

*a feminist anthology*

THE  
MEDUSA  
PROJECT



*edited by*

*Juliette van der Molen & Megha Sood*



# The Medusa Project

*A Feminist Anthology*

MOOKYCHICK

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*Golden Mask by Penny Sharman*

# Notes from the Editors

“Women, we might as well be dogs baying the moon as petitioners without the right to vote!”

---Susan B. Anthony

Dear Readers,

The start of this year not only marked the beginning of a new decade but also the centennial of the Nineteenth Amendment of the US Constitution which celebrates the democratic milestone of the Women's suffrage movement. The movement spearheaded by Susan B Anthony and her loyal followers has been a milestone that led to one of the critical amendments in the US Constitution. The right to vote not only speaks about freedom of choice but also about equality.

The campaign was equally important in the history of the American Poetry as it was heralded and promoted by the poems written by many suffragists who were part of that defining movement. This fact confirms the urgency and the necessity of the poetry and the salient role creative arts play in defining society at large.

To celebrate such a defining movement in history We, the editors of Mookychick, called all the womxn writers to submit work which resonated with the feeling of freedom, choice, and equality. Poems, Art, Fiction that reflect their struggle to carve a position in the patriarchal society, to get those voices heard, and to finally achieve a position to equality.

Our request for those works of art was returned with an extremely warm response and it finally led to the birth of this beautiful and riveting anthology: “The Medusa Project” which draws inspiration from the magical winged warrior and a Greek Gorgon “Medusa” who rose above all the struggles, atrocities and abuse in her patriarchal society and carved a niche for her finally becoming a beacon of strength and resilience for generations to come.

To me “Medusa” is a powerful feminist icon, a magical ally, a metaphor for emboldening resilience, who used her knowledge and resistance to dismantle the patriarchy. An empowering symbol of speaking truth to power and rising above all the accusations with resonating strength. That strength is the underlying emotion and the very essence of this anthology which is reflected in every single page of this e-book.

Women have been fighting for so long for their rights and the struggle has become even more crucial in the current political climate. With so many powerful movements

spearheaded by womxn in the last few years and the blatant violation of women's rights brings out the urgency for women's equality.

This anthology is a deep exposition of that pain and angst carried by the women for generations. It encapsulates the entire angst, rage, and passion and transforms it into thirty poems, mixed with art, poetry, fiction, and the magical rituals spreading throughout this e-book. It is a summation of the myriad ways women are reclaiming their feminist power. The entire collection is a clear reflection of that very underlying emotion. Each page will take you to the magical journey of expression and healing. This e-book bears a stark reflection of the immense vigor carried in the brave voices of its contributors.

This anthology also holds an extremely special place in my writing journey by being the first anthology I'm curating as a co-Editor. Being a part of such a purposeful anthology not only validates my writing but also reiterates the immense power that all genres of art hold. The e-book features and celebrates the writings of the well-established writers and emerging writers with equal ease and beauty.

I am really grateful and thankful for the immense support of my co-Editor Juliette van der Molen for her brilliant leadership and invaluable suggestions at various phases of the anthology. Also, none of this would have been possible without the support of the entire team of Mookychick along with founder Magda Knight whose constant encouragement guided us every step of the way. Also, a big shout out to our brilliant social media manager, Imogen Smiley, for spreading the word about anthology so enthusiastically.

Lastly, I'm immensely thankful to every submitter, contributor, reader, and supporter of this anthology for joining us in this beautiful journey of expression and healing. The sheer existence of this **128** page -anthology proves the immense strength and resilience the writers of this anthology have shown to voice their pain and struggle in today's society.

Hoping that this collection infuses you with the same formidable strength and healing which the infamous Greek gorgon imparts.

Regards,

Megha Sood

A Proud Co-editor of the "The Medusa Project"

Assistant Poetry Editor, Mookychick

Dear Readers,

I never intended to edit an anthology this year. Like so many projects, this started out as something different. Megha Sood, my assistant editor, came up with the brilliant idea of putting a themed call out for submissions to celebrate International Women's Day and the 100th anniversary of women gaining the right to vote in the United States. This is a presidential election year in the United States and it feels just as important as it was 100 years ago that women have the right to vote, the right to be heard. I shared her call with our editorial team and as so often happens with the magic of Mookychick, an anthology was born.

As an author that likes to dig into history, I'm often reminding myself that old texts are written and stories are told through the narrative of men. Even when they are about women, they are often not first hand accounts. The further back that I read, the more this is the case. And so, as we look into mythology and the story of Medusa, it is important to understand that women were not the original tellers of these tales.

Narrative is powerful. Words can build and shape ideologies that last centuries after the author is long gone. The more that we hear stories from the source, the more we are open to the possibility of enlightenment and compassion. Medusa, at its core, is a story about violence against women and the vilification that has historically followed. Forget that it's mythology and look at the repetitive themes that have led us all the way through a history that was written to take power away from women and blame them for their misfortunes. Even Athena is cast in the role of a jealous woman if we follow the traditional telling. But, what if Athena wanted to protect Medusa? She gave her the ultimate power to end the male gaze. This meant that Medusa would never be the prized possession of any man, never find love or that completeness that we are told all women must find. Athena punished Medusa- this is what the patriarchal narrative would have us believe.

Medusa is more than mythology.

Medusa is me. Medusa is you.

I want to hear Medusa's story from her own lips. I want to chat with Athena over a cup of tea. I want to hear the voices of women that are not my own. And so, I ended up editing *The Medusa Project*. The author's and artists that have contributed to this stunning body of work have come together as a powerful force. Inside of this anthology you will find stories of trauma, of survival and of triumph. You will find art that asks us to pause and consider different perspectives. You will find magical rituals rooted in empowerment and healing.

I'm so thankful for everyone that trusted us enough with their work to respond to our submission call. Often, it is not easy to share these stories and I am grateful for each

contribution. I'm grateful to my co-Editor and Assistant Poetry Editor, Megha Sood, for her tireless enthusiasm, thoughtfulness and attention to detail along every step of the way. When my energy flagged, she lifted me up and let me know we were in this together. I couldn't have asked for a better partner.

Additionally, I'd like to thank Magda Knight, co-founder and EIC of Mookychick, for her gentle encouragement and for providing the foundation of an incredible magazine where all voices can be heard. It was her vision that provided for Medusa as the theme and catalyst for this anthology, as well as the title. Her Medusa ritual in our section of Magical Rituals is part of the "Big Medusa Energy" that we know will be a source of empowerment to many.

Thank you to our editorial team at Mookychick for your insight and support with this project. And lastly, a thank you to Wijnand, who worked hard to layout this anthology and breathe the last bit of life into it!

It is our hope that in these pages you will find camaraderie, understanding and empowerment. We believe that Medusa would approve.

Sincerely,  
Juliette van der Molen  
Poetry Editor/Mookychick





# Content Warning

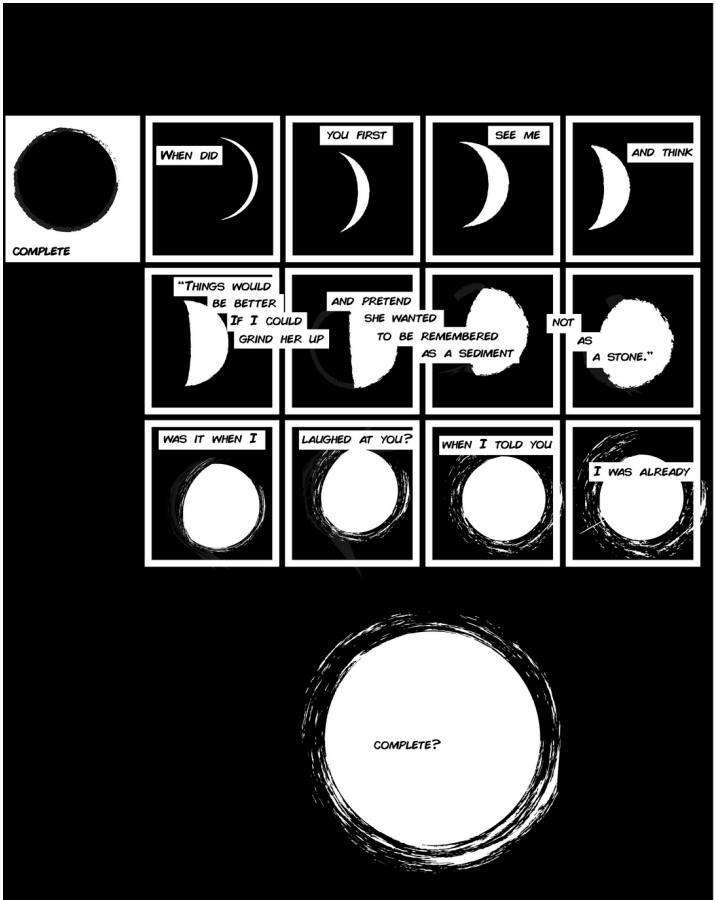
Due to the nature of this anthology's theme, selected writing and art may contain sensitive and triggering imagery and terminology. If you choose to read this anthology, it may be important to exercise self-care and take breaks where necessary.

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complete by Anne Elise Brinich

# Verse of the Gorgon

*POETRY*





# We Are

by Lisa Lerma Weber

We are told Eve was formed from Adam's rib  
so we are called women.  
And Eve ate the fruit of the tree of knowledge  
so we are called sinners.  
And Eve tempted Adam with the fruit  
so we are called whores.  
And Eve caused humans to be cast out  
so we are blamed.

We are told women should submit to men,  
bow their heads in obedience penance shame  
because woman was made by God for man.  
And a woman who doesn't submit is a jezebel  
who paints her face with her sins  
and wears her disobedience like jewels.

We are told women are nothing without men.  
We are simply the wombs the worshippers the wounds.

We are told chastised punished.

We are women and we are wondrous.  
We are wolves running free and howling at the moon.  
We will not take their words  
and carry them like crosses on our backs.  
We will not let them pierce us  
with their spears of hypocrisy and shame.  
We will not let them plant their seeds  
of doubt and hate in our wombs.

We are free to define ourselves and tell our own stories,  
free to choose our own paths.  
We are not creations of man, but of God,  
and we may speak to God in our own way,  
in our own time, and not through gatekeepers  
who throw stones in an attempt to bury us  
along with their own disguised sins.

We are women. We are. WE ARE.

# The Warrior

by Dr. Charley Barnes

She boils the meat clean off the bone  
and takes the skull by a horn.

Weather-beaten, she wonders  
on counting the spirals to each point,  
would she find the age of the beast?

Seamstress steady, she threads  
a living snake through eye sockets  
and spaces where teeth once were.

The completed figure she wears  
balanced on her fist as though she is  
a puppeteer, this construction a mere prop.

She leaves the wild to feed on her leftovers  
from this, and stands the head tall,  
speared outside her land.  
Warrior, this symbol reads. Caution.

# At a video conference call, a child says “I look fat on camera”

by Anuja Ghimire

I won't tell her about my emptiness  
when I ate so little that my mind was a static  
how the mirror masked  
I couldn't push the door open

stories floated in my gasping mouth  
sounds without electricity

I wanted everything  
even the lies  
a body isn't a temple  
but a mask of wounds you carry

there are so many years  
even in loneliness  
you are some body

let me hold you in my arms  
be a rocking cradle  
the marching of a drum

remember, girl, my love  
no matter how the shadow changes  
walk to the fullness of light

# Not My Hijab

by Khadija Anderson

Yes, I was going slow  
trying to change lanes  
in freeway traffic  
I was watching the rear view mirror

suddenly a Chevy pick up  
headlights flashing  
coming up fast  
I abandon my blinkers  
and speed up  
not fast enough for him  
god, I think, he's so close  
he's gonna – SLAM!

chrome bumper into my Jetta trunk  
now he's pushing me  
down the 4th street off-ramp  
brakes impotent  
car veering into the next lane  
he backs off and speeds by

I follow him  
screaming into my cell phone  
until the police find us  
near McDonalds

must have been that  
the cop pointed  
to the white hijab  
pinned tightly around my face.

# Takada Woman

by Victoria Gatehouse

In the 1950s a group of Anlo-Ewe women from Ghana, denied the right to drum, created Takada Dance-Drumming, refusing to resume traditional duties until permitted to play publically.

You say, woman, don't touch!  
You say my blood will suck its power,  
that no babies will come  
from a drum-shaken womb.

My drum will speak for me.

I'll strike up a storm  
with forbidden sticks,  
make skin of goat  
and antelope sing  
of harvests, of dance,  
of spirits, of spring,  
of mother-love,  
of marriage, of war

of no more cooking  
no more working the fields  
no more fucking  
until this woman is free  
to drum with her sisters.

You can cut out my tongue –  
the beat of my blood  
the heat of my words  
the voice of my daughters  
will rage from this drum.



# For I am A Woman!

By JGeorge

With the strength and might of a glacier, hidden under a fragile hull.  
I walk the lane with the grace of a pony, mild as a breeze, fierce as the storm,  
I leap the hurdles with ease,  
For, I am a Woman.  
The world, a little tilted under my gaze, the Earth, a little harder under my feet.  
'Rebellion', a misinterpretation for my questions.  
'Glamour', a substitute for my confidence.  
'A Girl', period for my ambitions.  
Valiantly and dauntlessly do we oversee them,  
For, I am a Woman.  
Make a nocturnal walk, watch the stars.  
Dance in the rain, Shout at the mountains.  
Jump in the lake, Cry like a baby.  
Laugh like the thunders, loud as a waterfall.  
Dreams of hope, with the elegance of 'ME'  
the freedom I crave, the life I live,  
For, I am a Woman.....

# On Why It's A Threat

by Lynne Schmidt

The first time she is catcalled,  
she is nineteen years old and  
we are walking down the street,  
dog leashes in hand, on a college campus  
that is not ours but is close enough to be home.

Close enough that I should feel safe to walk my pets, go for a run, exist.

He rolls up, and I bristle when I hear the stop because it's too soon,  
and she mistakes the slowing for the sign at the end of the road.

My ears wait for what may or may not come next and sure enough  
his voice rises just loud enough so we can hear it,  
"I don't know which is more beautiful, the dogs, or the girls walking them."

Beside me, she stills, a deer in the sights of a gun,  
eyes wild like prey  
ready for fight or flight,  
because she is.

Another youngest child seeking protection  
when there may not be any safety to be had.

She does not realize she walks beside a bomb  
who marched in DC against a rapist in seat,  
who has been fighting off men like this since her knuckles could bleed.

I ignite for all the times she will be yelled at and  
all the times my oldest sister has thrown me behind her  
when the vehicles stop and the car doors open.

I position my body between her and this man,  
the way my sister did for me,  
a shell of a shield if need be,  
grip the leash tighter with my hand  
and demand he to keep driving.

My hands shake.

My voice doesn't.  
This is all I need her to hear.

His saccharine words turn to acid,  
smile sliding off his face like an avalanche,  
*Bitch-cunt you have STIs I wouldn't touch you with a ten foot pole*  
before his tires peel away pavement and leave us reeling in dust.

When we return home,  
she is still shaking, and I am still furious.

She tells me she was scared she would be hurt,  
or I would be hurt,  
and I tell her, the same thing my sister told me,  
I wouldn't let that happen.

Later, when she tells her partner what happened,  
he says,  
"It's not a big deal. Why are you acting like it is?"

# Metamorphosis

by Megha Sood

A blind seed sprouting from its humble origin  
a sapling breaking the crumbled earth,  
getting infused by the mercy of summer rains  
doused by the apricity of the sun.

Parched for eons, getting drenched  
in the first showers of the monsoon,  
Nature teaches us a million ways  
to begin its humble journey,  
of growing, of breaking through the pain.

Growing like a Medusa, a litany of a winged Gorgon  
breaking out into thousand versions of me  
morphing into shapes  
perfecting the art of topiary.

A slow cleaving in my backbone  
this fecundity of myself  
a reminder of a beautiful emergence,  
Like a butterfly from its cocoon  
a necessary transformation.

Clawing and scratching  
thick walls of the patriarchy  
blind rules steering my hands for generations  
Having a lien to my soul, I scratch and pave my way  
with my bloody knuckles to a path, I call my own.

