

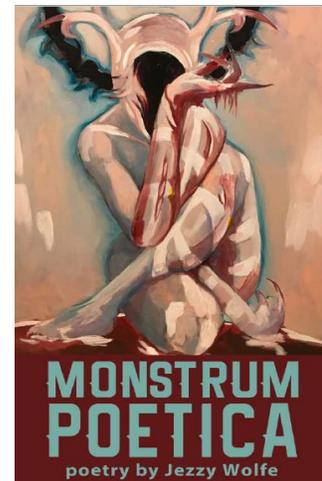
# The Monster Menagerie: An Interview With Poet Jezzy Wolfe

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

Jezzy Wolfe is known to many as an author of fiction, a reviewer and even a blog radio host. She has now ventured full time into the realm of dark poetry with her debut collection *Monstrum Poetica* from Raw Dog Screaming Press, lovingly introduced by the great Jonathon Maberry. She joins us to discuss her collection which is a literal menagerie of monsters.



**Q:** Before *Monstrum Poetica* you were probably more known as a fiction author than a poet. You have also been a blog radio host, a reviewer and a web designer. I do see that you have had a not so clandestine long-term dalliance with dark poetry. Among other accolades, your poem “Dead Above” was named one of the Top Ten of Crystal Lake Publishing’s recent poetry competition. What is it about the dark side of poetry that has



**compelled you to seek it out in such a grand fashion with your debut collection? Can you list some of the poets that influence you and how?**

A: My love of poetry started with the nursery rhymes my mom read to me when I was a young child, and grew up with me. In high school, that love flourished with modernists like E.E. Cummings and post modernists like Lawrence Ferlinghetti. I adored the beat poets of the 1950's and 60's for the way they craftily explored human condition, religion, and sexuality, something that smacked against my conservative Christian upbringing. As an adult, the darker confessional poets spoke to my soul...Sylvia Plath, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Anne Sexton. And that was where I *really* started rooting my own poetry in the veins of the confessional. I still write quite a bit of confessional poetry, as it is my therapy. My way to cope with the many frustrations of navigating life.

Poetry is so uniquely personal, and often resonates with very specific audiences. With *Monstrum*, I hoped to delve into something that was overtly more horror themed and could speak to a broader audience. It was an interesting and engaging experiment, one I enjoyed enough to continue with new themes.

**Q: *Monstrum Poetica* is a poetic encyclopedia of folklore and myths spanning a broad geographic scope. I**

**counted about 17 different archetypical creatures from the well-known werewolves and vampires to lesser-known creatures such as the *Aswang* and *Yokai*. Besides a general narrative of the lore of each creature you present three poems on each. The poems have different points of view and focus on aspects of and the diverse varieties of these creatures. With so many to choose how did you compile this list?**

A: In the beginning, I wasn't sure what I was doing. Quite simply, I wanted to write poetry about monsters. But there were too many to choose from, so I began a process of elimination. There were two primary qualifiers: The monsters had to be a species of creature, rather than singulars. (Think vampires as opposed to Dracula, or hellhounds rather than just Cerebus.) They also had to be intrinsically malevolent. Deadly. I wanted sinister and evil, not just annoying and mischievous. The list was further refined by descriptive distinctions. There were beasts of the water and air, urban legends and regional folklores, canines, spirits, harbingers, even a few with actual scientific explanations. I looked for beings that are not typically considered monsters but are historically known as such. I wanted to make sure that there were some surprises in the mix, and some horrific inclusions that might give readers a brand-new nightmare.

Initially, the collection was to be strictly poetry, classed by beast. But the more I learned about them, the more I realized it was important to share that information alongside the poems. In some cases, it was that the monsters were so bizarre, so unfamiliar, that background would be necessary to genuinely appreciate them. In other instances, the history behind some of the popularized monsters added a new layer of complexity to the familiar. I didn't know that werewolves dated as far back as Greek mythology. I was unaware of the Islamic roots of the jinn. I never made that connection between black eyed children and men in black. Discovering these unexpected gems of unquity became as motivational to me as the poetry itself. Sharing that with the reader would give them context without removing them from the atmosphere I strived to create.

