

HWA Poetry Showcase Featured Poets and a Tribute to Peter Adam Salomon

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

The HWA Poetry Showcase is now publishing its eighth volume of the series. The Showcase was the brainchild of two-time Bram Stoker Nominee Peter Adam Salomon whom I considered to be a friend, though due to his health and later Covid, I never got to meet face-to-



face. Peter convinced the late Rocky Wood, then President of the HWA to start the showcase to feature the poetic talents of the HWA, as clearly exhibited by this year's featured Showcase poets. Peter was the editor of the Showcase for Volumes I and II, both of which were at the top of the Amazon best sellers list for poetry. He asked me to take over for him due to his health and his belief that the Showcase should also feature the editing talents of different poets and the position of editor should change every two years. I was the editor for two years and Peter reminded me of the need to pass the mantle. He and I agreed that Stephanie M. Wytovich would be an excellent editor. Peter also pushed me to try to get the HWA to agree to turn the Showcase from a digital only publication to a hard copy one as well. With his encouragement the HWA went back and made Volumes I and II hard copy also. Ever devoted to dark poetry, Peter advocated for making

October 7 Dark Poetry Day. Dark Poetry Day has gained acceptance with the public and academia. Peter was a champion of poetry. He was also a friend though we never got to meet in person. The week before he died, we exchanged thoughts on a new volume of verse Peter had been working on. I owe him gratitude and am saddened at losing him. He was a true friend of poetry and the HWA.

Bram Stoker Award winning author and editor Stephanie M. Wytovich is now stepping down as editor of the Showcase after guiding Volumes V, VI, VII and now the upcoming Volume VIII. We are certainly going to miss her input, but she is honoring a tradition set by the first editor Peter Salomon to pass this endeavor on after a time so that it continues to represent the diversity of the HWA. Angela Yuriko Smith, who already has impressive credentials as a poet, fiction author and editor, will become the new editor.

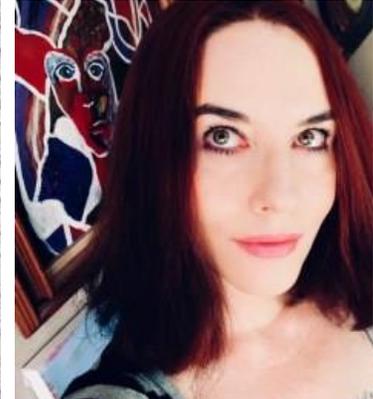
This latest volume, featuring a beautiful cover by Robert Cabeen, continues the strong support that the HWA gives to dark and speculative poetry. Ms. Wytovich along with her judges, Bram Stoker nominee Angela Yuriko Smith and Bram Stoker winning poet Sara Tantlinger, have selected what they chose to be the three poems and poets as “featured” for the volumes which has been the tradition of the series. This year the featured poets are



Lee Murray



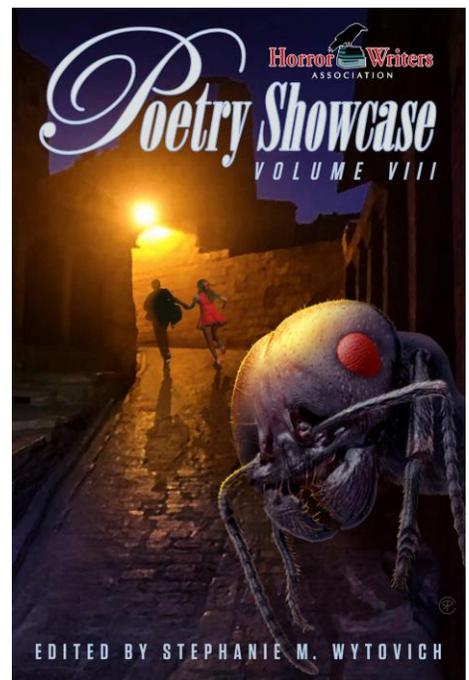
Ingrid Taylor



Brenda Tolian

The poems these three submitted are rich in use of language, imagery and of course evoke abundant creepy and dark feelings in any reader. The series can be found at https://www.amazon.com/dp/B0753JH32N?searchxofy=true&ref=db_s_aps_series_rwt.

I asked each of them to provide a copy of these poems and to talk a bit about what they intended with their work and their experiences with the Showcase.