Like the lava, the primordial gel  
creating life so sublime,  
Having the strength of mountains hidden in me  
birthing lives in the blink of an eye

Descended from warriors  
wearing my scars with pride  
With inked breaths and walnut skin  
Like a phoenix, I rise

This fecundity is my survival extinct  
to handle the plethora of emotions life throws at me  
Undulating between the proximity and prosody of pain;  
With every ounce of a fight,  
I'm running towards a new me.

# If I Were Medusa

by Linda M. Crate

medusa was blamed for her rape,  
and turned into a monster  
for her beauty;

nothing's changed—

today we still blame the victim  
instead of holding the guilty  
accountable for their crimes,  
we sentence the victims to bullying  
and ridicule and scrutiny;

"what were you wearing?"

"did you drink?"

"were you walking alone?"

"how late was it?"

maybe instead ask the person who  
did what they did, why they did it?  
why is it okay to fail all these  
people?  
some of which are children?

why is it okay to blame the victim?  
they are not at fault.

if i were medusa, i'd turn you all to stone;  
because your lack of empathy and kindness  
makes you more a monster than i ever could be.



# Acteon's Fate\*

by Scarlett Ward Bennett

Ankle-deep in nettles, his feet hardened and split into cloves;  
his headache tore through both temples and  
bloody velvet horn spilled from each side.  
His mouth unlatched, and out of it  
tumbled a great rancid and leathery thing,  
drip-wet and lolled around a throaty bellow.  
Earth-coloured hair nettled its way through  
his soft elbow ditch and vein-roped groin,  
until yielding flesh bristled into fur;  
collared and thick around the chest.  
The last thing he saw before his eyes popped free of socket,  
like milky unripe-conker bulges either side of his face

was a woman's breast, her gilded thigh, then  
the tear-flash of his hound's canine-filled bite.

---

\* According to the story told by the Roman Ovid, the goddess Diana turned Acteon into a stag as a punishment for watching her bathe in the forests. He was then ripped into shreds by his own hunting hounds.

# And, Like Icarus Before Her

By Imogen. L. Smiley

Harpies are destined to roam the skies,  
but our corpses are greeted by earth.  
We cannot live on the ground,  
humans don't take well to monsters in their midst.

We're expected to claw our way into the air;  
stragglers are left for death by assimilation, or the hunt.  
Mastering flight with haste,  
so we can rise above the rest of the flock.

Even strong fliers seldom reach the summit,  
torn from Heaven's Peak by those beside them.  
Clouds weep; masking our crossed swords  
and bloodshed.

We're not sociable creatures;  
all energy expelled in feeble clawing at the clouds,  
too high for us to break through  
with someone clinging to our ankles.

It's all dead weight.

Our legendary shortcomings are undeserving  
of tales of goodness. We will never be Daphne;  
our failings will be stricken onto vases,  
a warning of the wrath of the flightless harpy.

We battle in the sky;  
crimson claws painted with the blood of fallen sisters,  
shielded by storm-clouds as talons tear skin.  
We have long since dropped our weapons.

We fight like men.

Our war cries started a monsoon.  
This was the siege of Troy,  
but Helen had relinquished her bow and quiver,  
and ripped Paris' heart out for herself.

Harpies swarm the lofty pantheon,  
and gladiators march us in,  
my eyes settle upon my opponent;  
risking banishment from our vaporous Olympus.

She had the touch of Midas, weightless in comparison.

We were fledglings that learned to fly together  
now we circle each other in our thunderstorm coliseum  
waiting for the first move.

The dance begins as lightning divides us,  
victory is certain;  
a fact of the universe.

One has to fall.

She uproots feathers from my skin,  
and I claw at her face in a desperate plea  
to blind her like Oedipus past.  
But she slashes my back, and watches me falter.

Kicks me with her scaly foot for good measure -  
Rearing upward toward the light, basking in spectator applause  
while I plummet toward earth.  
She turns away, as the clouds shun me in exile:

“So, who’s next?”

# Conjurer

by D. Slayton Avery

Don't.  
I mean stop. Don't  
fault Me, don't fault snakes, don't  
take that page from that book.  
That early chapter when all got named  
forever after the snake  
and I get blamed.  
Don't keep Me  
out of these books. Don't  
keep the truth from my Daughters. Stop taking  
her story. Stop rewriting  
history. I mean stop.  
Killing old wisdom  
you fear. In ignorance you conjure  
witches. Burning hate flares,  
consumes. You won't  
have a Mother to run to when  
too late you realize  
the imbalance and regret  
the hubris and don't  
have a better name  
for humanity, for women.

# Battle Hymn of the Lesbian Empire

by Alicia Fitton

Are we lesbians building an empire?  
Or builders building an empire of queers?  
A casual insult that tripped off the tongue  
Defines the mission long since begun

We'll build for love displayed with a rainbow  
Our histories hidden beneath our wide skirts  
Our lives papered over with "They're just good friends."  
We'll tear it all down and make fast amends

For classroom crushes and quiet whispers  
Our loud bodies shaped in every witch way  
And our teenagers told that "Its just a phase."  
For girls in black tie and a come hither gaze.

For first dates ending in fast packed suitcases  
For short hair and waistcoats and Lindy Bop dresses.  
We build on the shoulders of sisters with scissors  
And axes and sabres and vampire slayers

Its better than chocolate, we build for cheerleaders  
Not subtext or no text for avid screen readers  
We'll broadcast our stories for us, for the many  
For Dana and Bette, and yes even Jenny.  
We are strong women building our future.  
We stand for love, Lesbian Empire Builders.

# Pterosaur

(For Mary Anning, b.1799 – d.1847)

by Caroline Hardaker

On a quaint and cold English coast  
she perched in briny shallows; a pink flamingo  
in a sea of *how do you do, and thank you*,  
pocketing cockle shells, mermaid's purses,  
aery foreign bodies and forgotten peculiarities. An ammonite;  
soon to be mounted in a lady's pendant, brachiopods;  
fringed with shallow ridges, lashes fanned like moth's wings,  
a crown of preserved coral; a scrying dome for thinker's-fortunes,  
and pale opalescent starfish; peaked with bestial spines  
to be dried later on taut strings in bright sunlight.  
Hundreds of lucky purse-pearls for travelers,  
bone-tokens and runes. Treasures to frame a window seat  
and chime inside pouches,  
making empty quarters sing, with a clink.

Worlds are birthed from cold clods of earth.

Thumbs in the abdomen, she learns through slow labours  
how to empty chalk downs for bronze or the heady-flush  
of blood-rust. How to tease apart coprolite husks  
to comprehend habit. One stone flint lives in her fist,  
but she is gentle with it  
so as not to break sensibility.

Mary stands with one foot in a shallow grave.

On the white cliffs, with brush and a scalpel whet on scorn –  
She is emissary to the first albatross and its mechanics,  
leather swathes, and greatsword at each wrist.  
Listen, its dead voice erupts from an old moon,  
mounted between the eyes. She counts the rods, pillars,  
columns, mapping architecture to blueprint the future of flight.

But then, digging deeper, there –

(a truth entombed until the work is disclosed)

a clutch of eggs, bound in a dead cloud.  
A dozen bottled promises  
ended before a new world could meet them.

# Rosie the Riveter will not take your shit

by Debz Butler

They stand in their press conferences and gift our history back to us  
Tied in a perfect bow, smelling of perfume  
they tell us what is needed in crisis

We need some of that Blitz Spirit  
We need Survival Instinct  
Those women didn't cry over what they had lost  
They threw parties with what they had left  
danced on piles of bricks  
Did what they could  
Did their duty  
Did what they were told

Unfortunately, we do not learn our history through neatly wrapped packages  
We learn through whispers  
in our ears as we sit on grandmothers laps  
It flows through our blood, not rose tinted  
just dark brilliant red  
It stinks of shit and sweat and damp  
Not their stories, but ours

We have always adapted to disaster  
but we did it bitching and moaning  
Kicking and screaming  
Gnashing our teeth  
We cried over what we had lost and yes,  
we threw parties with what was left  
but also with the stuff we got on the sly  
We didn't dance on piles of bricks  
We screamed at the injustice, pulled the broken  
bodies from beneath, buried them together  
and remembered them on our tongues forever

We did what we could  
We did our duty  
When they barricaded the shelters  
we tore through wood  
Got splinters under our nails



Left bloodied hand marks on the walls instead of  
breadcrumbs to guide the way

We did what we were told  
except they told us after the deed was long done  
Rewrote our victories as their own  
Tied them in perfect bows, smelling of perfume  
toasted the end but did not invite us to dance

We will survive this  
We will sit on our grandmothers knees  
and let them whisper in our ears  
Long known battle plans  
They will know our victory only after they see  
it on our blog  
And whilst they toast with champagne

We will bring home our battle weary  
Bury our dead  
And then take to the streets.

# Today, I hated being a woman

by Jess O'Shea

It's not an often thought  
but I can't deny it hasn't  
passed me by; how I would want  
to erase this body, and start a fresh

But today, I hated being a woman.  
There was a man, mouth full spitting  
dirty crumbs across to his peers  
who said about a short skirted girl  
carrying a baby on her shoulder

his voice rough like fireplace crackles  
coarse and obvious  
like most smoky icy mornings, walking past  
that pub, he was there  
his nose broken blood vessels, purple like little  
worms curling around his nostrils

she had her tits out  
they laughed  
and I sank.  
Why they won't bottle feed is beyond me  
attention seeking more like

each word said plunged toward me  
like darts I only wanted  
to sink lower, pull my skirt down further  
I didn't want them to see what I was,  
a woman.

Is there a scarier sound than the commotion  
of drunken men? I did  
not have a child, nor defence

He gulped his pint with a mighty sigh  
and said abortions shouldn't be so  
available  
I sat crossed legged pretending to read

but listening they never called on me or  
said my name, but they were talking about  
me. A woman. In a skirt.

Today I hated being a woman. At times when  
I hear the men; I could be convinced that I  
hated those women too, for making them looking  
at me, or untoward  
I realised looking at my exposed knees  
it was not me they hated.  
But somehow, I remain unconvinced

# Origin Story

by Zoe Mitchell

There was a young woman, beautiful  
in the way they all are, almost interchangeable  
with gentle, painfully human concerns.

She thought about potential suitors,  
her next meal, different ways  
to untangle a knot in silken hair.

Before, she hadn't even thought  
about the future but she held faith  
in its benevolence within her soft skin.

After, she testified that people watched  
as she fled from a brawny, gill-necked deity.  
She remembers uproarious laughter.

She can't recall what she was wearing,  
it's not etched with enough depth for her,  
but lawyers will scratch that fact

with acid. The crime is not enough  
for the court; she will be burned  
by the lines of her dress and flowing hair

as if they matter more than a sanctuary  
defiled, or a woman. Athena witnessed  
the rape at her altar and had rage enough

to topple a whole council of gods,  
but no power to tackle this one,  
who held the pull of the tides and took

whatever he wanted. No one spoke of that  
when the verdict was given, or how they expected  
a mortal to do what a goddess couldn't.

The hand over young Medusa's mouth  
wasn't shame – it was the venomous snake

of a story that turns people to stone.

# I am not what you consider beautiful

by Stella Hervey Birrell

I am gravity defiant.  
I swing over your head  
without spilling a drop.

I am splinter and dust.  
I am a toilet that needs scrubbing.  
I am what the soap washed out of your mouth.  
I am a rotting onion sliming the vegetable basket.

I am rooted in earth and granite.  
I am the sweet softness of marshland.  
I am bulk-bought beauty.  
I am everything you pretend to hate, that you fear.  
What good am I to you  
if I am not what you consider beautiful?

I have no interest in your boxes.

My hands could slough the skin from your face.  
My body is like the waves: it will break all your attempts to harness its power.  
My brain is filled with every lost sock and still remembers everything.

You will not hook me up with the hats.  
You will not hold me captive in this basket  
of laundry, this net fished of stockings and spanx.

To you I am salt, needled nettle.

To my own I am moss,  
I am ancient fern,  
I am warm sand.

# Self Invention

by Kate J. Wilson

I am not like the others  
I prefer the wildness  
of hair grown awry  
darkening pits, the stink of me  
unperfumed unperturbed

I am never more me  
than I am without my clothes  
this ritual undressing riles  
I am impatient for skin

I take it all off when  
you leave the room  
run my hands over white flesh  
enjoy the feel of myself

these girlish breasts  
rose-tipped, kissable  
a rising mountain of buttocks  
uneven, ruts of veins  
I am done being vain about

I am reminded of those long hours  
the chill breeze of a studio  
where you painted a girl  
and I coaxed myself to womanhood  
always morose  
as I gathered my clothes

Why do these men rush to cover?  
I prefer to lie in heat  
as the sweat cools  
to feel my most beautiful  
to know without doubt  
I am not like the others

# thinking of boys

by Ellen Huang

of course I liked them. My likingness  
consisted of curiosity, of who my new  
friends on this campus, in this chapter,  
would be. In my mind, friendship was free.

I wanted every adventure,  
and I found you, with rhyming name.  
I found you, with temper of an ancient forest.  
I found you, with wise quietness of a bookstore mouse.

Literature has made me boisterous with the dead  
poets and wild things in wolf suits, and so easily  
I'd consider your humor first. It's more fun. Sometimes.

But of course I liked them,  
and keep finding them. Dryads, dragons, mystics,  
giants, seven dwarves and seven ravens. I'd be the same,  
a transformed familiar and messenger, if need ever came

for a sharp-taloned wingman.  
I found elementals and characters,  
trickster gods and satyrs on my side.  
I found even princes who grow flowers,  
and flaming angels, antlered deer and talking bears.

So yes, I fantasize it all, how the world is ours  
if we hang the code  
and take the spoils  
as equals with sword and spade.

But when you speak of them in that way,  
highlighted parts and heat, wanting to  
drink them whole and deep, my mind is  
mist and blank.

I don't know what you mean, dear nymphs and  
will-o-the-wisps who surround me.  
I don't feel appetite for another species.



I don't feel that way for admiring trees.

# Power Play

by Carla S. Schick

Grey clouds hover over  
Enclose my body  
Shivers reach  
arms around  
myself    Cover shoulders  
with a scarf  
like a blanket  
of fleece  
a decaying bed  
of wet weeds    Vultures  
fly above    Circling their catch  
quivering  
with a last breath

We return  
from school & I pretend  
to escape vicious taunts  
the neighborhood children  
closing in

*you're gonna get it. We don't like  
your kind*

They point  
to my unmatching clothes  
snatch my cap    Yell out  
newsboy as they wave  
their arms around  
as though throwing today's paper  
onto a nearby porch.

*we're gonna get you*  
they sing    When I see  
I can't flee I raise  
my small fists in the air  
take the first swing

Scatter their words

like the red autumn leaves  
swirling about my feet.

# The Wild Women

by Ashleigh Condon

There's a planet out in space  
    It's quite far from earth  
and it's absolutely choc-a-bloc  
with women  
or at least     they look like women.  
Except they're hairy and naked and free.

Take this one for instance  
    she's  
swiping at salmon with her big strong palms  
teetering on the edge of a fast-flowing river  
with her nostrils flaring, irises like pinheads  
breasts hanging  
Here comes a salmon in a slap of wet silver  
Smack! She bats it over her shoulder  
It's still jerking spasmodically on the grass  
when she sticks her chin in the mud  
and groans as she bites.

There's another woman who has scaled  
a eucalyptus tree  
she's got a branch between her thighs  
tight like a vice  
and she's cracking open a beehive  
    like a coconut  
she pulls out sticky globs  
of glistening amber  
She doesn't notice the bee stings  
she shrugs them off like rain water

Here's twelve of them in a bog  
wrestling in wet mud  
and here's seven little ones  
chasing their own shadows  
as the sun beats a glow upon their skins

There's the huge tree  
where they all fell off

See its mighty brown trunk  
and its capable limbs  
holding aloft a series of  
human-sized conker shells

Look, watch one now  
A seam is splitting  
two women hover beneath it  
with a huge green leaf  
and with a loud crack  
the shell splits apart  
and a little one drops like a cherry  
and she's bundled in green  
    hairy, and naked, and free.

# Eve's Justice

by Shari Aber

It is spring  
and at the edge of my garden two black snakes lie  
hoselike, entwined, his jaws clamping her just below her head.  
This is not lovemaking. It is hostile and absolute,  
dominance, submission.

I have heard the accusers, voices cracking,  
go public, strip off the glamour, bare their suffering  
own their shame, their subjection, their degradation.  
I have heard their stories -- exchanges of oral sex  
for promises -- stories of coercion, of rape.