**Q: In the press release for this volume issued by Raw Dog Screaming Press stated the following about your debut collection**

***“Monstrum Poetica is my love song to the monsters that wait in our nightmares, realized through verses that move across pages,” Wolfe said. “It is a selection of singular dances embedded in the shadows of the horrific.”***

**A very lovely description. Can you offer a deeper discussion? Have you had nightmares of these creatures? Why did you choose this theme for your collection?**

A: I tend to associate poetry with performing and visual arts, in the way that poets use language to ‘paint’ their narratives, much like a verbal interpretation of a Monet or Degas. I often utilize concrete structure to add another layer of meaning to my pieces, an arrangement of white spaces and placement that illustrates a ‘dance’ with the words themselves. I find them to be a particularly satisfying challenge, but try to utilize them carefully, as I know not everyone appreciates shaped verse. When I include them, I do so with much intention.

Monsters hold a fascinating place in our lives. Throughout history, monsters were devices that served as warnings. Warnings against disobedience, warnings against depravity. Warnings against greed. They were morality markers, and the bringers of punishment should we not heed the warnings given. They were our consequences. In those ways, they were also our scapegoats. The fear we associate with monsters is the fear we feel towards humanity, because monsters are merely a reflection of our uglier natures. They are our executioners, and redemptions. When I look at them in that way, in the ‘service’ they do

for us, it's easy to feel a little sympathy for the beast. In reality, *we* are our own monsters.

**Q: Did you have a favorite creature in this collection?**

A: Ah yes. Mothman. Ironically, Mothman might be the one creature that didn't completely fit my checklist of qualifiers for this collection. I mean, is there more than one Mothman? Is Mothman a monster or a cryptid? Is Mothman truly deadly, or merely a creepy but helpful harbinger sent to warn us of coming disaster? No matter the answers, there was no way I could leave out my favorite beastie. Dead Zone was one of the first poems I wrote for Monstrum, combining the monster with the horrific tragedy of Chernobyl. Manmade horror meets the supernatural. It is a thrilling scenario, and one I could not resist exploring.

**Q: The publisher of your collection, Raw Dog Screaming Press, is well known for its support of poetry. RDSP's publishers, Jennifer Barnes and John Edward Larson, know how to find and promote great poetry. How did you connect with them? What were your experiences in the editing and final product that became your collection?**

A: I've always admired Raw Dog Screaming Press, and their unique interest in dark speculative poetry both

intrigued and excited me. I followed them for years before a mutual friend put me in touch with them. The entire team was such a pleasure to work with, and while I was anxious about the overwhelming process of publishing my first collection of poetry, they made it easy. Jennifer and John answered every question I had about the production and design, Stephanie Wytovich provided wonderfully inciteful editing suggestions, and Erin Al-Mehairi handled the promotions with infectious enthusiasm. Steve Archer's artwork was the perfect visualization of what I hoped to achieve.

The peace of mind that comes from working with such a proficient team is invaluable, and I will never be able to thank them enough for taking a chance on me and my collection. I will equally cherish any opportunity I have to work with them in the future. Finding publishers that strive to keep poetry alive and vibrant is a true blessing.

**Q: It was delightful to see the twists you added to several of the often overused archetypes. For example, in the category of zombies, your poem “*Another Roadkill Revenge Story*” is a narrative of a zombie apocalypse brought on the world by a deer**

*When Bambi met headfirst with  
that speeding truck.  
And who knew deer zombies could*

*bite through windshields?*

**The poem finishes with a nasty twist on the Beatitudes, “And the deer shall inherit the earth.” How on earth did you come up with such an original twist to an old trope?**

A: Some things really do write themselves. Admittedly, a few of the monsters included in *Monstrum* are not my usual favorite creeps, but excluding them would be remiss. Zombies were one such monster. Often, when I am not sure how to approach something, I default to humor, and two of my zombie poems were intentionally playful. I also turn occasionally to current events for inspiration, which is what I did in the instance of *Another Roadkill Revenge Story*. Not long before I started working on this collection, the news was littered with stories about CWD, or Chronic Wasting Disease, that showed up in deer. People were speculating whether it could be transmitted to humans, a sort of undead virus. I coupled that with the idea that so many deer lose their homes to urban sprawl and possibly carry that grudge against us...if deer were the grudge carrying sort of animals. (They might be, though. I cannot say with any authority. I’m no deer expert. I am not out on my hikes whispering to random deer, listening to their nefarious plots against humanity, or whatnot.) *Roadkill* is one of those poems that rushed through me without hesitation. And the ending is one of my favorite lines in the

entire collection. It is a combination of the heavy Biblical dread I was raised with, and unironic sarcasm.