Q: Each of you have very strong roots in fiction but certainly excelled with your poems appearing in Volume VIII. What has drawn you to dark poetry? Do you write poetry regularly and if so what inspirations do you draw from? Do you think that your work in poetry furthers your fiction writing or the other way around?

Lee Murray: Thank you, David. It's true that I'm better known for my fiction than for poetry. I've been an avid consumer of poetry all my life—I always have a collection or two on my bedside table to dip into—but as far as being a poet myself, I'm still a debutante with only around a dozen poems published to date. My interest in writing poetry began as a means of sharpening my prose with the kind of cutting, concise imagery that our horror poets are renown for. I wanted to explore how poets created meaning and beauty using as few words as possible. How they could conjure mood and ambiance with a single line. How they made readers bleed with the careful use of white space. To that end, I attended myriad poetry workshops by some of the world's best horror poets, among them Donna Lynch, Stephanie Wytovich, and Linda D. Addison. What I discovered opened my eyes. Concepts which might not lend themselves to a short story or novel are sometimes better revealed in a poem. Or those same concepts might be expressed differently as poetry. A new form can offer a new perspective. There are ways of teasing new meaning out of

existing texts. While I've been grappling with these groundbreaking ideas, my prose has also been evolving. I've always tried to write what resonates for me (rather than for the market), but lately there's been an increased emphasis on issues from my own experience and heritage in my work, and those themes have somehow required a fresh approach from me. So I've been tending towards hybrid work, using poetry in my prose, or presenting my stories more as prose-poems. It's exciting and terrifying, and I'm grateful to the innovative editors who have accepted those works and offered their encouragement.

Ingrid Taylor: *I've always loved reading and writing poetry, and when I was eleven, my poem about a horse won a contest and was published in a journal. That was the first time I felt validated as a writer and understood that people other than my mother wanted to read my writing (don't get me wrong, my mom is a wonderful audience). After taking a significant break from writing to attend veterinary school and work in clinical practice, I returned to poetry many years later. I often use poetry to inform and inspire my fiction writing, and when I'm in a tough spot with prose, immersing myself in poetry will help me break through barriers in the writing. Creating poetry is very freeing for me—I seem to be able to access a certain depth and darkness in my poems, and I like the opportunity to explore and play with language in surprising ways. I'm currently*

completing my debut collection of dark fabulist poetry, and I'm looking forward to getting it out into the world.

Brenda Tolian: *I have always written poetry and the musical lyric. Music and its symbolism and explicit details informs my greater fiction writing. Horror requires that the writer dips their fingers into the abyss and retrieve sensual details. If we do not awaken the senses of the reader, then they will not feel the horror & the dread. It must be more than reading—It must burrow under the skin and twitch there until the creature newborn rips out of your guts.*

Q: Tell us about the specific poems you submitted. How did the ideas for your poem come to mind and describe what you wanted the reader to experience from your work?

Lee Murray: *“orchid moon” grew out of a writing exercise set for participants of Linda D. Addison’s Horror University poetry workshop, which the Grand Master presented at our virtual StokerCon event in 2021 (and is still available online). In that workshop, Addison revealed how she often finds inspiration for her poems in lines of free writing or in sentences lifted from stories she’s written previously. She invited participants to find something we’d written, select a few lines, and rearrange or reimagine the*

words and phrases to tease out new meaning. A copy of *Black Cranes: Tales of Unquiet Women* was on my desk, so I selected two (longish) sentences from my story “*Frangipani Wishes*” to work with. In the story, a young woman persecuted by hungry ghost spirits is also tormented by her father’s youngest wife, referred to only as *Little Wife*. She’s just a minor character in the story, but as I played with the sentences, I realised there was an underlying narrative that I hadn’t yet explored: a tale about all the *Little Wives* who clamour to claim space in ‘their fathers’ houses’, yet, lacking agency, these women are compelled to snatch at power by poisoning the lives of others. In just a few minutes I had a couple of stanzas. I shared them with the group and received some lovely feedback. At that point, Addison cracked the whip and we had to move on to another aspect of the workshop, but buoyed by everyone’s encouragement, I went back to develop the poem over the next few weeks, eventually discovering its resolution.