I have seen the recent parade of defiant and sneering men  
long revered, hallowed even, heard their hissed protests, denials,  
watched as they replaced smug smirks with canes and walkers,  
I have seen them dragged from their pedestals, cuffed,  
flung into the hollows of prison cells.

Ah, the fall of man.

# Nothing But A Woman

by Emma Flint

Why should I struggle to be heard?  
My body,  
A cage of flesh,  
A means to hold me back.  
You excuse your prejudice with reasons of gender,  
It's a false pretence,  
A way to hide your bigotry and lies,  
You don't care what's nestled between my thighs.  
It's about your lust for power,  
To dominate and to own,  
You call it masculinity,  
But you and I know that's a broken throne.  
Hidden by old fashioned values,  
You dictate our lives,  
We're meaningless,  
Without value,  
I'm less because I'm a woman.  
My mind too fragile,  
Too delicate,  
A snowflake without strength.  
But strength is what carries me through each day,  
To challenge narrow minds,  
To open closed hearts.  
I break down foolish walls,  
Fashioned by your jaded views,  
I can move mountains,  
I can conquer you,  
It's something you'll never do.

# [sonnet] What Is Affection Between Friends?

By Juliette Kumar

## VI

It's been six months since my tastes have changed, to  
suppress the ones you introduced. I cannot  
decide if I miss you yet, don't know if  
it's okay for me to admit. I've been  
trying to not check your socials, but you  
appear more often than not in 'people  
you may know.' And, of course, I felt inclined  
to test how far I knew you at all.  
After clicking through pictures of your fancy  
dinners, and catalogue friends, I got stuck  
on a sepia filtered shot of you;  
no older than six, on your mom's shoulders  
like she was your personal pedestal.  
At least, I assume she's your mother, only  
she doesn't appear in any others.  
It feels important, and I kind of wish  
I could have asked about that, but then again  
it's probably for the best I didn't (less to consider.)  
You're wearing glasses, maybe you outgrew  
them. All of it makes me think if things would  
have been different, had we met when you were  
this soft, and moving. Would our pain have less  
repercussion through the eyes of a child?  
Or, perhaps we could have met with my hands  
above my head on polyester sheets,  
and then never again. Even better,  
before I knew that love felt silken on my tongue,  
and that this was not it, but a memory,  
like your mother's picture, with an ending  
I could reinvent, and might, one day, miss.  
I want to put you on my shoulders, and  
demand, 'Did I give you enough of me?'  
But I am not your mother and it's hard  
to find comfort on a pedestal made from tangerine peel.



This could be the forever ending. It's  
up to you it's up to you it's up to-

**LEVEL - Relationship: FAILED.**

**To start again: Turn to i**

**To exit game: ERROR ERROR ERROR.**

# The other things you were

by Kim Fahner

The men who first told your story  
winnowed you down to a paper cut-out doll—  
just a severed head with snakes for hair  
and frozen eyes, so wild with storms.

They made you smaller, then bigger,  
turning you into a shadow puppet  
cast on a pale midnight wall by  
a bright beam of moonlight,  
frightening children with your tale.

Before that, you were a beauty,  
classical and sculpted, and your head—  
so full of thoughts and dreams and worries—  
was still a part of you, not taken or severed.  
Before that, you were a person, a woman,  
a blessing, and not just a curse.

# The Dunnock

by Jo Flynn

I think she is trying to teach me  
something.  
About the trickery of life and death, maybe.  
Through dead baby birds  
and live ones.

I peel their tiny lifeless bodies up off the slabs and  
apologise to Earth  
before giving them back to her.  
Find them chirping later in the honeysuckle,  
begging to be fed.

# Don't Try

by Laurie Koensgen

Don't try to be my leader—  
I will slice that pointed finger,  
leave it waggle aimlessly  
in split-  
decision.

If you persist in  
thinking you're The Man,  
I'll amputate the lingering  
command: your upper hand.

Don't try to be my jailer. It can  
only end in failure. I'm not  
a curfewed lamb who needs  
a sheepdog to curtail her.  
Ruminant on this:  
I am not your black sheep.  
Not your bleak sheep either.

Don't try to be my speaker even  
when my voice is weaker. Don't  
try to be my judge. Hold  
your tongue  
and not that grudge.  
Just try to be my lover—  
and your finger  
will recover.

# Medusa Blessed or Gorgon Cursed

by Marie Fields

Punished for  
An involuntary desecration  
Or gifted with  
A stone stare  
Venomous is  
The crown of snakes  
Beware her vengeful stare  
Does she ever bemoan her fate?  
Feeling the bite of loneliness  
Or does she revel in her power  
Raised up by a Goddess  
To be both  
Monster and marvel  
Prized for her head only  
Just like any other.

# Knot

by Sam Egelstaff

Because of you I do this  
because of you,  
because of you I do.

I turn the dial to wash away  
the toil of time sold  
to another, who steals  
you away from me.

And the sun, and the sun  
is the line that ties me  
to your thoughts,  
that pegs out our shields  
to dry into space; evaporate.

And the moon, and the moon,  
is your arms and the dent  
in which we dig.  
And the bud and the snow  
incubates under blankets.

I scream at the light  
that pulls you out  
into that space  
I cannot hold,  
that is abstract  
like your noun.

And I cry at the thought of it  
and I cry  
and I cry at the thought.

For I can see, when I cling  
onto your hand and exhale  
the words that mean everything,  
that I have practised  
over time,

that they are letters  
you do not hear,  
that they are sounds  
you do not see.

For you blow them away  
like the seeds  
of feathered clocks, caught  
upon a child's breath,  
and I watch them float  
away from me.

For I am who I was,  
when the world meant everything.  
But the udders of time  
have sucked me dry  
and now I am ready  
for the bolt.

# A Harpy in Suburbia

by SK Grout

Though I don't recall your last name I'm adding you to the list  
scritch  
scratch  
there you are

I'll call you Beau Bobdiddly.

Wasn't your  
first, beautiful?

Chosen with care

because

your parents surely loved you.

But names have power                      & saying yours out loud                      when it catches  
the wind  
would give you                      way                      too                      much

I make a fist.

See how your excuses become  
graphite.

They can be burned  
taken by the sun's light  
or smudged by sweaty fingers

welcome in night.

You bleed prettily too.

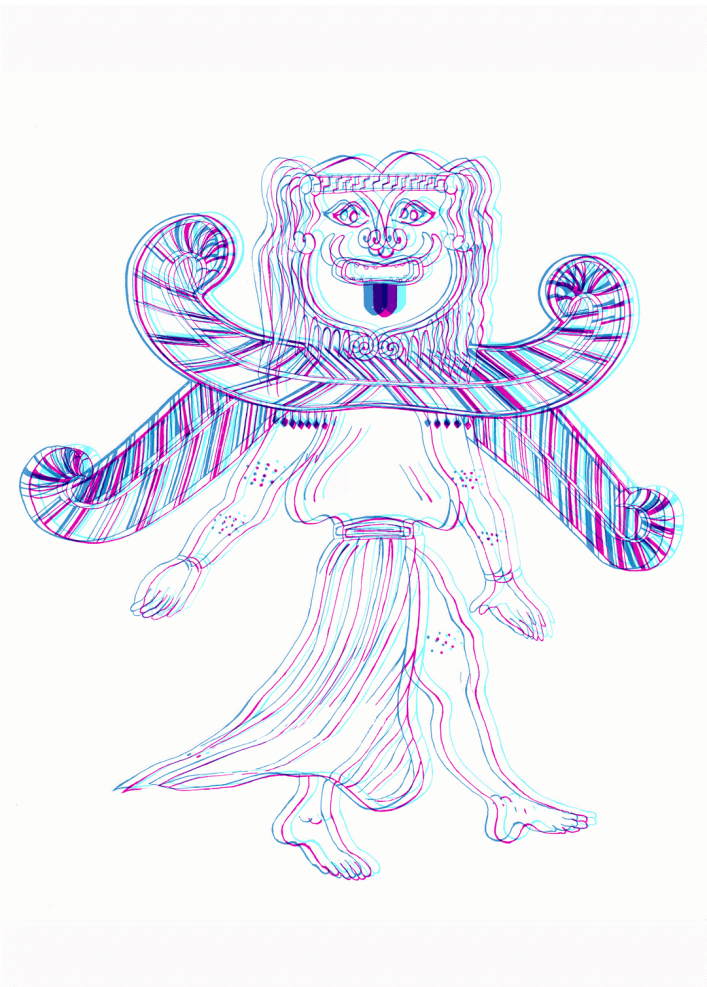
Just like the girls you took  
swallowed into your respectable car  
the allure of your age enough.  
Limits taught too low.

I forgot about my claws.  
This fist is bleeding my skin  
mixing with your blood.



I shake out the black  
air swirls around like colour.

Flick flack.



*Gorgon by Jo Barghest*

# Lore of the Elusive Goddess

*Fiction*



# You Reap What You Sow

by Christina Rosso

When our courtship began we were nicknamed the lovers. I couldn't blame them, of course. We were in love, deliciously and fervidly. Gossip circles placed bets on how soon my belly would begin to swell. Would they even be married by then? they snickered.

A seed would never turn into a baby inside me. Our baby. My husband's and mine. Too much was unearthed, seeds planted long ago by the ones who came before me.

We were bound to one another in a church by the sea, my husband and I. Then we traveled by carriage to his manor set deep within the woods. We rarely left bed in the first days of wedding bliss. Cheeks flushed, lips swollen, imagining it growing, I pressed my hands to my belly.

Soon euphoria bled into curiosity. When was the house built? I asked. In the fifteenth century, my husband replied. Were you born here? Yes. How many rooms are there? At least thirty. Does it hold any secrets? His face grew stern, his black eyebrows forming a thick line. His mouth said no, but his eyes told me all I needed, just as the muddy boots tossed in the back of the bureau did.

He always snuck out after our bodies had come together in rapture. His movements were those of ghosts, silent and elusory. It took several nights to successfully track him. My husband's study was blood red; I discovered an entrance to a tunnel hidden in plain sight.

Down the corridor I followed, the stone floor ice cold beneath my bare feet. Darkness surrounded. My ears pricked to catch my husband's boots chew against the gravel-coated ground. Surely his silence wouldn't be as vigilant in this hidden place. Where was he leading me? I wondered. What secrets did he keep from his bride?

White light shone ahead. I moved towards it, my body longing to be bathed in illumination. I peeked outside of the tunnel into moonlight. My husband knelt before a lake, the bottom of his boots slick with fresh mud. I imagined us making love with the moon as witness. My lips parted to call out to him.

Three figures rose from the black water, shrouded in white veils. Six eyes shone through the fabric. My mouth stretched into a silent scream. I watched my husband bow his head, a tremble tracing his limbs. He was crying.

Heat prickled in my chest. The shrouded figures had seen me. I returned their burning gaze, looking into the abyss of their eyes. Curiosity would no longer steer me; I now had knowledge of the brides that had come before, and those that would come after.

I peeled my body away from the tunnel entrance, feeling the darkness's velvet caress. I turned away from my husband and his phantom brides, my feet finding familiarity in the grooves and pebbles of the stone floor. I would pretend to be asleep when he returned, stowing the muddy boots in the bureau, my breath even and slow, my husband unsuspecting of his bride's new knowledge.

# Snakes

by Claire Marsden

I love the sound of my name in your mouth. Evie Hughes. Evie Hughes. Evie Hughes. How it echoes. Liquid warmth. I wish I could bring you into my bed. Pull you close to me, escape into your arms like an old familiar book, one that I can't help but return to.

Once upon a time...

In the beginning...

I'd explore you again, and again, and again. Turn you over in my hands, run my finger down the crease of your spine.

Kiss your lips.

I can almost taste the orange you ate at lunch.

I think it's sweet how you try and avoid me. How your words get in knots like the ones I brush from my hair. I'm sure I saw you flush when I called you by your name last week. It's mean I know but I love the way it feels on my tongue. Everett. Everett. Everett.

Don't you feel desire leaning over, willing us to look up? Perhaps you do, she's not exactly as gentle as the breeze, after all. I'd much rather look at you anyway; your hands when they brush my paper, the white band where your wedding ring used to be. I like the way my stomach flutters when you speak, you're so enthusiastic still, your eyes glitter with it. How I'd love to hold your gaze in return, you'd see the glow within mine if you dared look back.

I made a wish to Hera last night, she owes me a favour. I wished that you take us out into the avenue of trees, that we sneak away to the field behind them. I just know the grass is waiting to welcome us. Don't you hear it calling? Perhaps you're afraid of the adders that will be released when I finally uncoil myself. Yes, perhaps, but I think what you are most afraid of is your desire to be bitten.

"Evie..."

"huh? oh, sorry Mr Adams, I drifted off". Ask me what I was thinking.

"that's okay, I asked if you could name me one of the fruits of the spirit?"

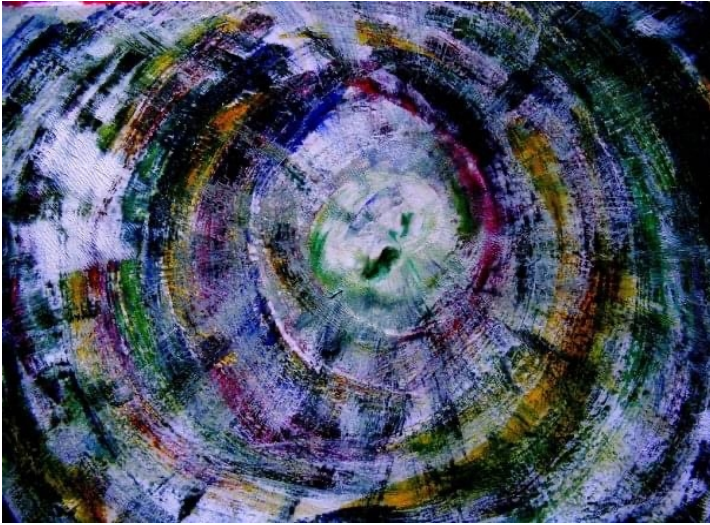
"sure, patience; it's a virtue"

"Yes, it is, correct, um, okay, um.. Ian, could you just open that -- "

It is indeed. And I am both patient and shameless. I dare to celebrate and explore my sexual nature. This, I know, is where my power resides, the joy of which seeps into all spheres of my life. I think this is what some men truly fear. But be at ease I say, we don't bite, much.







*Vortex by Penny Sharman*

# Litany of the Winged Warrior

*Essay - CNF*



# The Right to Bleed

A brief exploration of the suppression and silencing of the menstrual experience

by Cáit Ní Dhoonchú

The right to bleed is a concept which sticks in the throat. It does not appear to make sense at first; How can rights be tied up with a bodily experience in this way? Surely menstruation is something which is physically undeniable. However, those who cast even the slightest critical eye over people's experience of menstruation in our society (and societies around the world) can see that it can be and is all too often suppressed and denied.

The argument put forward here is that while people who experience menstruation<sup>†</sup> are denied the right to fully experience their own reality, equality cannot be achieved. The ways in which this suppression of experience manifests itself varies from culture to culture. In the western world, advertisements have long proffered a lifestyle in which the menstrual experience bears no significance on one's day to day life. Clothes remain unstained, bed clothes pristine and work and sports are enjoyable and easily achieved. The illusion and ideal put forward in this way mean that a person's physical and psychological experience of menstruation is doubly denied in the following ways (1) because the advertisements suggest a lack of physical proof of bleeding and its physiological effects and (2) because it is suggested that people 'should' be able to carry on with their day to day lives despite their menstrual experience. A further testament to the white-washing of people's experiences of menstruation is the language used to engage with it. 'Feminine hygiene products' denote a need for a 'hygienic' intervention when it comes to menstruation. The lack of any evidence of menstrual blood itself in advertisements wipes them 'clean' from the 'undesirable' proof of bodily fluids having leaked. It is deeply troubling that menstrual blood has been labelled culturally as unhygienic and must be 'santised' by products made from non-biodegradable materials which ironically soil and litter the earth for thousands of years. These products have been and are a pollutant answer to a natural 'problem'. Thankfully, in recent times eco-friendly alternative products have become more widely available such as reusable cloth pads.

