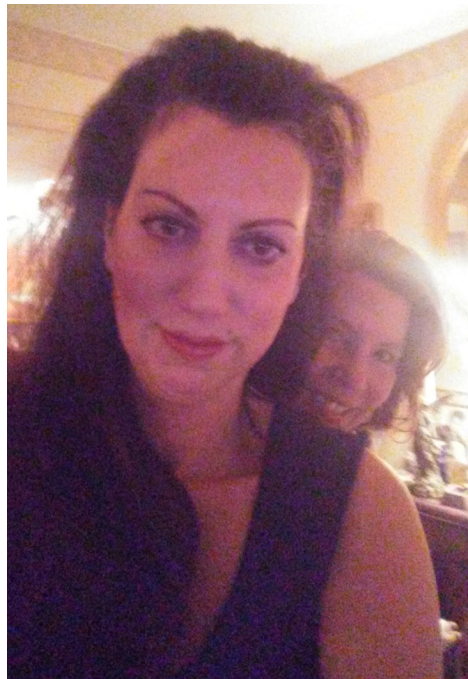


Life Between This World and the Next: An Interview with Poet Corrine De Winter

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

Corrine De Winter won the Bram Stoker Award in 2004 for poetry with *The Women At The Funeral* (Space & Time Press). Corrine has had three other poetry collections nominated for the Bram Stoker Award for Superior Achievement in Poetry including *Venus Intervention*, a collaboration with two-time Bram Stoker winning author Alessandro Manzetti, *Virgin of the Apocalypse* and *Valentine:*

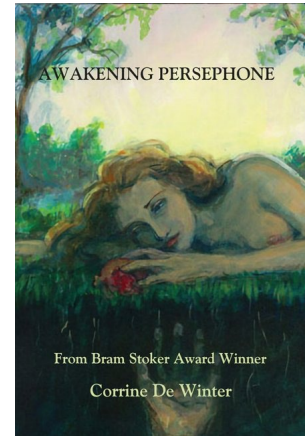


Short Love Poems. Corrine has also been the recipient of awards from Triton College of Arts & Sciences, Writer's Digest, The Esme Bradberry Award, The Madeline Sadin Award and The Rhysling Award. A naturalist, philanthropist, paranormal expert, artist, and the founder of "Small World Fund For Children," De Winter lives "between this world and the next." This year Corrine will be publishing a new volume of speculative poetry *Awakening Persephone*.

Q: Looking over many of your writings, I see a heavy influence regarding Greek mythology. The Greek gods were certainly not scantily clothed Santa Claus figures granting every wish for mankind. Instead, they were vain, greedy, lustful (without regard to their victims) and often viewed humans as their toys. Humans who exhibited too much power or pride often had to roll Sisyphus' stone in a never-ending cycle of tragedy and frustration. There certainly are lots of material and archetypes to draw from but what specifically attracted you to this as a theme for a number of your poems?

A: I've always been into mythology, fairy tales, and sort of archaic superstitions, etc. I think I chose Persephone as one of the "characters" in the book because her story is akin to a lot of women, in my opinion. I know how it feels to be "dragged" down into a Hellish place, and also know that there will be a reprieve, a rebirth so to speak, eventually. But it's that never ending carousel of chaos and peace I think I wanted to address.

Q: Congratulations on your new volume. *Awakening Persephone*. Persephone, of course, is the goddess of the Greek Underworld. The title presents many possible meanings to me. The Greeks used her story to explain the seasons – during Fall and Winter, Persephone lived in the Underworld; during Spring and Summer, she resided on earth with the living. Fertility was added to her attributes as part of this mythos. The tragic/romantic depiction of this duology aside, Persephone’s story is truly horrific. Unfortunately for her she was not like the mischievous fertility god Kokopelli of the First Peoples’ mythos. Literally, with the approval of her father Zeus, Persephone was raped by her uncle Hades and drug into the Underworld to be his bride. I saw Bernini’s sculpture of *The Rape of Persephone* at the *Villa Borghese* in Florence (Firenza) a couple of years before the pandemic. Persephone’s horror was frozen in marble as some glorification of her violation. In a modern view I felt torn at the craftsmanship of the work and the graphic scene presented. The word “Awakening” placed in front



of the name “Persephone” in your title makes me ponder when reading the poems in this volume. Is there a single meaning you intended with that title or are there a number of possible meanings the reader could infer given the background of Persephone’s story?