**Q: Your section on Mermaids reminds us that fantasy stories by popular movie studios have entirely glossed over the dark nature of the roots of folklore. In researching these creatures did some surprise you when you learned of the differences between the modern children's variations and the true foundations of these stories?**

A: My most beloved book is a Reader's Digest edition compilation circa 1967 titled THE WORLD'S BEST FAIRY TALES. I've had this book my entire life, and it includes 69 popular fairy tales. Just about any childhood favorite you can think of is somewhere within its 800 pages, and these are not the modern, candy-coated reinterpretations. Back then, happy endings were not a default. My introduction to The Little Mermaid was in this book, a tragic tale of the youngest daughter of the Sea King, who failed to win the love of a human prince. She turned to foam on the sea. I grew up memorizing those sad little tragedies. Even as a young girl, the idea of rewriting fairy tales for a happily-ever-after narrative was less interesting. Fairy tales, much like nursery rhymes and fables, were morality lessons—dire warnings to remind children about the importance of following rules and obeying their parents. I admit I am a bit of a fatalist, so my appreciation

for the darker versions could never be replaced with playful animations and fun musical sequences...though I would be lying if I said I don't enjoy watching them revisited and rebooted on the big screen. I just see them as a different creature altogether from the stories I loved as a child.

**Q: Jonathon Maberry provides a wonderful and loving Introduction to you collection where he not only praises your work, but also speaks to the power and importance of poetry in his life. Has the same been for you? Have other non-poets in the horror field let on their love, secret or otherwise, for dark poetry? What do you think dark poetry adds to the genre of horror?**

A: As I began focusing on composing poems for Monstrum, I was introduced to many brilliant authors in the horror community that are also accomplished and respected poets. They are an enthusiastic, encouraging, and welcoming bunch, and their continued support and friendships have meant the world to me. There is a growing attraction to dark verse now that delights me. Early on in my writing career, it seemed that publishers seeking poetry were rare, and the poets I met through blogging often self-published their collections. Which is why I started with fiction, and why I am better known for writing short horror.

But *poetry* is my first love. It has held a unique place in my life, and anything I write, whether poetry or fiction, intends

to be a reflection of that love. It is breath, symphony, and brushstrokes. It is a decadent homage to that which terrifies, in abbreviated explosions of expression. I feel horror benefits uniquely from the inclusion of poetry and poetic vice in that it emphasizes the beauty of our nightmares and phobias and transforms them into something both beguiling and repulsive.

**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: Honestly, I’ve done both, though more often than not, I write only when I feel inspired. I will go through times when I push myself to make a daily habit of penning at least one new piece, but those periods fall victim to the hassles of everyday life, unfortunately. I would love to be someone that sits down to tangle with my muses daily. When I do fall into habits or routines that produce creativity, I am thrilled with the progress I make. I admire, as well as envy that discipline in others.

While I was working on Monstrum, I did set a goal for myself to produce a new piece daily. Some days were a struggle because I was simultaneously researching and writing. It was easy to get caught up in the research phase of the project, and sometimes, that proved to be more hinderance than help. Because while research is imperative, it is also a time-consuming distraction.

**Q: As a follow up to the previous question, and one I often repeat, deals with the avoidance of cliché in speculative poetry. What advice can you give the fledging poet on how to use archetypes without resorting to cliché? How do you write dark poetry without imitating the poets that inspired you to write dark poetry?**

A: I did worry about writing pieces that simply repeated common ideas around the more popular monsters I included. Almost no one is a stranger to vampires, werewolves, and zombies, after all. Finding a new direction with any of them came through all that research. Looking for any unusual or unfamiliar detail and running with it. I turned to books, to movies, to the internet and YouTube. It was about finding a spark of something new in something old. For me, soaking in media helps me find new inspiration. And that's the best advice I could give. Sit down, clear your head, and dive in. Don't hesitate to jump

into new rabbit holes. If it excites you, run with it, because that excitement is the key to finding your unique narrative.