When Kiran Gandhi ran the London marathon free bleeding<sup>‡</sup> in 2016 her choice made headlines. The appearance of blood on her running gear caught the media's attention. I would argue that such actions are in direct contradiction with a long accepted social norm which has taught and instructed people that menstruation must be hidden. It is

<sup>†</sup> Not limiting the reference of menstruation to women but to all who experience menstruation, whatever their gender or non-binary identification.

<sup>‡</sup> A practice in which menstrual blood flows uninterrupted by conventional methods such as by use of a sanitary towel, tampon or menstrual cup.

as if, if we as a society cannot see the menstrual blood- it does not exist, in fact that perhaps menstruation as an experience does not exist. When individuals such as Gandhi contravene these social norms, they cause a media sensation which is further proof of the extent to which the reality of the menstrual experience has been for too long, all but erased from our culture.

Equality in relation to menstruation is complex. There are many factors involved, from the high cost of menstrual products which can make them unaffordable to those on low incomes, to the varying ways in which menstruation is experienced by individuals. There are both physical and psychological medical disorders relating to menstruation which can make experiencing it far more difficult. It is important to note, that advertising and a general cultural consensus which largely erases the menstrual experience, in doing so also fails people who menstruate by failing to acknowledge diversity within their experience. If the reality of menstruation is to be denied, then all the branches of its consequences and related issues are too, discarded and therefore unheard by society. This brings me to a relatively new form of activism which has emerged in recent years which aims to combat the stigma around menstruation.

A quick search under #menstrualactivism online for example will provide thousands of examples of people combatting the stigma around the menstrual experience, often in very direct way. These challenges to the patriarchal silencing of menstruation are arresting in their visual power. Many people have become accustomed to the sight of blood in an onscreen context through the horror and action genres in cinema and television. Menstrual blood references on screen however are rare, the iconic scene in the on-screen adaptation of Stephen King's *Carrie* (anyone who has seen that film will remember it I'm sure) being one exception.

In conclusion, I argue that people who experience menstruation have neither been afforded the freedom nor, due to socio-cultural norms, the choice to do so in any way other than that which is prescribed by a long history of 'sanitising' and cloaking their bodies and it's experiences. In this way, equality cannot be achieved in this sense until the experiences of the body are heard and acknowledged. Education in the diversity of menstrual experiences is one way in which society could begin to lessen the taboo of menstruation as a topic. Furthermore, the phenomenon of menstrual activism allows for much needed light and focus to be thrown on an experience which has been sanitised and largely ignored in mainstream culture. Much like our voices, if they are not expressed, they cannot be heard. You could say of menstruation, if it too is not expressed in culture, then it risks becoming culturally invisible and in this way, we silence the body.

# A Chronicle Of Youthhood

by Jaisha Jansena

I met my best friend in my favorite class: 7th grade Latin. Our teacher told us that Latin was a dead language, it didn't belong to the living. It wasn't like French or Spanish. But back then, I felt like a dead language too. Sometimes seen, but rarely heard.

Youthhood grips me like an old wool sweater. I try to pull the sleeves down but the faded lace trim digs into my arms. In elementary school, my mother dressed me like a children's doll catalogue. She styled me in bright tights and pleated skirts instead of jeans and tube socks. My peers teased me endlessly for wearing church clothes.

In middle school, my mother and I tried to reconcile inside dressing rooms at Dillard's or in the carpeted aisles at JC Penny's. There were times when we'd hit the right note and harmony would barrel towards us. But we'd jump out of the way, unsure of how to really feel it. I favored corduroy pants then, in saturated shades like turquoise and violet, with matching sneakers, printed tops stamped with pink roses, gold ribbon, \$7 wedges from Payless.

My mother's disapproval settled in the deep line between her eyes. I spent 7th grade running around a rotation of foster kids. Fleeing flashing pots and pans, sticky tantrums and time-outs, I'd lock myself in my bedroom to focus on my 3-hours-a-night-college-prep homework until my mother's nightly headache shattered the sound and chatter of the house.

When silence finally settled in, I'd creep into the kitchen to make pancakes. I wasn't allowed to use the oven but I could use an electric griddle my mother got on sale at Walgreens while waiting for her prescriptions. It was a glorified toaster really with 3 flimsy settings, but I didn't complain.

Some words whisper, some words rumble, some words throw their noise up like coughs. Her words hacked their way to me.

Careful, she warned, as I stood holding a stack of pancakes at the kitchen counter. Boys won't like you if you're fat.

Youthhood skates down the backs of ribs. My fingertips follow the feeling of empty space. Something like peace falters and breaks off in my mouth. After that night with the pancakes, I learned how to pack my desire up and keep it neat and tidy like a

suitcase that sleeps at the back of my closet. I learned how to roll my desire out of the way, somewhere my mother couldn't trip over it.

In middle school, I stayed up late to use cheap griddle in my kitchen. But in high school, I stayed up late to use the dial-up. I started a blog, where I copied the doodled lines of prose from my 5 subject notebooks. I chaotically struggled back into desire. I fell in love with ripped denim, suede shoes, dramatic blouses with high collars, and silk ties.

I exploded into a fury of cello lessons, Shakespeare rehearsals, city buses, and libraries. I'd spend the weekend stalking yard sales, prowling for paperbacks. Two weeks before I started 11th grade, I decided to shave my head. Boys won't like you if you have short hair, my mother warned again, snatching up a wrinkled magazine from the salon chair beside her. Good, I replied. And I didn't budge.

I paid \$12.64 for my shaved head and my mother ignored me for a week.

Youthhood is the fuzzy scruff running over the lines of my skin. The soft scrap of my hands covers the murmurs that mark my body. I was in 6th bell English when my best friend walked in again. It was our first class together in 3 years. She was a flash of black and white houndstooth, red patent leather, a labyrinth of coarse black curls, and ballet flats. I started to spend time after school hanging out with her, working on projects in the library, or wasting time on a swing set by the football fields.

Some weekends we had sleepovers, where we'd joke over bagel pizzas and brownies, browse vintage dresses on Modcloth, and sing Amy Winehouse. At night, I'd obsess over The L Word and Black Swan. But during the day, I'd fill my mouth with sweet Cheerios and Flamin Hot Cheetos, anything to glaze over my bitter tongue. On chili days in the cafeteria, my best friend would pass me oyster crackers in the hallway between P/E.

And I had a favorite class again.

Youthhood is a hard rocket of desire that shot in through a crack in the window. When I turned 17, I realized I was no longer my mother's doll. But I was still a devotee of beauty, escaping into healing aesthetics. One day my best friend and I went thrifting at Goodwill. Magic clings to the corners of this memory. That day felt endless, infinite like anything could happen. Walking into that store felt like making an effortless leap into an exit I always knew I could find.

Be on the watch, I chanted under my breath while working my way down the packed rows of clothes. There are ways out.



Less than 5 minutes into my search, I found a pair of russet wedges with taupe laces; they fit perfectly. You're always so lucky, my best friend said, nodding at my purchase. Yeah, I said, sneaking a small smile back at her over my shoulder. Other words hid themselves in my grin.

Not because of the shoes, I wanted to tell her. I'm lucky because I have you.

# I gave the snake a rosebud mouth

by Monique Quintana

When I was a sophomore in high school, I fashioned myself into the goddess of tranquility. I was taking a class on Greek mythology, and my teacher assigned us to create our mythos and a figurehead to go with it. I flipped through a palm-sized thesaurus on my teacher's bookshelf to find a word that I could use as inspiration, which would remind me of myself.

My entire life, I had been called me quiet and shy. The family used to ask my mother why I didn't talk at parties when the other children ran around our old houses, their voices a clang of echoes in the walls, and their shoes were pounding light against the wooden floors. I'd sit on the couch and hear the women in my family spin their spoons in coffee cups, some of their voices high and low, but in a perpetual floating motion towards the kitchen sky and the clouds that I thought had escaped the sun.

I found the word, tranquility, in the thesaurus. It was a pleasant way to say what I thought I was like, and it sounded like a girl's name. On the cardstock our teacher gave us, I drew a smoky gray sea. I didn't have any colored pens to make blue. There were the clouds of my city. There was a ship that bobbed on the surface of the waves. There was cryptozoology below the water. A snake monster that miraculously did not drown, but peeked its mouth above the blue. The brown girl sitting behind me handed me a red ballpoint pen. Here, she said, It's all I've got.

I gave the snake a rosebud mouth.

When my teacher handed back my project, she had written a note of praise on my poster. Lovely! It said. The paper had stacked against the other students' work--doodles of gods with thick skin, violent strands of golden hair, hurried loops of swordplay, mouths agape in songs that would waken the dead. And in the sound of that, the mouth of my snake under tranquility--the red pen mark smeared to grow the word that would stay and seed and float below, away from me in the water.

# [Choosing] Bisexuality [is (not) a choice]

by Nori Rose Hubert

I grew up in the Church of Christ. Every Sunday I was sung promises of “HE WASHES AWAY YOUR SINS” and tales of floods and fires that cleansed cities like Sodom and Gomorrah of all those who fell short in the eyes of God. They said it was a choice to be gay. A choice to reject God. A choice to deny the word. A choice to go to hell.

I didn't choose, at age five, for a family member I loved, to point to a photograph in a magazine of two womxn holding hands and say, Nori - those womxn are gay, and God hates that. But ten years later, at age fifteen, I chose to stage a day of silent protest with my friends at our high school. We didn't choose to have the principal and school administrators rip the tape off our mouths (though they gave the pro-life club that choice). But we did choose to show up in tie-dye and rainbow stripes, and not back down when they threatened to expel us and the other kids called us fags and dykes.

I'm often told - by family, friends, strangers on the Internet - to choose a side since I'm so likely to choose to cheat that nobody would choose to be with me. I don't choose to be told that having eyes for guys makes me straight, that loving soft curves and vulvas makes me gay, that finding beauty in all genders makes me greedy. But I did choose, at age twenty-three, to come out to my partner two months before a killer chose to walk into Pulse nightclub and blow 49 people away like autumn leaves. I didn't choose to be traumatized in that way, to know next time it could be me or so many of my friends. But since I was in New York at the time, I chose to go to the vigil on Christopher Street in front of the Stonewall Inn, light a candle and say out loud, to a crowd full of strangers, I am bisexual, and I am proud. Just like I chose to carry the pansexual pride flag in my first Pride Parade and shake my rainbow tutu-ed ass at the protestors who chose to show up with their signs made of sloppy cardboard, for souls without a home.

I don't choose for unicorn accounts to follow me on Twitter every time I post about bisexuality or Queer activism, but I do choose to block them. I didn't choose for Queer folks who I considered friends to tell me, in no uncertain terms, that I haven't been oppressed enough to call myself Queer because it took twenty-three years to overcome my fear of hell, or because I married a man. But I do choose to tell folks who are struggling in the dark, searching the closet for the pieces of themselves which the world shoved into shoeboxes and crammed into dark corners hoping they'd disappear out of sight, out of mind, what I wish someone had told me - You are enough, You belong, and there is no one right way to be Queer.

I don't choose for my sexuality to be erased, vilified, fetishized. I don't choose for the world to call me broken, dirty, dishonest, untrustworthy, confused, perverted, sinful, disease-ridden, Whore. I don't choose to have a higher statistical chance for abuse, poverty, homelessness, illness, being murdered than my straight or gay peers. But I do choose to go to therapy, take my mood stabilizers, write, march, make magic, wear pink and blue and purple, stuff my face with sugar and laughter and kisses, dance all night with my chosen family under a moon who only shows their bright face to the world.

**My joy is defiance and that is not  
something I will give away.**

I did not choose to be bisexual. But if given the choice, I wouldn't change who I am, what I've lost, what I've found. Because being alive in this body, in this time we're upon means I can choose to wake up every day and write a new chapter to shape this life in my image.

# Her crowning glory

by Sam Hall

One of her earliest memories was the smell of her grandma's hair setting lotion. Purple, it came from a small bottle, acrid, a bit like nail polish remover, the smell wafted through the little house, mixing with the delicious smells of Sunday roast that seemed to linger all week, till her next weekend visit to her grandma. As she got a little older, grandma would let her paint on the lotion to her wiry white hair with a flat sponge, then curl up small sections around a hair roller, secured by a short plastic pin with a rounded blob at one end. Grandma would sit under an electric hairdryer in a deckchair for half an hour, whilst the heat blasted curls into her dead straight hair, her scalp visibly reddening underneath. The girl would take the spare pins and metal rollers, then make them into the shape of a strange animal, not quite a horse, as she made up little stories of what the creature was doing.

At Infant School she was introduced for the first time to shame. The shame of finding nits in her hair. She felt like she was one of the wild, poor children who only came to school sometimes, and when they did attend, their school uniforms were torn and smelly. The nit nurse told her not to cry, that nits only live in clean hair, so her hair must be clean, but it didn't stop the boys from singing 'She's got nits, she's got nits' when they smelled the remains of the strong insecticide on her hair the morning after the night of the nit massacre. Always sensitive to strong smells, she'd almost been sick when her mum had brushed the astringent chemical through her hair. Eyes watering and nose running, she'd had to sit on the window seat with the window fully open, wearing her mum's hand knitted red jumper to keep her warm, before the noxious stink could be washed off in the morning.

Later, at Junior School, she would run from the hair cutting scissors that her mother, apprenticed to a hairdresser before she married, before she had four children, kept sharp in the kitchen drawer. A clumsy, solitary child, her aim was to grow her hair so long that she could sit on it, acting out her Rapunzel fantasies in the quiet suburb of Bristol where she lived with her family. Her hair, plaited into a long rope, swaying from side to side as she attempted hopscotch in the playground, would be grabbed and pulled by the boys, held like the reins on a carriage, as they shouted at her to 'trot, little horsey'. But as her hair got longer, past her bum, without realising what she was doing, she had started to weaponise it. Not top of the class in anything, just average looking, average at lessons, and bullied for reasons she didn't know; suddenly her hair was longer than anyone else in the school. Shiny, soft, brushed every night by her mum, then plaited to stop it tangling as she tossed and turned in bed; at last her hair was like the fairytale. Parents of classmates would stop to admire it, the boys no longer bullied her, and other long-haired girls joined her gang.

At Secondary School, she missed her old gang and there were new bullies to pick her apart over her weight, which could no longer be described as ‘puppy fat’, her inability at sports, and a slight indefinable otherness she had begun to exude. To take her mind off how much she hated school, the experiments began, altering her look to try to fit in, then altering her look to stand out. Clothes were expensive but hair was easy to change with temporary hair dyes and perms. Her mum had to borrow a second set of perm curlers from a friend as she had so much hair and it took hours to perm. The perm lotion smelled a bit like the nit lotion from a few years prior. She could feel a slight fizzing, burning sensation on her scalp. After the perm a neutralising and setting lotion was applied to larger rollers, in the aim of having smooth, sultry waves like Jaclyn Smith in *Charlie’s Angels*, but her hair which already had a slight curl to it, exploded like *Crystal Tipps* in a ball of frizz. She cried at the state of it, she tried to fake a stomach ache so she wouldn’t have to go into school the next day to fan the flames of a new set of bullies. But her mum said that they’d think she had been skiving if she had a day off sick then went in with a new hairdo. She tried to iron it flat, but nothing would loosen the tight ringlets. In the end, she plaited it, then flattened it as tight to her head as she could with hairgrips.

The perm had changed the porosity of her hair. Prior to the perm when she had tried to dye her hair, none of the colours had stuck to her muddy brown natural colour. After the perm, the texture of her hair felt different. It tangled easier, was more difficult to brush, was lighter in colour. Previous hair dyes had been a waste of pocket money, but once the perm had settled down and started to drop, she dyed her hair bright red and for the first time it took. After hand drying with great splotches of conditioner left in, she had long, flowing, curly, titian hair like *Boticelli’s Venus*; finally something that was not average.

She kept this hair through college. She now had something to regard as her best feature. Her first boyfriend Tom loved it, especially when she parted it into two long plaits and curled them up on either side like *Princess Leia*. He was the boyfriend who wanted to shave her. She’d been taking a razor to the dark hair on her legs and armpits since Secondary School, but had always kept her pubes au naturel. That boyfriend confessed he had a fantasy about shaving her. She found that a bit icky and the relationship did not last much longer after his revelation. The only woman she’d ever kissed had purple hair extensions and had been a former flatmate during college. She fancied *Purple Hair’s* brother and perhaps because they were friends, or because of her feelings for the brother, the kiss didn’t go any further. After they graduated, as a celebration both she and her friend decided to do something radical with their hair. Her friend took out her extensions and was left with a cute plum coloured bob.