A: I chose “Awakening” because I imagine Persephone, (like a lot of women,) needs to wake up to her power. Also I see her time in Hell as a sort of slumber, trailing slowly through the dark environs of hades. I wanted to present an image of Revival, a new incarnation of someone who felt “damaged.” There is always the question of ‘Can we resuscitate ourselves? Can we save our own lives?’ And what does it take to achieve that?

Q: On the surface many of the poems deal with relationships, the struggles of life and introspection as to the meaning of both. Deeper down a number of the poems in your new book place images from Greek mythology into my head. In *Untangled*, you write of a Pashto girl describing her hair as branches filled with birds. (“My Mama never cut my hair/But for once, when I was a

girl/And it had become a knotted rope./A nest had formed, beyond untangling,”). I immediately thought of poor Daphne turned into a tree after praying for protection from Father Earth while Apollo pursued her to essentially rape her. The branches of Daphne’s tree become the laurel wreath worn by poets and victors of battles and athletic events in ancient Greece and Rome. Like Daphne, the speaker in *Untangled* becomes scattered into slivers from the songs of the nesting birds she had to shake loose from her branches, but perhaps bringing a renewed life in doing so. (“Music, I said, made slivers of me,/Until a song bird/Built another nest from the fractals/In an untrimmed tree.”). Other poems invoke Christian symbols and origins such as *Summerland*, *On Becoming One With Heaven*, *Fire-Walkers* and *Exposures* (“I tell you the Virgin is beautiful/With her powder blue robe/And a crown of 13 glittering stars./In every vision she is flawless and sad/As a porcelain doll,/Sends silent messages/Like small implosions./And the world's going to hell./All except for you.”). The latter two of these include references to First Peoples’ myths as well. So many poems bringing these archetypes, sometimes

very subtly and always so beautifully. I love the folklore insets you weave into these poems as well. (“*Oh, these ancient fairy tales/Sewn into my dresses...../The Once Upon a Never/And the Sorrow ever after*” – from Part I of *Summerland, An Angel Speaks*). I have to assume that this emphasis on these archetypes was purposeful. What was your thought process in crafting this volume, the choice of themes and the placement of the poems in the book?

A: *Thank you for recognizing all the innuendos!*

The archetypes asserted by Carl Jung have always been of interest to me- as well as, obviously, the spirit world. I wanted to combine these elements, and thought the best way to do this was to bring out the challenges of humanity in regards to living, loving and death through various iconic characters- I’ve said before that we are all multi-faceted and so much more than we deem ourselves to be in this human form. There is so much we can learn by sharing our stories with one another- our emotions at the darkest or most joyful times. Although I also believe that the darkest times are when we gain the most in terms of

“soul growth.” I wanted to have 3 separate sections in the book because I felt that there really was a slightly differing theme to some of the poems- I hope it works!

Q: There is a spiritual aspect to much of your poetry. I cannot decide if you share with the reader a spiritual journey or a discovery. Is it either? What aspects of spirituality of any kind do you want to impart with your readers?

A: Well, I think in our collective spiritual journeys (and we all are on one, even if you pay no mind to it!) there is always discovery. I could write a lot about aspects of spirituality (and I did in my last book “The Sensitive Soul’s Guide”) but suffice it to say I believe we are all ONE really, and the sooner we realize that the better humanity will be. As a Certified Psychic Medium I encounter many clients who are “searching” for themselves, wanting to know their “purpose” and how to find inner peace. Everyone wants to know that everything is going to be ok. I’m here to say that yes, Everything IS going to be ok, and even if it’s not OK, it will STILL be OK. There is so much about life & death that remains a mystery, but

*at the root of it all is one thing that truly matters:
LOVE.*

Q: I have also read you to be described as a paranormal expert. What is that facet of your life? Does it impact how you write and what you write about? Do you actually channel any of your poetry as Yeats did?

A: I used to work with Ed & Lorraine Warren way back, and have gone on many ghost hunting expeditions. I don't know that I'm an actual "expert" But I sure have learned a lot through the years about spirit activity and hauntings.

Yes, I do find myself channeling a lot of my work- It's so strange but at times when it just flows, I'll reread it later & I won't even recognize it as my own work! Of course I love when that happens!

Q: In some biographies you are described as "living in between this world and the next." What do you mean by that? Does this placement of self affect how you write and what you write about?

A: There is a movement out there now called Memento Mori (Remember your own death) and unwittingly I guess I'm a part of it- I think connecting with the "other side" has proven to me how important it is to be aware of the unseen world- it has so much to teach us. It opens a great highway for healing and forgiveness. In saying that I live between this world & the next, I am simply stating that is how I feel- a woman of two worlds.