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

A: I am currently working on poetry for two different themed collections...one that explores the feminine archetypes of horror, and one that travels the dark timeline of mankind's nuclear advancements. I am invigorated by where these avenues are taking me, and thoroughly enjoying this journey, so I cannot wait to share more about these projects with you in the future!

**Please share with us a few of your favorite pieces:**

*Cold Case*

We left in the night  
Black covering our tracks  
Headed for nowhere  
    Our secret safe in our chests

And still tucked there  
when our bodies floated up  
from Cimmerian depths  
Buoyed with the stench of a century

Submerged in the igneous muck  
of a frozen lake.

Hatchet marks in our heads.

Our secret still safe in our chests.

### *The Umbra*

The backwards hour  
brought her to her shadow,  
eyes black and h o l l o w,  
skin g r e e n and veil thin.  
Not a warning, but a promise  
that she was spiralling toward  
the untimely end of her forever.  
A finite farewell to be feared  
and spun into dire stories  
of what not to do when  
wandering the dunes  
  
after dark.

## *Return By Fire*

She died as a witch last life around,  
Her body consumed by blazing fire,  
History repeats itself, she found,  
Staking her to another burning pyre.

Her body consumed by blazing fire,  
Hemorrhaging magic from her veins,  
Staking her to another burning pyre,  
The familiar hell that leaves its stains.

Hemorrhaging magic from her veins,  
Smothering her cries in the roar of flame,  
The familiar hell that leaves its stains,  
Brought back by fear, by ignorant blame.

Smothering her cries in the roar of flame,  
Leaving her ashes to blacken the ground,  
Brought back by fear, by ignorant blame,  
She died as a witch last life around.

## *Dead Zone*

Do you suppose  
in the days before the inferno,

the people of Pripyat  
entertained an enigmatic guest?

*Do you?*

Did anyone see  
it circling the skyline,  
and wonder at the span  
of its terrible wings?

Did the children  
hurl stones  
at an ugly bird?  
Would their parents  
notice when they did?

Did that spectral shadow with  
round reflector eyes  
and wings the size  
of tattered sails,

perch in the commons,  
hover above playgrounds,  
swoop over cars?

Could they feel the  
sinister presence

resting on the bridge

where they would later watch  
Chernobyl burn,  
oblivious bodies,  
under the soft fall  
of radiated ash  
and certain doom?

### *Sanguinary*

Many ways to stop a heart,  
That pounds against a cage of bone,  
To exsanguinate for lifeless art.

A needle's prick can play the part,  
Of an embolism brusquely grown,  
Many ways to stop a heart.

By hatchet for a craftless start,  
If time be short, it's quickest shown,  
To exsanguinate for lifeless art.

Pills bring fate if swallowed smart,  
Delivery clandestine and consumed alone,  
Many ways to stop a heart.

Toxic treats will easiest depart,

Candies laced with Death unknown,  
To exsanguinate for lifeless art.

But a lover's blade is the poisoned dart,  
That most oft carves forever into stone...  
Many ways to stop a heart  
To exsanguinate for lifeless art.

*“Dead Zone” and “The Umbra” appear in MONSTRUM  
POETICA, published by Raw Dog Screaming Press 2022*

*“Cold Case”, “Return By Fire”, and “Sanguinary”  
appear in Siren’s Call ezine, Winter 2021 issue*

**Jezy Wolfe** is a poet and author who has appeared in numerous anthologies and publications, such as Smart Rhino’s ZIPPERED FLESH trilogy and the INSIDIOUS ASSASSINS and ASININE ASSASSINS anthologies, Crystal Lake’s SHALLOW WATERS anthology, Western Legends’ UNNATURAL TALES OF THE JACKALOPE, Space & Time Magazine, Siren’s Call ezine, and Weird Tales Magazine. Her debut poetry collection, MONSTRUM POETICA, was published in 2021 by Raw Dog Screaming Press. When she is not being chased by her

ferrets or hiking trails, you can find her on her blog at [jezzywolfe.wordpress.com](http://jezzywolfe.wordpress.com), on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/jezzywolfeauthor](http://www.facebook.com/jezzywolfeauthor), and on Twitter at [@JezzyWolfe](https://twitter.com/JezzyWolfe).