She didn’t want to be a cliché, she didn’t want to be the type of woman who cuts their hair off symbolically when they split up with someone, but since Tom she had been online dating and was fed up with men sending her messages which fantasized about

having her long hair wrapped around their thighs, so she asked her friend to cut her hair short, then bleach it.

She hates her new short hair. It's uncontrollably curly, and she thinks she looks like a '50s schoolgirl. Prim, proper. So young. Though at least it can be brushed easily into the retro styles using exactly the same setting lotion that her grandma used to use. She and her friend had both started getting into retro fashion in their last year at college, and though they now lived in different boroughs, Purple Hair and she would still meet up at gigs and clubs, where their hair was nothing special. Everyone sported bright colours and Victory Rolls. She begins to grow the bleached blonde crop out. Her hair grows quickly, so by the time she meets the man she will marry it's down her back, coloured dark red with ombre ends.

He loves her hair. On her wedding day it looks magnificent, she wears a handmade tiara of black and silver crystals and it tumbles down fiery red from it. He will lie in bed stroking it and when the sun rises, take early morning pictures on his phone of her with the light coming from behind it. He calls it her 'lava hair'. She gets a job she enjoys but it's too busy, she's a designer in a small publisher, she works long hours and she's tired when she gets home from it and they argue more and more. He tries to keep the spark there by arranging surprise date nights and she starts taking up the rugs and cleaning the bedroom floor with salt water once a week, because it was something she remembers her grandma doing and her grandma had a long, happy marriage.

She wants to stay married, it would be a source of shame to her to be divorced, so she starts thinking that her hair is the key. She doesn't cut it at all during the time of their marriage, not even to trim the split ends, but still, after a number of unhappy years, they decide on a trial separation, then a divorce.

Now, bald as a coot, she stands in her living room in front of a small replica of Luciano Garbati's statue of Medusa. She'd seen it in New York a couple of years ago on a work trip, and something in the sculptor's reimagining of the story spoke to her.

A slim, naked woman stands with a sword in one hand and the severed head of Perseus in the other. She looks fairly normal, a bit athletic. She's not so ugly that to look at her you would be turned to stone, in fact, she is beautiful. The statue looks both pissed off and sad at the same time. Medusa has done this terrible act, but she was forced to do this.

Her colourful hair wrap is held loose in her hand, it's just one of an army of scarves and fabrics that she uses to keep her current lack of hair secret, private. If they see her shorn head, people always assume that she has cancer but it's actually alopecia areata. She doesn't want to have to explain that anymore to people.

She started noticing that patches of hair were falling out about three months after the Decree Absolute came through, she'd had to move out of the house they'd shared all that time, then her ex-husband's father died and she still loved her ex and mourned his dad, so she helped him through it, not realising how stressful it was to her. She shaved the few remaining clumps off, shedding tears as she did so for the end of the relationship. Her hair had always been the way she defined herself. She prays it will grow back, it can grow back, that's what she's read, she just needs to get rid of all the stress from her life. She's removed a lot of its sources, that's what this period of rest and re-evaluation has been about; taking two months off and using up all the holiday time that she's been owed from work. The foot-tall replica of the statue was expensive, but now she's got it in front of her she's glad she bought it. In one version of the story Medusa's hair was her crowning glory, a temptation to the very gods, so Athena turned her hair into snakes, so she would no longer be attractive.

The tangle of snakes on Medusa's head looks like the resplendent curls that she had when she was at college; her best bed hair on a good day. She thinks of her friend with the purple hair extensions. She's been thinking about her a lot recently. She's been limiting her social media – one of her sources of chronic stress, but she allows herself five minutes to look up Purple Hair online. Her friend looks different, a curly head of natural blonde hair shining out of the profile pic. Older, but still the familiar half-smile on her lips. Her kissable lips. She wonders about the path that she could have taken, if that moment should have led somewhere. Over the years she has thought about it, more than once. Though she doesn't regret the married life she had, she doesn't know if she should have married him in the first place.

She composes a long message, then for an age her finger hovers over the send icon. She wonders what her friend will think about the current lack of hair. She is ashamed of her baldness, like she was ashamed of the nits back when she was five.

She goes back to the expensive small statue on her rented mantelpiece, in her rented flat, stares at the gorgon. She isn't turned into stone. For the first time she notices that Medusa has no hair on the rest of her body and laughs out loud when she remembers the boyfriend who wanted to shave her pubic hair. Medusa's gaze holds no shame and nor should hers.

She decides that her friend won't care a jot about the baldness, returns to the computer, sends the message.



# The Thorn

by Nellie Cole

No map would mark this out as a place to stop, or to deviate from the well-worn path. Felled timbers offer a way over the stream: safe passage through the thickets of hawthorn branches and brambles. It is safer to continue, to follow the waymarkers on and up the hill, than to step down and become ensnared. Yet, when history is left unplotted, we must forget to follow maps.

Following the course of the narrow stream, I tread my own path through the scattered mulch. In springtime, this copse blossoms out into a brimming hedgerow; now, in winter, it is little more than a tangle of branches, which catch at my hair and my clothes. I travel a little further upstream, then finding a mossy knoll at the water's edge, take a seat.

I am uncertain of where along the river she lost her life. It had been a winter's day, of that I am sure: fallen leaves collecting on the riverbed, plastered with silt; the water swelling to a drowning depth. A day much like this. Looking down, I notice a small graze received somewhere along the way, the thorn that pierced me still caught in my skin.

*The thorn is exceedingly sharp,  
an evil thing for any thegn to touch,  
uncommonly severe on all who sit among them.*

To the ancestors of this land, a thorn was more than a spike on a stem: it was a letter, a part of a written language. To them, everything was imbued with life, even the letters they carved into stone. Each rune had its own name and its own meaning: so while  $\square$ , or thorn, enabled them to write *this* or *that*, when evoked, it could also embody power, protection, and pain. Through a single rune, one might read a great many tales, stories that cannot be told in words.

Zisa's is one such story. Her resting place has become mythical, but the tragedy of her death is very seldom understood, the truth of her life barely known. There were no witnesses at her passing: only the trees, which amass in thickets around this place like rose bushes around some precious thing.

Looking back to my grazed skin, I pluck out the thorn between finger and thumb, and drop it into the stream below. The water barely moves, yet the little blood which clings to the barb is washed away in a moment, dissipating to nothing. I wonder how much of her lifeblood these waters took, and whether it too was gone without a trace. I wonder how many grazes they found upon her skin: from the fatal knock to the lower back; the

thrusting forward of hands; the futile wrenching of arms from a stranglehold of branches.

Thinking of Zisa, my mind is likewise ensnared. I see brambles wrapped about her tongue, voiceless since birth; I see two thorns, crossed, set as teeth in her lower jaw. Pain is present in the scar across her cheek, the stretchmarks on her stomach, the splinters in her palms and the soles of her feet. Protection is in the fires she builds, the wicker she weaves to cradle her baby, the twigs she cuts to pegs to sell at market. Through the thorn, we see what might otherwise disappear, as wordlessly as blood in the slow moving waters.

There is only a small mark on my skin, and it will soon begin to heal. I get to my feet and brush the moss and mulch from my clothes, before carefully returning the way I came. Stepping back onto the path, there is no sign that my track has been trodden. No map marks the spot where Zisa lost her life, no memorial: only a thorn, washed clean of blood, caught in the silt of the riverbed.

# Statuesque

by Catherine Kleindienst

He stands before me.

I will him to stone, but his body remains flesh. His skin is pink, not grey; his heart is beating, not still, pumping venom through his veins. His mouth continues to move, though that's the part I wish most to become stone. His eyes keep trained on me, daggers piercing through my skin.

Whatever poison runs through him, whatever venom dances in his veins, it's not enough. Not enough to drip onto the floor, to burn a hole in the ground for him to disappear through. If he won't turn to stone, if his flesh won't fade, he might as well have the courtesy to vanish, to leave and never return.

Instead, his words grow louder. He calls me beautiful. Statuesque, he says. I want to laugh at the irony, but it comes out muffled, nervous, an awkward eruption of noise.

And somehow, I'm the one frozen, while he continues to speak. Words slip from his mouth but my own remains closed, my tongue heavy.

His hand reaches out to grab my own, and I want to break it from his arm, watch his frozen fingers crumble to the floor piece by piece. I wonder if then, the people surrounding us, watching in silence, could see him for the monster he is. If his skin fell away, if he crumbled to pieces, would they see the beast that resides beneath, the restless creature that lurks deep inside?

Maybe they would look past him, tell me to become stone instead.

If I'm stone, he can't hurt me.

But I don't want to harden my heart. I don't want my mind to be grey and cracked, old and ruined. I don't want him to create a spot in my head that recalls this, that can't escape this memory. I can't close my eyes and see him standing there, snakes slithering beneath his skin.

If my mind turns to stone, will that save me?

If I look in a mirror and see grey tinting my flesh, will I be better?

Whether or not I wanted my mind to become stone, it's too late because no thoughts burrow into my mind; it's nothing but blank while I shake my head back and forth, but "no" isn't enough and "no" will never be enough so he keeps talking, snakes slithering from his tongue down his chin, scattering onto the floor and curling around my feet.

His snakes nip at my ankles and I feel myself hardening, feet becoming tethered to the floor. I can neither walk away nor towards him, and my eyes can't look anywhere else.

But I will not become stone, if a mannequin is what he wants me to be.

I bend down and pick up the snakes, inviting them to slither up my arms, to rest on my shoulders. They hang over me like a cape. And his words stop, finally, as mine begin, as the snakes I once feared give me a newfound strength. They nip and bite, striking out at him, and though he doesn't turn to stone, he leaves me, running fast as his feet can take him.

I smile at the snakes shielding me, and I take "statuesque" for myself. His words are mine, now, to use as I want. Just as the snakes that once dripped venom into his veins now rest on my shoulders. They have become my armor, a shield that I never knew I needed.

And when I think of him, when my mind wanders off to that forbidden place, I look to the snakes draped over me instead. They are my protectors and they assure me, with their harshly hissed words, that I will never be stone again.

# Thalassophobe

by Natasha Kindred

For someone afraid of deep water, I spend a lot of time there.

Sometimes, I test my phobia by googling the loss of now-familiar submarines. I read about the violent crush of hull, the scraping of bow through prehistoric sediment. I bring up images of shipwrecks, vast and silent (are they? Does the creak and groan of their broken keels make a sound down there in the wet wind of ocean current? Is there even a current so far down or is it as still as all the dead boats?). Their portholes and windows glare out at intruders with the empty gaze of hungry sharks. I shudder to see them; a nauseous prickle that tickles my kidneys, sudden salivation, a loose sort of sickness that unhooks the jaw. I can feel the horror pouring into the compartments of my vessel. I stare at those ships lost to the cold black until I feel vomit rising. I re-read some of the last written words, scrawled in the dark, of Lieutenant Captain Dmitri Kolesnikov of the Kursk; ‘Regards to everybody. No need to despair.’

I don’t know why I do this.

I suppose it is the nature of addicts to trawl the depths and bring up terrors, things with grey teeth and freezing skin. To take to high waters and foul weather with a hole in one’s side. I have heard many times of the miraculous power of the 12 Steps, I have seen it in action, lives turned around, redeemed, brought up, salvaged. A Higher Power has done for us what we could not do for ourselves. Less often, I hear about the operation to bring the bodies to the surface.

I had a dream not long after I got out of rehab; of a long, flooded corridor full of filing cabinets stretched ahead to a dim and distant square of light. As I watched, the water began to recede, showing the light as an open door at the end of the wall of drawers, which began to rattle. Slowly, they started to open and all these long, slick, black limbs appeared. Tentacles unwound from some like ribbons. From others poked the delicate, jerking legs of monstrous spiders. I looked ahead to the door beyond, and the gauntlet of horror I’d have to run to reach it. I felt panic surge like a fist pushing up from my gut, and the corridor began to flood again. It didn’t take a session on the couch to figure out the meaning of that one. The pressure of alcoholism kept the worst things locked in their drawers, as surely as the weight of the sea seals a sunken hull shut. Sobriety drained the trench, left the floor vulnerable to things that were raw and creeping.

Addiction breeds abominations, a black egg in the brain throbbing with hatchlings. I watered mine with alcohol, nurturing the thickening bodies with poison. It turns men

into slack-jawed wolves in every phase of the moon, the alcoholic woman is a Gorgon. People think they know her in TV tropes about daytime G&T's in tense suburbia; middle-aged, smeared mascara, slurred words. An embarrassment at garden parties, a recklessly-driven Landrover. Highlights. They think they know her in the pitiful landlady upstairs, alone but from the soothing hum of GMTV, red wine in hand at all hours. They think they know her in the party girl; shots, chardonnay, awakening to the tanned limbs of some unsuitable, half-remembered man, played for giggles (rarely is the male alcoholic treated with such levity; aggressive, romantic, swooning, charming, brilliant, doomed).

The alcoholic woman is the thing you fear in the deeps with teeth as big as your head. The alcoholic woman is the cave spider whose domain is strewn with mummified endings; she has venomous spit and psychedelic skin and her tongue is a killing field. Her rage will eat you as surely as the ocean swallows all those unfortunate ships, it is as chill and dark and pitiless. Viper-headed, death to behold.

My ugliness, too, was a punishment or a blessing depending on your interpretation. Dance around Medusa and you will find, as many have fiercely proclaimed, that she was defending herself. Her fatal gaze repels evil, it keeps harm at arm's length. She averts misfortune with isolation; vigilant, apotropaic. You cannot get close to the alcoholic, she will freeze you where you stand, a blunt instrument afraid of mirrors. She has spent a decade swallowing fury and is now vomiting bile and you cannot play her for laughs.

Treatment is a cage-dive designed to acquaint me with bottomless places, and I am less afraid of things that lie in wait in water. I still avoid the lethal gleam of the glass eyes in supermarket aisles and I go monster hunting with reflection. They cut my head off in a clinic and now it adorns my shield and guards my door; fair-cheeked, justified, ravenous, dreadful. Like the weaponised Gorgoneion, the sober alcoholic is detached, not defenceless. Medusa's face still writhes beneath my own, rolling her killer eyes. I tease my tangled snakes into messy buns and ponytails and braids, a smiling horror in office chic who revels in the magic power of a severed skull.

I go to my meetings and meet my winged sisters there. We defend ourselves and one another, we gaze at the past and turn it to stone. We remain repulsive to weak-hearted heroes, we turn aside evil with looks that can kill. We thrive in the ambient pressure of deep places. We laugh like any woman would, who found herself more dangerous unarmed.





*Medusa as a Sphinx Cat by Cat Rogi*



# Medusa's Grimoire

*Magical Ritual*

# Medusa Ritual for Snake Healing Magic

By Magda Knight

For the purposes of this ritual, Theseus is just a boy who got lucky. This is not his tale; this is not his working.

This working is about you. Medusa. The Gorgon. Perhaps you have been feared and reviled for your self-contained perfection. Oh, well. Not everyone understands the Gorgon. For the purpose of this working, that is their loss.

A Medusa working is not about anyone else in the world. It is about you.

It is a fact not widely known that Medusa was perfect, and one of the reasons for her perfection is that she bathed every morning in the healing venom of the snakes which fed and grew from her scalp. Medusa was her own poison; her own medicine. She was a self-contained perfection, resplendent and self-knowing in her final form. And she knew, as all wise monsters know, that perfection takes work.

Medusa needed no caduceus. The caduceus? Oh, that knotted snake-entwined staff beloved of healers the world over. She was her own caduceus. She had everything she needed to heal, already within her and within her reach.

This, then, is a Medusa ritual for self-healing. You need nothing save that which you already have. Fear nothing; you are the greatest creature ever to exist in your own body, in your own personal space and time. You heal every day. Shadow work is healing work is shadow work, you beauty. You piece of self-perfection.

Bathe, now, in the healing venom of your own snakes. They are your past, your future, not something tacked onto you but a very own part of your own true self. They are yours, Gorgon. Be free, be well. Do not fear lucky young boys off on their own adventures. You have a healing bathing ritual to attend to, for you are yourself, and the others are just the others.

This is your time, Medusa. Perform your ritual, and perform it well, in your own truth and aspect.

Begin.