Q: In another interview I read that you were heavily influenced by Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca*. Did you choose your pen name based on the "missing" character Rebecca De Winter? What was it about that work that influenced you?

*A: Oh wow, yes! I first saw that movie and then read the book when I was about 15 yrs old. I was entranced! From that point on I started using De Winter as my writing last name. The main character in *Rebecca* (the 2nd wife of Max De Winter) has no name (oddly enough) You don't even notice throughout that she is never named! So I decided to use her last name with my first name. Daphne*

DuMaurier is one of my favorite authors- she has written so many great novels and stories: The Birds, My Cousin Rachel, Don't Look Back...” So many more! The story of Rebecca, (and if you've read it or seen it you'll know what I mean) is masterfully haunting- I love that Hitchcock directed the movie, too.

Q: You have had a long relationship with The New York Quarterly while it was edited by late great William Packard, even referring to Packard as a mentor. Your works appeared along side Joyce Carol Oates and Charles Bukowski. How did that relationship come to be and is there anything you can share with us about advice Packard may have given you that might help other poets?

A: Yes, I miss William very much. It all began when I found a 1972 copy of the New York Quarterly at a tag sale. Inside were these B&W photos of Robert Creeley and Anne Sexton, and others- looking so cool, like true poets, you know? At that time I said to myself “Man, I'd love to have my picture in here one day.” I then submitted to them, and soon after I got a call from William Packard- he asked me to write as

part of their ongoing series “The Present State of American Poetry,” and he needed a B&W photo! I was beyond thrilled! Of course when my photo was in there it didn’t look half as cool as the ones from 1972 did! William & I continued to have weekly phone calls, and he’d send me poems on homemade postcards sometimes, or typed letters (he had a specific type of old typewriter, I never knew what it was) He asked me to come read at the New School in NYC – that was a great night. I asked him at the time if I should take writing classes or try to get my MFA & he said “No, I don’t want to see you writing in an academic way, and that is what they will teach you.” Among the things we talked about I remember him saying to me “Remember to stay centered- Find your center & stay there.” I think he was alluding to me being emotional about some issues at the time, but I often think of him telling me that.

Before Bukowski died he made William promise to carry on the journal, “We need it.” He said, and indeed he did.

Q: Which other poets do you consider having influenced your work and why?

A: Conrad Aiken is probably my number one- His poems psychoanalyze you without you even realizing it, they are phenomenal in their depth and clarity. He was 11 yrs old when he woke on Christmas morning to hear gunshots- His father had shot his mother & then turned the gun on himself. In light of that I think his work always delved into the darkness of life- “The Jig of Forslin” is probably my favorite by him

Anne Sexton (when she died I lived about 7 miles from her home.) I love her raw, self confessional style- Also, Sylvia Plath, Andrew Harvey, Leonard Cohen, Pablo Neruda, Rainer Maria Rilke and the lyrics & music of Nick Cave.

Q: On your website you offer artwork, craftwork, and readings – such a splendid montage of creativity and energy. Does one craft tend to influence the other? Do you believe that your poetry has been enhanced by your art. I love photography and though my efforts are mediocre, I like to believe that constantly having that photographer’s eye helps me with my poetic voice. Is this similar for you?

A: Yes, I think poetry does present in many forms, as in art work for instance. A good poem should finish in the reader, spark something that is the follow up to the last words. I think at its purest form it strives to make us better people. Your photography I'm sure, lends itself to your writing in the way the details, ambiance, undertones, are important for you to notice while photographing & in your writing.

Q: I try to ask this of every poet I have interviewed. Poets I have met often fall into two camps. Some claim only to write when inspired. When the moment or the “Muse” takes them. Others, tell me they are methodical, writing every single day for some set time, perhaps even working on a goal of writing so many poems per day or week. How do you approach your writing, both in determining what to write about and the form of expression you will choose for your piece?

A: I don't write every day, nor force myself to produce. I usually write when I come across something inspiring, which is why I love museums. Some days I'll wake up with a line in my head, write

it down, and carry it out later. Things like that come to me sometimes, like an ethereal drop off, ha haa. I also find inspiration from reading good poetry- I will read a great line & then write from that- my favorite thing to do! When I have taught classes in poetry I tell the students to choose a line they like and then write from that- I am amazed by the talent out there, especially when you realize there is nothing to be afraid of when it comes to writing- just get it out. You can edit later.

Q: Another “stock” question: What advice can you give the fledging poet on how to use archetypes without resorting to cliché? That is, how do you write dark poetry without imitating the poets that inspired you to write dark poetry?