Ingrid Taylor: This poem was inspired by the 2020 film *Castle Freak*. I have a deep love of horror films and frequently draw inspiration from them, but when I watched this film, some of the scenes caused a strong emotional response in me as a disabled person. While my disability is not the same as the main character’s, I found that I deeply identified with the challenges she faced in claiming her agency and self-determination after becoming disabled

when others were determined to take that from her. And I strongly identified with the “monster” in the film and how she was othered and marginalized within an ableist setting. I think the filmmakers subverted the conventional representations of monstrosity and disability in some interesting ways, and I found that I couldn’t stop thinking about the film and how it has resonated with my personal experience. I wrote this poem to express those emotions and give voice to the “monster” who is kept on the margins of “acceptable”/ableist society.

Brenda Tolian: *Skinwalkers are a given in the haunting valley I call home. They are not just myth; they are considered by many to be real. I want the reader to inhabit the body, to feel the hunger and the power of transformation. The Skinwalker makes a treatise with the dark and the primordial spirits of place, both inhabiting and breaking the fundamental rules of nature.*

Q: Why did you decide to submit to this year’s Showcase? What was your experience with the jury and editor in the submission and selection process?

Lee Murray: I’d submitted twice before and been published both times (Dear Christine in HWA Poetry Showcase Vol. VI, and Rétourne in HWA Poetry Showcase Vol. VII)—a surprise on both occasions. As a writer of fiction predominantly, I hadn’t expected to have my poems

accepted, so some serious imposter syndrome ensued. But those two appearances, and a completed poem on file, gave me the confidence to have another go. (Also, Robert Payne Cabeen was the cover illustrator for Vols. VI and VII, and the possibility of in appearing in a third gorgeous volume featuring his artwork was another a drawcard.) The HWA submission portal is easy to use and working with Stephanie Wytovich is always a dream. She is kind and professional, and the showcase has dazzled under her guidance. However, as Stephanie relinquishes the Showcase to take on another life-changing project, I'm intrigued to see how Angela Yuriko Smith will shape the anthology going forward.

Ingrid Taylor: *I've been honored to have my poems appear in the last three volumes of the Poetry Showcase, and I'm happy to be part of an organization that is so dedicated to dark poetry. I feel that submitting my poems to the Showcase for consideration is doing my small part to support that greater vision. And it's always a great pleasure to work with Editor Stephanie Wytovich and the guest judges and see my poems in the wonderful volumes they've produced.*

Brenda Tolian: *Stephanie M. Wytovich is an epic poet that I admire so much—so a chance to work with her was something to try for. I sent in a work that was a retooled song lyric morphing into Skinwalker Moon. Working with*

the HWA and Stephanie M. Wytovich is one of those dreams you have but don't think will happen. Every part of the process has been wonderful!

Q: Have you found your membership in the HWA to be beneficial to either help you promote your poetic works or to help you as a poet in your craft?

*Lee Murray: Yes and yes! I've learned so much about poetic forms from reading work by my HWA colleagues and from attending their workshops, panels, and readings. Their work has inspired and moved me, and their tips and strategies are illuminating. As for helping to promote my work, I'm about to release my first poetry collection, *Tortured Willows*, a collaboration comprising 60 poems, written with my Black Cranes sisters, Christina Sng, Angela Yuriko Smith, and Geneve Flynn, and the encouragement and support we've received from our HWA colleagues in the lead up to the book's release has been simply phenomenal. Endorsements and encouragement from real writers who are not our mothers? Priceless.*

Ingrid Taylor: I was very fortunate to receive support for my poetry from the HWA as a recipient of the Dark Poetry Scholarship. With this scholarship, I was able to participate in classes and poetry workshops that enhanced and deepened my knowledge and craft. I've found the HWA dark poetry community to be incredibly supportive and

uplifting, and I feel constantly encouraged and inspired by my fellow horror poets. The first time I ever found the courage to read my poetry aloud for an audience was at the StokerCon in Providence. I showed up for the open mike and planned on just listening. Linda Addison, who was facilitating the readings, was so generous, kind, and supportive and her love of poetry was so evident that before I knew it, I was heading up to read one of my poems. It was a wonderful feeling to be in that room full of poets, and from that point on I knew I wanted to share more of my poems.