How to perform the Medusa Ritual

You will need:

- Yourself
- Symbolic snake attire
- A mirror you can hold

### Becoming the Gorgon

First, you must dress yourself. You may decide that your Medusa aspect is one that is either naked or robed. Or wear everything you own with a snake theme or a royal theme in your house.

Snake adornment is essential. Throw on snakeskin prints, jewellery that makes you think of scales, green lipstick or eyeshadow if you have it. You can draw snakes coiling from your wrists to your elbows, writhing lovingly round your arms. These serpents love you so very much; they are both servants who do your bidding and an innate part of your essence. You can draw two snakes subtly climbing from the roots of your hair down behind your ear. You may already have a snake tattoo. You can coil phone charger cords round your arms and attach them with duct tape.

If you have nothing else, you can curl the snakes into your scalp by tracing them with your finger on your own head in a form of automatic drawing. In fact, do this, loved one. That splendid sensation of touch. Feel the snakes. They are yours.

### Dispelling the fear of venom

Ah, the serpent. Healers know it as an avatar of transformation. Its venom, which can kill, can also be transformed into medicine. Transformational snake magic is about knowledge, and the wisdom of channelling fear.

We all feel fear. Yes. But the Gorgon is her own fear. She is the snakes, and the snakes are her. Therefore, she is able to work with fear. She is willing to do shadow work with herself.

First, you must accept that venom, fear and toxicity are in some way a part of you and your past experiences. Acknowledge the snakes in their entirety, not just the elements you want to work with.

You must feel the snake's bite upon your skin.

**(Note:** If you have experience of self-harm, and this aspect of the ritual is simply not for you, respect that in yourself. You are more important than the words of another. You can replace this aspect of the ritual with a spit upon the ground. There. You have expelled the snake's venom from the body. You are powerful.)

Feel fear about this, or don't – it doesn't matter either way. You are the Gorgon. It will not be the first time you have been bitten. Sometimes the snakes cannot help themselves, poor loves. It is their nature.

It is time to give yourself a snakebite. In a symbolic act, pinch the fleshy part of one thumb. Feel the pinch. Acknowledge the snake's fangs digging in.

Do not be afraid. Or do. It matters not. Either way, you are still doing the work. If, as you feel the pinch, you feel tension - perhaps in your gut - it is but nature. It is not doubt or grief or fear. It is just snakes.

Exhale in the manner of your choosing – long and slow, short and fast, with or without sound. Sound is good, for it will help your mind focus on the ritual, not on the nature of the toxicity you might be working with. A useful sound is a form of ululation: Start low, feeling it in your base, your lower spine, your belly, then climb up to feel the notes rise through your heart and throat and crown. Then down again.

The snakes bit you, but they did your bidding. They bit you because you asked them to. They did it as an act of fealty; an act of love. And you are used to their venom, anyway. And their bite was an act of release.

They bit you because you know and the snakes know that you are ready to perform healing snake magic, and that is all.

The healing mirror

Take your handheld mirror and hold it out to the side, facing towards you from the side so that if you chose to turn your face you could see yourself in the mirror – but you will not turn your face to look.

You are looking very powerful right now.

It suits you.

The mirror may be a bathroom mirror, a powder compact, or your mobile phone with the camera on and set to show you, not the world beyond. It may be the black mirror - that is, your mobile phone switched off.

Whatever it might have been before, it is now a mirror. Hold it out to one side, so that it is facing you.

Do not look in the mirror. You will turn yourself to stone.

Remember this: you do not need to look in the mirror to know that you are exquisite. You are the Gorgon. You have always been gorgeous. You do not need that affirmation today.

In the mirror, your Gorgon self can be seen (though you will not look). The Gorgon wears an expression of self-containment, of self-knowing. That wisdom is already there.

The snakes reach out from the mirror's depths. Visualise them circling you, entwining with you.

These snakes bring healing. If they lick or nip you, it is not venom, but medicine. And they do not need to nip or lick you. Their entire form is a medicine aura that reaches out beyond their skin.

Acknowledge where the snakes travel, and where they might focus on you. All over? Certain areas? Do they circle you in a scaled medicine-cocoon-dance?

You may talk to them, if you wish. You may ask them things, or tell them things. If you whisper in your mind, they will hear you, the mirror-snakes.

When it is time, bid them retreat into the mirror.

Then place the mirror face down on a surface, without looking in it.

The work is done.

You've bathed in the healing venom of your own snakes, and you have survived and healed in ways that will reveal themselves in coming hours, days, months, years.

You have done the work.

You have permitted yourself to find new ways to heal and grow.

Strong. Self-contained.

Gorgon.



# Medusa Trauma Tarot Spread

by Backyard Banshee

Hello, I'm Backyard Banshee and my Instagram covers divination. I've created a Medusa Project cartomancy spread (tarot, lenormand, or other oracle cards) that you can use to help you move forward from an event that has left you feeling stuck and unable to move on. My mythological point of view falls in line with the version that Medusa was a beautiful woman, who got harassed because of her looks when she just wanted to learn & encourage her own development. That she was raped, assaulted against her will by a powerful person, who left her so traumatised she sought protection in the form of eternal repulsion, along with her sisters who stood by her side after this traumatic event. That she could no longer be in the current world because she was stuck mentally in what had happened to her, reliving it over & over. That her move from Greece to modern day Libya to be as far away from what happened as she physically could, to be left alone to heal and recuperate. And that with her sisters support meant she could try to live again. I've created a spread with this version in mind, in the hope it could benefit someone out there. Trauma isn't necessarily caused by something as brutal as rape, but can cover anything from giving birth, to a fallout with a friend, to nearly being hit by a car. It impacts and manifests in the body in many ways, and whilst this cartomancy spread is meant to be used as a tool to help, I do implore that you seek help from your countries mental health charities who can do a whole lot more good than I can from behind my screen. The Calm Zone website here has a great list of global mental health charities who can support you:

<https://www.thecalmzone.net/2019/10/international-mental-health-charities>



To begin, grab a paper, pen, and your chosen deck that feels right for this process.

Think about the trauma, whatever this may be for you, what's causing you pain and the emotions they bring to you.

With your pen & paper, write down some true "I" statements to help you focus on the specifics of the problems surrounding what has happened. Statements such as "I feel \*insert emotion\* because of \*this situation\* which is impacting \*specifics\*."

To have it written down will help give you some power to start. And once you've done your reading, in true witchy fashion why not freeze the paper in an ice cube to freeze these feelings, or burn the paper so you can start to move on. Even flushing it down the toilet so you can put some distance between you and the problem may make you feel a bit better about it all.

Whilst shuffling your cards, focus on your statements and what you feel.

Look at the each question as you pull out each card, and start to build an idea of what you can do next to make yourself feel better.

And that's it! I hope that this may help you, and shed some light on how to move forward.

I'm sending you lots of loving healing vibes and if anyone would like to reach out to me I'm more than happy to listen.

With love always, @backyardbanshee



# Ritual to Summon Medusa's Protection and Knowledge

By Ghia Vitale

Use this simple ritual to summon Medusa's protection and knowledge whenever you need it. Medusa's insights are helpful for helping you understand and improve various aspects of your life, including your personal life (like, ahem, your love life), career life, and matters of justice or revenge. (If you're being wrongfully blamed or punished for something, Medusa is happy to help with turning the tides in your favor.) She will enlighten and empower you with the protection and knowledge you need to be happier and more fulfilled. Feel free to make any accommodations or changes you need to make this spell more effective, accessible, and personalized to your liking.

Here's what you'll need for this spell:

Jasmine or lemongrass stick incense (Incense made out of any snake-attracting herbs will do!)

A black tea candle

A miniature cauldron

Fire source (lighter, matches, etc.)

EXTRA:

Feel free to start burning essential oil with a burner just prior to the ritual. It'll give your working more of an "oomph." Again, use essential oils made out of herbs that attract snakes.

1. Prepare for the ritual however you see fit. Get yourself into the mood by researching Medusa online, doing a smoke cleansing, or anything else you do to magically and spiritually attune yourself prior to a ritual or spell. If it feels right, feel free to skip to the next step after you set up an altar space:

2. Welcome Medusa to the ritual with the following invocation:

“Hail Medusa,

Demoness of Knowledge and Protection who averts evil.

You are eternal in Your petrifying gaze,

exalted by Your serpentine power,

enlightened and endless with dark wisdom,

righteous in Your feminist rage!

I honor You and hold space for You in this ritual.

Please be with me in mind, body, and soul.

So mote it be!”

3. Light the incense as an offering:

“Medusa, I light this incense to burn as an offering in Your honor. Please accept it as an expression of my love and desire to be closer to You. I seek to embody Your wisdom and receive the greatness that is Your protection.”

4. Consciously invoke Medusa into your being. Visualize yourself psychically “pulling” Her energy down through your crown chakra all the way down to your root chakra. Feel Her presence within you and around you. Note any changes you feel in your energy or space’s energy. (Personally, I perceive Medusa’s energy as earthy and stabilizing yet fiery and passionate.) Approach Her with an open mind and heart so She knows you appreciate and respect Her.

5. Once you’ve fully invoked Medusa, light a black candle and place it into the mini-cauldron. Then say the following words:

“Medusa, this candle burns in Your honor,

yet no entity can fathom Your power.

Your decapitated head alone is stronger than the might of men and gods combined.

That's why Athena put Your head on Her shield, but alas,

You are whole and empowered in Your infernal knowledge.

Please bestow Your protection and insights upon me

to guide me and keep me safe from harm.

Reveal Your wisdom to me!"

6. Take this time to meditate with Medusa. Be mindful of any images, words, phrases, symbols, etc. that pop up in your mind's eye. They will help you understand Her messages for you. Use your intuition to interpret these messages and understand what She's trying to tell you on a personal level. Don't worry if you can't interpret them right away—the answer will come to you in time, but sooner rather than later. You can also use this time to do divination or commune with Her directly.
7. Visualize Medusa's power and protection surrounding you and filling up your aura. I visualize Her energy as an iridescent green and red glow that intensifies with increasing powers.
8. Afterward, ground and center. While you're doing that, mentally send off the excess energy out into the darkness/universe to manifest more protection and knowledge in your favor. It's alright if there's still some energy with/around you by the time you're done.
9. Thank Medusa with genuine gratitude and dismiss Her from the ritual.
10. Next, be on the lookout for meaningful signs and synchronicities from Her. She'll be good to you if you approach Her with good intentions, so always be respectful toward Her, even if it's just in your thoughts.

# Reflecting Upon The Medusa Ritual For Knowledge and Protection

By Ghia Vitale

Medusa is one of the Gorgons, the three sisters/monsters with venomous snakes for hair. She was a beautiful, young (and mortal) woman who made a vow to Athena to remain celibate, but Poseidon decided to rape Her in Athena's temple. Athena then punished Medusa by turning Her gorgeous hair into live snakes and giving Her a face so terrifying, onlookers would turn into stone just by looking at Her. Although people like the Perseus in the Roman poet Ovid's telling of the tale consider the punishment from Athena/Minerva to be justified, modern feminists have a different interpretation of Medusa's myth. She has become a feminist icon, a reclaimed symbol of feminine darkness and power. She is the wronged mortal who's finally making the pop culture comeback She deserves as a badass. She's also a valuable magical ally to those who seek out Her assistance and wisdom.

Gorgons can turn people into stone or outright kill them just by gazing at them or being beheld by Them. Although a Gorgon is a monster from Greek mythology, I consider Medusa to be both a demon and a goddess. She is a powerful protectress, hence why the name "Medusa" often translates to "Guardian" or "Protectress" in Greek. She's not Athena, but She is a wellspring of knowledge in Her own right, especially when it comes to undergoing personal transformations and dismantling the patriarchy. That's why I felt compelled to design a ritual that calls upon Her power to manifest Her protection and knowledge in your life.

I tried to design this Medusa ritual to be simple and easy to adapt to one's individual preferences for the sake of accessibility. When I wrote the ritual down in my book of shadows, it felt as though I were channeling the ritual right from Medusa's fang-filled mouth. I knew She'd never lead my pen astray as it swerved into messy yet passionate script letters. My fingers struggled to keep up with the pace of my thoughts. They were aching by the time I was finished. I knew I was going to perform this ritual before submitting it to The Medusa Project, but I wasn't prepared for how spot-on and helpful Medusa's messages to me would be.

Before I did the ritual, I felt like shit. I was feeling bad about myself because someone I was attracted to hadn't texted me for a while. It really wasn't a big deal, but it triggered a slew of self-consciousness and negative thoughts about myself that really got me down. It was honestly the worst I had felt about myself in a long time.

Then one of my guides (Naberius) encouraged me to do the Medusa ritual because he said it would help me. With minimal preparation and eyes still glossy from crying, I began the ritual and immediately entered a spiritual mindset. When the time came to summon Medusa's knowledge and insights, an image of Morning Glory flowers popped into my head. Then I saw Her, green and scaly with outstretched arms as glowing purple butterflies poured out from inside/underneath Her. Her joyous yet fierce aura instantly made an impression on me.

Then my fingers turned into snakes. She informed me that I could use these finger-snakes as astral weaponry and for magical purposes. I briefly tried it out by willing the pointer finger-snake to bust through my specific problem/blockage like a homing missile. Each time I shot a snake out of my finger socket, another one grew in its place. I look forward to seeing how well this move works in the astral realm.

During my time with Medusa, She told me, "Sometimes, it's better to be frightening than beautiful." She also revealed to me that She has the power to compel men you're attracted to while keeping shitty/dangerous men away. Sounds like a win-win situation to me. In fact, a lot of us could use more of that energy. Medusa knows the world needs more of her. And even while knowing all of this, I had the audacity to be shocked when She read me like a book.

When I looked up Morning Glory symbolism, I found it stands for unrequited love and the mortality of love. At first, I was afraid it was a bad omen, but then the thick of the gnosis hit me the next morning when I briefly stepped outside after enjoying a cup of coffee. As I took in the sunlight and spring air, I realized that Medusa was trying to tell me that a lot of love and attraction is either unrequited or temporary. That's part of what makes unconditional love and lasting love so precious. It doesn't mean that temporary connections have zero value or importance. It just means you're more likely to not form significant bonds with most people who tickle your fancy and honestly, it's better off that way. The best thing anyone can do is cherish the love while it's there. I'm just lucky to experience a connection with someone I enjoy, no matter how fleeting it is. Furthermore, it's all the more reason to appreciate the long-term relationship I have with my partner. (I'm polyamorous, by the way.)

Once the gnosis hit me, I automatically felt much better than I did before. I no longer felt like there was anything wrong with me. I realized I shouldn't expect myself to appeal to others and it doesn't matter if someone doesn't like me or requite my attraction. I'd rather embrace my inner-Medusa and be loved for the monster I truly am rather than someone I am not. Also, those who can't perceive my beauty and value don't deserve to see it at all, so what's the point in getting upset about it?

I'm so grateful to Medusa for pulling me out of that personal slump and blessing me with Her wisdom. I plan on working with Her more in the future. I adore Her energies and encourage you to welcome Her into your life. If/when you do my ritual to summon Medusa's knowledge and protection, pay attention to the unique ways in

which She manifests to you. Personally, I've noticed that She often communicates to me through flowers and nature imagery. She has both light and dark aspects as well as expressions in every shade that dwells in between the two ends of the spectrum. She was very open and willing to help me, so I suspect She'll do the same for you if you approach Her with respect.

Good luck in your personal and magical endeavors! I'm rooting for you.



Medusa    arises

her head is smoke

not snakes

the chasm sleeps



# The Pathway To Medusa Arising

*A ClairCognizant's Diary*

by Sascha Aurora Akhtar





18 July 2019

## On Finding The Medicine Of The Moment



As some of you know I truly believe in magic. What I call natural magic. It's the energy of Universe that once you tap into —makes space for you. Whatever I seek comes to me, but only since I am able to see what is in front of me.

So in a little charity shop two days ago, heart fully broken yet again by bereavement — my father, a great man, a great poet in the Urdu language is dead — this exquisite little book came to me.

So simple the language... Even just that title... I didn't know of the poet Paul Gerdy. It didn't matter. His energy, his poem's energy, the feel of this small treasure, the smell of it, trying to parse the French, simple as it is, with my impoverished skills — all these actions are pretty much the thing giving me sole solace right now.

This is all to say: One you open, then surrender then trust — Accept. In this case:  
Healing From Any & All Sources.