A:

*Since it is really easy to fall into clichés in our writing, I would suggest the writer to really look at who **THEY** are in relation to the archetypes. Of course you must really find your own voice- usually when you do it will feel fresh – not sort of “corpse-like.” Ha haa.*

Q: What is next for you? Are you working on any new volumes or even scholarly works relating to speculative poetry we should be looking for?

A: I'm always working on a few things at once, of course! I am hoping to get a book the author Denise DuMaurs & I wrote together published one of these days.. and I have a Graphic Novel about Jim Morrison in the after life that still needs a home..And I have a book called Rock Star Afterlife, interviews with dead rock stars as channeled through a medium. In terms of poetry I probably have enough now for a new collection, but I'll wait on that.

Please share with us a few of your favorite pieces:

STAND BY ME

When the dead itch inside my skin,

Through the thorns of my faith,

Beyond the shore of waves that kill.

Stand by me through the judgement

And heart sickness,

Through the tragedy of growth
And the paths of unknowing.
Stand by me as the new leaves
Are forming on dead branches,
As the flowers spring from a netherworld in May.
Stand by me when I fall over and over again
And feel as though I can stand no more.
Stand by me when the city lights blind me
And the stars of the dead blink out one by one,
And even the moon hides from me.
When the guns of every soldier search for a place to aim,
Stand by me.
Stand by me when I love in the face of cruelty,
When I hold a bomb in my hands
And let it go off.

BLUE

A deep breath in.
Plan your escape and how long will it take
To be truly loved

The way you want?
And what happens, what happens
As the snow flies
And the flowers grow,
As the Earth turns,
As your brain shifts
From belief to incredulousness,
From comfort to chaos.

But I was talking about Love,
And how like a diamond love is, the many facets of color,
The angles in which it shows brilliance,
How it is sometimes solid and calm
And other times sparkling.

But I was talking about angels-
And how they come & go like worn out lovers,
Tired of picking up after you,
Excusing themselves because of a draft, or a smell
Or an off hand joke.

But I was talking about Love, how it sometimes
Hides like a coward, how it drops out of the scene,
Vacating to another town,

A seedy starving town it feels at home in.
Sometimes love chooses
To never return home at all, it's
A perpetual runaway seeking sustenance
From strangers.
But I was talking about desolation, the void,
The unending nothingness of dark matter
And the mystery of it all.
But I was talking about You
And your regret
For having never said:
"I'm Sorry."

MOON

Yes, I share my light.
I spread legend and myth among you,
But I care not what you think.
The psychology of my fullness
Gives you pause, warps you
As I outshine everything in your path.

While you are earthbound this victory will not end.
You speak of my countenance,
Create names for my scars,
Silly human titles.
You call me Moon,
But I am so much more.
I am the ultimate brilliance in 12 parts,
And you will always, always, always
Be beneath me.

OUT OF TIME

It's the birdsong of a cardinal at 1 in the morning
Although I am drunk & full of nostalgia,
And the green landscape is slowly turning bloody,
It's the birdsong in the dark
That reminds me that everything lately is out of time.
I fall asleep with spirit on my tongue each night,
I stay true to the love in my heart, but still
The chasm widens, and the longing continues,
And I am alone.

I smoke my life away,
Addicted always to dreaming and finding specks of glitter,
Never realizing true peace within, but understanding Rilke
When he said "The only journey is the one within."

And within, within, down the winding staircase lined
With statues and dead flowers,
A bird comes in the dark,
Alights on my hand
And sings a song of eternity.

Bio: Corrine De Winter is an author and Stoker Award Winner for her poetry collection "The Women at the Funeral."

Corrine De Winter has won numerous awards for her writing from the New York Quarterly, Triton College of Arts & Sciences, & The Rhysling Science Fiction Award. Her work has been applauded by such luminaries as William Peter Blatty ("The Exorcist" author) Tom Monteleone, Thomas Ligotti, Nick Cave, Stanley Wiater, Heather Graham, and others. William Packard, former editor of the New York Quarterly, was a mentor, publishing De Winter's work early on and inviting her to write "The Present State of American Poetry," a regular feature in the journal. At Packard's invitation she read her poetry at the New School in NYC, and continued a rapport

with Packard until his passing . Packard was a big supporter of Charles Bukowski and De Winter was published with him several times in his last years. Corrine De Winter (www.corrinedewinter.com) is also a Certified Psychic Medium. (Kera Center, World Metaphysical Association,) A Naturalist, Philanthropist, metaphysical seeker, artis, the founder of “Small World Fund For Children ,” and a Radio Host for SUPERNATURAL RADIO, on the Blogtalkradio.com website. De Winter lives between this world and the next.