Brenda Tolian: *HWA opened up the possibilities of what horror could be. I have met and worked with so many members who have helped see my career move forward from this volume to the successful pitch at Stoker Con that landed my novel Blood Mountain a home with Raw Dog Screaming Press.*

Here are your poems selected as featured poems for Volume VIII:

orchid moon

by Lee Murray

**while you sleep
Little Wife**

**cuts wet halfmoons
into your open palms**

**like curved beaks
they clamour
skylark syllables of despair
dark with putrid breath**

**while you sleep
fingers domed as a teak cage
you clasp at tumours
bloat-bellied with pustulating spite**

**as half-white tendrils
of an unquiet spirit
snake bitter through your bones
you slumber, still**

and outside

**on the greasy stoop
Little Wife
flirts with an orchid moon**

What Monster is This
by Ingrid L. Taylor

You made me voyeur
in my own castle, a pomegranate mouth
edged with cosmos & wrongly built,
to keen for the slip of your heart
peeled from your ribcage shell.
Do not forgive me because I want
the same as you—to break
on our bodies' borders, to pass through
the skin & everything beneath,
for the caress and the silver delight
that binds one to another's flesh.

You called me to storm,
& I chose the lightning
freak of sky
that splits to make me
whole. What monster is this
rare body of dissonant notes
rising to fuck & imbibe unrepentant,
whose rampage will cut
a bloodied swath across your velvet
silk & bone. I am atmosphere
sheltered in birdsong,
I nest in the waft of morning
& a sun that embraces the tender parts

you would not touch.
I enter this world you cast
to a mockingbird's tune
open my mouth
and sing.

Skinwalker Moon
by Brenda S. Tolian

wolfskin, dry crackle, ragged fur
i taste you on the western wind
tension, four limbed, two feet, two hands
below the peaceful pinyon, the sun has gone to blood
dripping down the Sangre de Cristo —*i need you*

gravel in my belly, hunger, mastication
claws grip the edge of the caldera
salt -sweat, and fear rolling over my tongue
howling to answering coyotes
the hunt, leaping over prickly pear
running until my chest bursts
i want you— *in my throat*

blade on belly, ragged teeth, count of twenty
slip skin, wet fabric, knitted cells

**pulling the edges of your smiling meat mask
slow, warm, wet
neck, chin, and lip—*i become you***

**drums, flickering pulse between sweat lined thighs
broken breastbone, cracking ribs, pull them wide
blood of sacred eagle
wings erect, you breathe through them
shake out of your skin, unzip your vertebrae
shiver, fine hair still erect
obsidian blade, peel away—*what i need***

**slip into your body to become
breast of moon exhales over the dunes
warm and heavy your wet skin
claws sharpened on twisted cottonwood
my tongue licks your blood-flecked lips
elk white skull bone on my head
there is magic in the night
your muscle in my mouth
your warm heart in my hands**

**i am you
the you—*that i never had***

Bios:

Lee Murray is a multi-award-winning author-editor from Aotearoa-New Zealand (Sir Julius Vogel, Australian Shadows) and a double Bram Stoker Award®-winner. A NZSA Honorary Literary Fellow, Lee is the Grimshaw Sargeson Fellow for 2021 for her narrative prose-poetry work *Fox Spirit on a Distant Cloud*. Her debut poetry collection, *Tortured Willows*, a collaboration with Christina Sng, Angela Yuriko Smith, and Geneve Flynn, is forthcoming from Yuriko Publishing. Read more at leemurray.info.

Ingrid Taylor is a poet, science writer, and veterinarian whose poetry has recently appeared in the Southwest Review, the Ocotillo Review, FERAL: A Journal of Poetry and Art, Horse Egg Literary, and others. Her poem “Mermaids” received Punt Volat Journal’s Annual Poetry Award in 2021. Her nonfiction work has appeared in Sentient Media. She’s received support for her writing from the Playa Artist Residency, the Horror Writers Association, and Gemini Ink, and she holds an MFA from Pacific University. Find her online at ingridltaylor.com and on Instagram @tildybear.

Brenda S. Tolian MFA is a Southwestern Gothic Horror writer from Southern Colorado. Her work appears in 101 Proof Horror, Consumed Tales Inspired by The Wendigo,

Twisted Pulp Magazine 3 and many other places. Look for her novel Blood Mountain forthcoming from Raw Dog Screaming Press and a story in the forthcoming Denver Horror Collectives ~The Jewish Book of Horror. She is currently working on a Doctorate in Literature at Murray State University and teaches English Literature and Writing. Find her at brendatolian.com.