This book right now is my healing talisman. Thank you.

Let It So Be.

11 August 2019

## On Rituals



R. I. P. OLD SELF. TOMM I AM EARTHING IN THE MOORS, TO LET GO OF ALL THAT IS NO LONGER SERVING ME. WHEN I RETURN WHO KNOWS WHO I'LL BE.

Lovely resonance today — author [@sonny\\_ramirez\\_author](#) says I should do this: Let today be the beginning of everything you want in this life, change starts today...change what needs to be changed, delete those that need to be deleted, erase all false thoughts of yourself, of what or who you are. Never be scared to stand on the ashes of who used be.

YASS STANDIN' ON ME OWN ASHES, INNIT.

13 August 2019

## On Owning Our Power



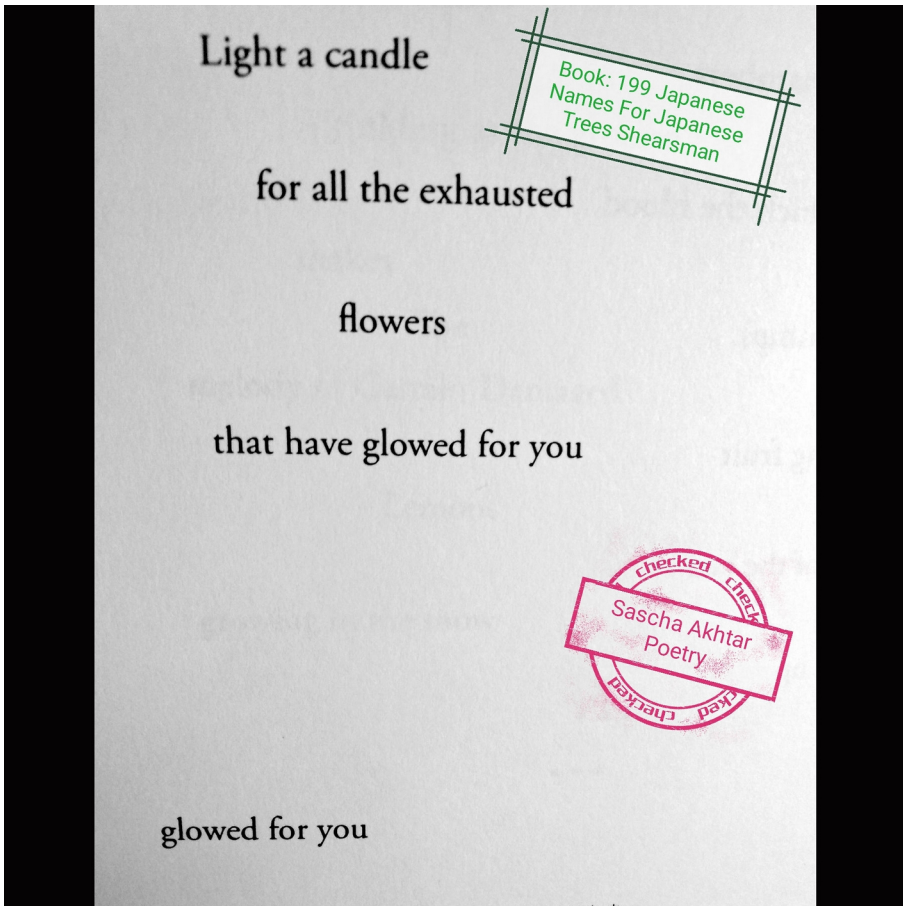
Am Gonna Lay Some Heavy Truths On You. There Is No Doubt In My Mind That With Intention Plus Belief In Your Own Power As A Result, Trust In The Present Moment And Vibing Vibing With Frequency... Magic Occurs. I Can Tell You I Am Almost Certainly No Longer The Same Person I Was Yesterday (Actually We Never Are ;). Thank You For Following, I Love. "

#malang #wandering #mystical #intention #rituals #rebirth #joinme #serenade #universe #naturalmagic



24 August 2019

## On Channeling



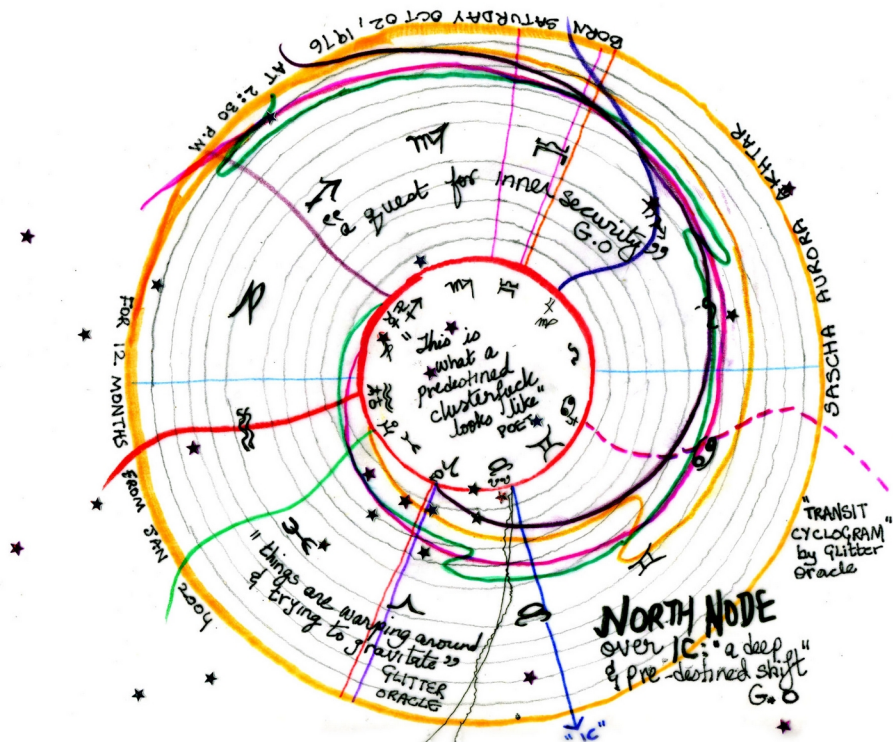
I Know It Seems Sad, But It's Just The Truth... As A Writer I Have Always Written From A Place Of Deep Pain, Sorrow, Loss, Abandonment, Abuse. It's Ok. We All Have Our Lives To Live. This Is Mine.

When I Am Feeling Blue I Can Post Something That Describes My Feelings. So That's Good. Also, Anyone Who's Ever Suffered In. Any Way Should Find Solace & Healing Too. So That's Even Better. Love You, All & Forever & Whoever.

#poetrycommunity #poetry #emogirl #poetrybooks #poetsofinstagram #ukpoets #ukpoetry #lovepoetry #pathos #lightacandle #glow #alone #melancholy #blues



# On Recognizing Our Powers



SNEAK PEEK INTO ONE OF THE HAND-DRAWN (by author) STAR CHARTS (charted by Francesca Lisette) included in a NEW Poeto-Narrative Book: Astra Inclinant (The Stars Incline Us) by Sascha Akhtar on Contraband UK.

Here's the skinny: 'The Book Is A Poeto-Documentation/Narrative Of A Series Of Life-Changing Events, Which My Claircognizance Alerted Me To (Which Is Why I Wrote A Poem Daily To Try To 'Catch' The Wyrd In Action). I Asked the Oracle @glitteroracle To Investigate The Matter Which They Did And VOILA My Suspicions Were Confirmed. There WAS Some Crazy Shit Afoot At The Time. I Was NOT Imagining It. We Have Included Visual Star Charts With The Poems So You Can See

What An Actual Pre-Destined ClusterFuck Looks Like. The Whole Thing Is A Wild Ride Into Fate & Pre-Destination And Poetry & Alchemy & Transformation & Fucking Love & Death.

#newpoetry #newschoolpoetry#newbooks #contrabandpressuk  
#indiepublishing#supportindiepublishing #astro poets#astrology  
#poetrycommunity#poetsofinstagram #newpoetrybooks#septemberbooks  
#booksinseptember#magical #artwithbooks #starcharts#witchesofinstagram  
#magicallife#witchlife #livelovelaugh #live#relationships #alchemy #alchemical#fate  
#predestination#astrainclinantsednonobligant#astrainclinant #astrainclinantthebook

03 September 2019

# On Spiritual Fires That Mould Us

**Lineage. Generations. Birth. Life. Love:**

My Baby Is 7 & I Am Feeling So Emo It's Truly Insane But I Think It's Because Only I Know The Hell I Was Going Through Even When All Seems So Good With Her Father's Hand On My Belly Through The Months Leading Up To Her Birth & The Many Lone Years Following, But All Through It There Has Been Her. The One. I Did It All For That Sweet Face. To Ensure Her Survival And Mine. Were It Not For Her, I Don't Know Where I'd Be. She Saved Me And All I Do IS For Her.Ok. Soz. September Can Be A HauntFest.

#honourthepast #manifestthefuture #liveinthepresent #milestones  
#personalstruggles #personallife #celebrations

## On Honouring Our Origins



“Sascha Akhtar’s *Grimoire of Grimalkin*, a contemporary masterpiece, is appropriately titled, for it is indeed a textbook of magic and there is certainly something feline but devilish about the voice we hear. This modern-day Liber de occulta philosophia reads like a wassail of honey meade distilled through concepts, as is when we read that “Egalité sounds like a burp” (p. 9). The magic this grimoire offers to der Zauberlehrling is that of words themselves, spells for spelling the world anew, for divining the words that lie beneath the surface, for summoning communication where it is not: “She loves him / this dead man / girlfriend tells / stories in French / subtitled in Vietnamese” (p.13). This work by a master smith is written in language – not in a language, but in language. The scurrying of energies that carry the reader along communicate to the reader in their very inter-communication with each other. The spell lasts from beginning to end. Read it.” —**Phillip John Usher, Chair - French Literature, Thought & Culture NYU.**

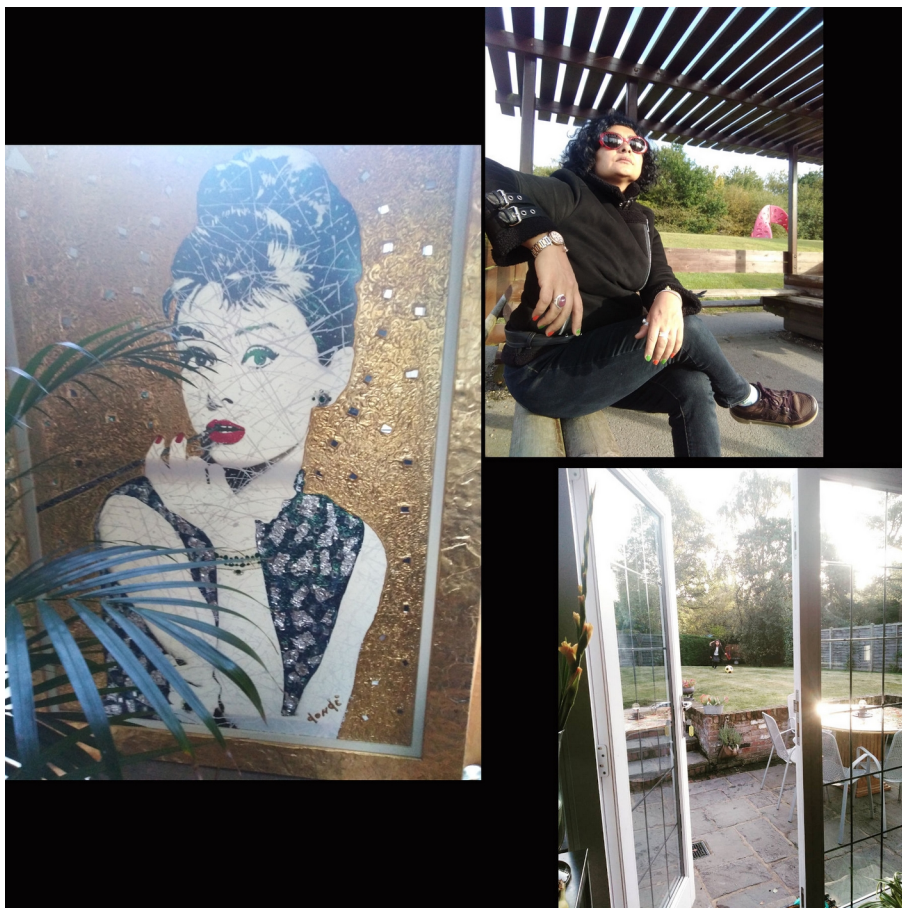
Spells & PoemTings & Good Stuff Said About My #Magic In The Time Before We Jumped Timelines & Became Enchanted Beings:/The Only Thing I Love More Than

The Front Cover Is The Back Cover of The Grimoire Of Grimalkin/Let's Start At The Very Beginning As Rebirth Begins

#poetrymagic #poetry #poetrylanguage #magicalpoetry #magicalwords  
#poetsofinstagram #femalepoetsofinstagram #witchesofinstagram #witchyvibes  
#channeling #channeledmessages #intuitive #intuitivepoetry #grimoire #grimoires  
#poetrygrimoires #towerofbabel #primallanguage #incantations #incantatory  
#ukpoets #londonpoets #booksofinstagram #books #mustread #mustreadbooks  
#poetrybooks #poetrybookshelf

27 September 2019

## On Inner Workings



This Shiny A. M. (#reflections on):

Sent Blessings To, The Lady Set In Gold. Wished For A #Garden With A Door (just like this one) For My Daughter. Remembered. How Hard I Worked To Keep Her Alive & Well. To Keep Me, Alive & Well. When It Was Devoid Of Others. No-one There.

I Was There & So Was She. I Sit This #autumn Morning, Waiting In The School Yard.

I Have To Wait For An Hour To See Her Tell Us About 'All Their Learning,' So Far.

There Was A Time, When I Was So Dead Inside, O Not Well Friend, NOT Well  
Where Having Slept Only 5 hrs & Having To Get Her To School & Then Wait An  
Hour For A 'Parent Event,' Would Have Been Impossible For Me.

(If I Didn't Sleep Enough I Couldn't Function. It Was As If My Psychology Said: NO.  
You Can Take Everything Else Away From Me, But I Draw The Line At Sleep. No,  
Really. I Would Cry. The Death Inside Me Would Make It So. I Was Unable to Talk.  
Walk).

But Look At Me Now (Know). #Wow. #Healing Is A #Beautiful Shape. At Any  
Distance. Make It So. Make It So.

#redsunglasses #blessedbe #audreyhepburn #honourthepast #liveinthenow  
#manifestthefuture



09 October 2019

## On Transforming



Strange Things Have Been Happening. A Face Re-Appearing. About 11 Years It Has Been (I've Calculated) . The Span Of Time Over Which I Lost One Life Partner, Than The Second.

Also, When My 1st Book Came Out & Saved Me.

The Face Tho' Is Mine.

Hello Bones In The Cheeks.



It Scares Me Seeing Her. When She Was Here, So Many Bad Things Happened.

The Extra Weight On Me, Over These Last Few Years Of Motherhood, Has Supported Me, Cosseted Me. Kept The Bad People Away. I Know It's Silly. I Know I Am So Dramatic. Keep Me Safe, Please.

I Bleed. You Bleed. We All Bleed, For Lyfe Means To Do So.

17 Oct 2019

## On Becoming Out & Truth



I Get It.

Usually It's 1 Book & STFU But I'll Tell U What.

This Isn't Usual.

No.

Nothing That Has Ever Happened 2 Me Has Been 'Usual'.

2day, I Feel A Strong #Truth Vibe: I Do NOT Come From Privilege. I Do NOT Come From A Kind Of Family Support System.

I Left Home @18 In 1995 W/Undiagnosed Aspergers \$1000 (Which I Earned Myself As A Fashion Model)2 Go Off 2 A Place I Knew NOTHING About.

W/ Not 1 KNOWN Soul There Because I Had To GET OUT, Away From A Legacy Of Abuse & Violence.

The Decade That Followed Was Poverty, Mo' Abuse Including: My Own Of Myself. Drugs #Heroin.

There I've Said It.

There Is No Shame.

My 1st Book Was Written Completely On Heroin. OK. I Lived In A Bullet-Hole Riddled Ancient Trailer For 3 Mths In The Mojave Desert.

