

**POETRY IN THE TIME OF COVID AND THE
REIGN OF ORDINARY HORRORS: AN
ESSAY BY OUR HWA POETRY BLOG
STUDENT ASSISTANT**

Our Poetry Blog Student Assistant, writing under the pen name Exsanguine Hart, has shared with us a delightful and poignant essay on the craft of writing poetry in the Covid era.

On Being a Better Curtain

This essay is about being a better curtain. But why such an everyday object? The mostly honest, slightly adulterated truth (for the sake of dramatic effect) is that like many people, I have spent much of the past two years holed up inside, staring at my curtains. For those of you who were hoping for a less mundane explanation, a resplendent mix of horror and chaotic energy, I can offer only a crudely composed limerick:

*Carnivorous curtains are rare
(Categorically prone to despair)
But in death they delight,
Crunching human shaped bites
And there isn't a view they would spare.*

What the last line of the limerick attempts to convey is that curtains are the world's best observers. They have a front-row view of the car screeching past on the outside and the houseplant twisting around a lamp on the inside. Curtains spend all their time watching, so they've gotten really good at seeing the things we no longer notice. For this reason, I believe in their superior ability to detect supernatural activity.

The pandemic suddenly brought me back to the world of daydreams and illustrated books and poetry. At first, I was nothing like a curtain. I was restless, anxious, uninspired and bored. My actions at the

outset of lockdown largely resembled my regular life. Up at six, study, exercise, homework, eat, sleep, repeat. As it went on, my habits devolved. Up at thirteen. To hell with studying.

My companions, a stack of poetry collections (by the likes of Linda Addison, Donna Lynch, e e cummings, Christina Sng and Edgar Allan Poe) spurred the return of my curiosity in world around me. I started to look at the concepts I encountered in the news and my biology textbooks and documentaries through the lens of art. The art I saw, the music I listened to and the poems I read all made me want to create.

And finally: Up at six; read, write, read, draw, repeat.

One poem in particular that influenced me in this stage of my journey was *The Yellow House* by Linda

Addison and Alessandro Manzetti. I liked the way that it flowed and tumbled over itself and the way it sounded ethereal and musical when read aloud. It made me reassess what I thought horror was. It was also a reminder that hope stems from direct action, like closing a curtain to block out the light instead of waiting all day for the sun to set.

And like a curtain projecting the silhouettes of real things, I learned first to mimic the poets I read, and then to write my own poems. The poets showed up like shadowy figures in my writing and instructed me in experimenting with form, from villanelles to free verse.

Eventually, I started working on my first collection, which I promptly scrapped, redrew and rewrote. (A cycle which repeated itself a number of times). However, being too weak to cull my darlings

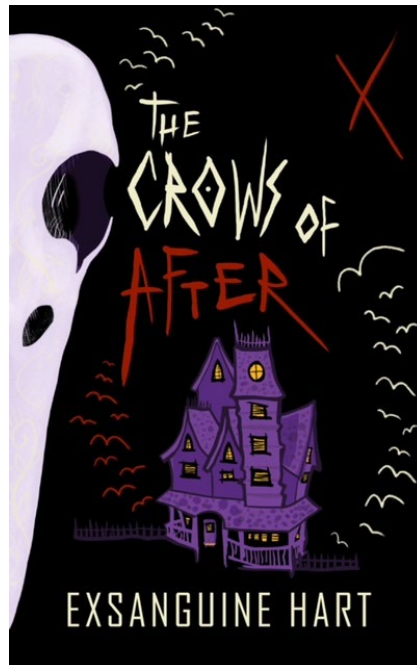
I began shoving them into a document filled with curtain-trimmings; snippets of poems that didn't make the final cut. Knowing the world would still be there in the morning, I learned it was worth ruthlessly clipping and rearranging my writing to make it better.

Like a curtain billowing in the wind, I learned to let go and follow the prompts offered by the things I encountered; the roadkill on the blacktop. My to-be-read pile. A map of the reduction of air pollution caused by Covid-19. Remembering being scared of Bloody Mary in the first grade. A French dictionary.

Finally, curtains taught me to keep going no matter what. They might grapple with the wind or get spattered by rain or get climbed on by a cat, but in the end they don't stop being what they are, and in doing this, they challenge me to continue writing and drawing for as long as I can.

I can't say I've mastered the art of being a curtain.
But I feel I've gotten closer.

Look for Exsanguine Hart's debut poetry collection *The Crows of After* (Specimen SandWitch Press).



BIO:

Exsanguine Hart is a scribbler with an obnoxiously pretentious pseudonym living somewhere in Canada with two cats and a number of dragons. Hart has been published in *Poetry Pause* (December 2021) and in *nationalpoetrymonth.ca* (April 2021) can be found online writing and doodling on instagram @exsanguine_hart and @specimensandwitch. See her webpages at <https://exsanguinehart.com/>.