I Was Arrested Once In. Fucking. Virginia. I Was A Brown Girl In The Wrong Place. I Could Have Been Left Rotting In Hanover County Jail In The Orange Jumpsuit They Made Me Wear Were It Not For LUCK.

I Wanted 2 Leave America. I Hated IT.

I Didn't Know Where To Go.

The Woman Who Raised Me like A Mum Was Born In BlackPool.

Loved London. Loved South Yorkshire.

I Wanted 2 Come Here Where The Story Began.

I Had NO Money.Given 2 Me Or Otherwise.

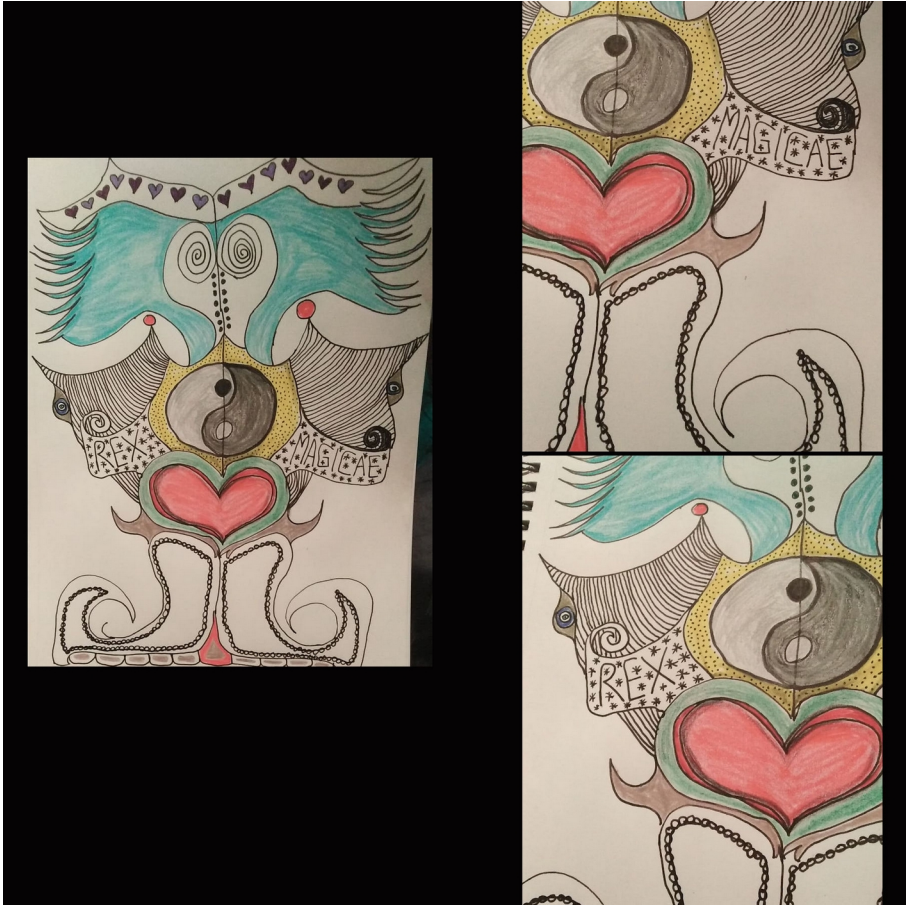
I Have Just Scraped By Always By The Fucking Skin Of My Teeth. Near Misses. Near Deaths. How I Got To The U.K.: I Applied 3 Times For An Ancestry Visa(That No Longer Exists).I Got Refused The 1st 2 Times, But I Did Not Give Up. I Had Nowhere Else 2 Go. My BloodMother Had Clearly Said, I Hope U Don't Think U Can Come Home After U Graduate. It's Ok. She Had A New Life. I Forgive. It Killed Me @The Time. These Books R MY LYFE. They R The Only Continuity. Oh I Feel A Sob Rising In My Chest, Burbling In My Throat But I Don't Need 2 Cry. This Is A Happy Occasion. This Book. My 1st Book Got Me Thru. After 1st Husband Ditched

Me When His Visa(That He Was Getting Through Me)2 Live In The U. K. Was Refused: **The Grimoire Of Grimalkin** Was Being Published. If I Had Not Had That Pull I Don't Know What Would Have Happened. I May Have Stayed In Pakistan & Never Returned So Decimated Was I By His Betrayal. Every Book Is The Same. My Lyfe. This Perhaps Even More 'Cos I Come Out In It, A Lot: Aspice: Paky.Digital Denizen. This Is The Dedication For Reasons Of Dissolution Which Have Taken Place – You Know What That Means Magical People:

**To You, for there is no 'I' except in You & The Same Love Runs Through Our Veins. Like Blood.**

#newpoetry

09 December 2019

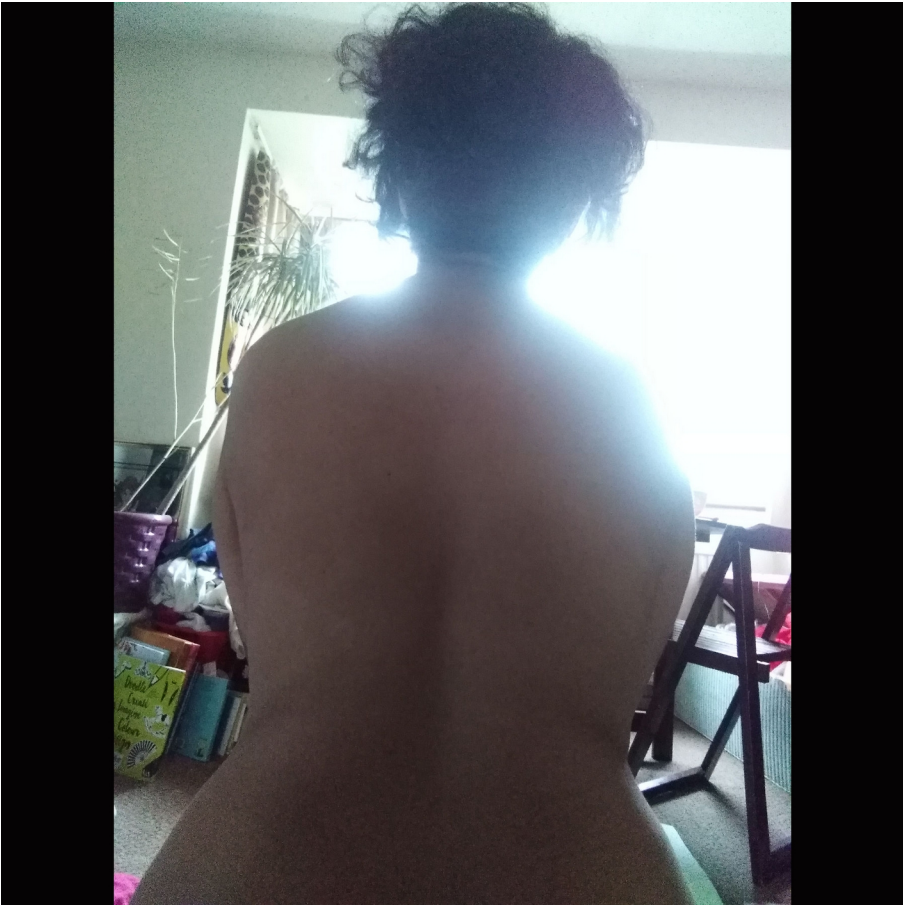


Seal. Throne. Power. Meditation. Bird. Sigil. Protection/ Rex Magicae. Claiming Gendered Terms.

#drawing #mywierddrawings #magicalworkings

8 January 2020

## On Owning Suffering & Be-Coming



Seven Years/#Transitioning/#thisisnotadrill: See My Hair. It's Matted With Sweat. All Night. Ravaged By Heat & Apocalypse Within Myself. You Want To Know Why I Am Become Fuc/King BitchCommanderCobra Because The WomanBody I Currently Inhabit Is A BattleGround & Today's Testosterone OverWhelms Yesterdays. And It NEVER Ends. Never. But I've Heard It Will. And Then There Will Be No More Blood Babies (Gave Birth To My 1st One At Age 9). There Will Be More Neutrality. Surges They Say Will Stop & I Will Weep, Then In Relief. To Become Closer To Equanimity. To Not Be Governed By Secretions I Cannot Fully Get A Handle On. This Is Why. This Is Why. It Is So Severe. I Am Dismantling. Don't Cry. If You Want To Wish. Wish This. S/he Becomes. Sooner. That The Body Makes It Through This.

With Strength On The Other Side. My Beard Will Grow Back (I Had One Once. That Other Life). Leading To An Elder Status, With Which To Lead My Kin (The Baby That Made It Through The Portal). My Flesh & Blood Blossom, Her. Whom. She. And If You Wish. Wish None Of This Severity For Her. No Extremes. It's Too Much To Bear. I Love You.

#autismandpmdd #transitions #pmdd #severemenopause #earlymenopause #perimenopause #bodyisabattleground #hormones

10 January 2020

## On Emergence From Becoming



**Thy Wilt Be Done:** First The Blue Emerged, Calling Me Back To It. Then The Sodalite Frog With Holes Bored In It, To Heal & Protect The Voice, The Throat From 'Frogs,' That Keep Us From Expressing, From Emoting, Saying, Singing. Then I Longed For Turquoise & From Out Of The Blue, Blue, Blue The Pieces Of Turquoise Emerged Also With Holes Already Bored In Them. I Told My Mother I Was Pleased. I Manifested The Turquoise Required To Create The Medicine Of The Moment. The Necklace Was Beading Itself, Before The Ritual Act Even Began. When It Was The Appointed Time, The Magical Object Emerged. Just In Time For The Eclipse.



The Pearls Were On A String. Kept. Hidden. Safe For 12 Years. The Turkish Eyes Rolled Into The Magical Space. I Am So Pleased. I Have Anointed Myself Now.

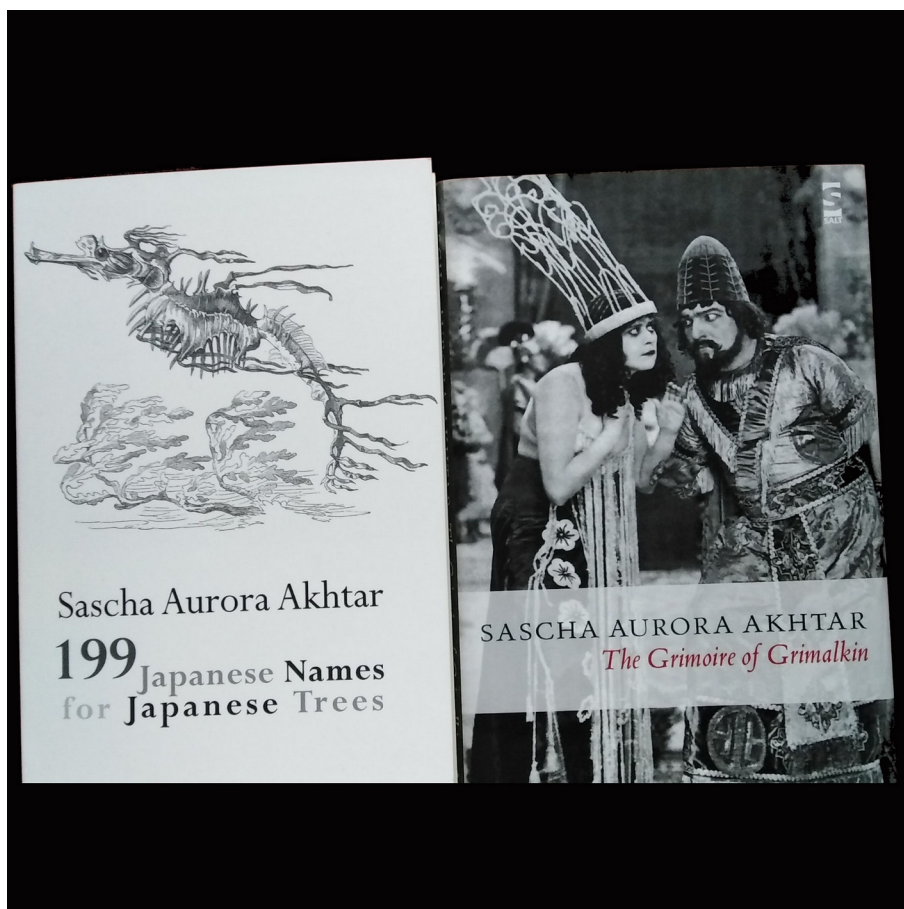


I Am Honouring Myself. Throughout The Arbitrary Time Fragment Known As 2019, I Followed You. I Followed Your Direction. Your Missives. I Sought It. The Blue Direction. I Allowed The Ancestors To Guide Me. I Went Many WalkAbout. I Observed, I Listened. The Call. The Call Of The Wilder Edges. Ta Panta Rhei Runs In Our Blood. Our Skin Is Falling, Ad Nauseum. (And We Needs Must Transmute, Transform With The Winds & The Water & The Fire & The Earth & The Ether). And There Was A Greater Breaking Down.(We Step Out Of Ourselves Into Other Selves). The Russian Doll Factor. Honour All The You's Though. As You Are ReBuilt. In Your Own Image. And Appoint Yourself. And Anoint Yourself. Every Event That Occurs Is Your Initiation. Rumi In Persian, His Tongue-Tongue Was Not Kittens & Rainbows As Mr. Barks Would Have Us Believe. Rumi Said The 'Soul Is A Bloody Hide To Be Beaten Into Leather'. Eek. But We Feel That Suffering. We Do. There's No Use Denying It. I Can't. And Buddha Than Said We Should Re-Perceive The 'Suffering,'

Ha! So It Isn't Even Suffering Anymore But The Road To Greater Joys. Deeper Joys. Internalized. Joys. And Magic Gives Us The Way. And The Birds Give Us The Way. I Have Pledged Allegiance To Them. To The Bird Goddess Who Emerged In A Story That Emerged From Me And Left Me Breathless, Quaking & Excited. Ouroboros, Ouroboros, Ouroboros. Yes, Eat Your Own Tail To Become. And Triumph".

14 January 2020

## On Being Brave & Saying Goodbye To The Patriarchy



**Fuck The Patriarchy: Forevermore: The Grimoire of Grimalkin** (2007, 2008 Salt UK)&  
**199 Japanese Names For Japanese Trees**(2016, Shearsman):

I need to say a few things about these books. They have become even more important to me than less. They both contain accounts of a kind of savage, wounded beast - not always woman nor man.

They both contain accounts of suffering, torture & pain. They are both hallucinatory. The 1st (GofG) was written immersed in heroin over 1 1/2 mths. Secrets no longer matter. It was not a good time for me, but this was how I channelled it. So, healing.

The second is what I consider my Epic. (I keep trying to find epics written by women bodies, 'of colour'. Are there any others?)

It is an alchemical text - it follows all stages: destruction, rebirth.

It is replete w/ symbology. The narrator is a spiritual Androgyne & this is what I have always considered myself. This is my 'preferred term'.

These books contain my deepest roots, my foundations.

They healed me & keep healing me. They contain secrets & mysteries that I am still unpacking-downloaded as they were in so many ways to me.

There is speaking in tongues, there is travel back to wyrd fairy land, there is odd dialect. Violence. I feel like for so long, I was not 'understood,' but perhaps it was because I did not understand myself. It has taken some time, but come 2019, I finally felt 'understood,' supported & even loved. Seen. People actually able to 'see,' me finally.

Like I was waiting for them to be born, even. To travel here, in this moment in time. I felt hidden before (& I chose to hide too) but now I feel 'revealed'.

The hiding HAD A LOT TO DO with allowing myself to be oppressed. By Patriarchy (& By Whitey).

Every partner I have had told me 'don't say these things'.

'You can't say that'.

'Dont' say that. What will people say?'

'My mother doesn't like you'.

'Why don't you do my laundry?'

'No. I'm the one who needs a desk'.

'Why were you dressed like that at your gig?'

'I wish I'd written that book'.

And then. For All The Reasons Above & More:

'Fuck You. I' m Leaving You. You're Shit.'

My poetry was a way to express my 'true' magical self because of all this in some kind of 'coded,' language & now, well, you lot know.

You see me. Thank you.

O & Fuck The Patriarchy. Forevermore.

21 January 2020

# On Being Of This World Yet Not Of It

The 'To Be OF THIS World,' Part Of The Mystic's Path Involves A Bargain Made With Living. Agreeing To LIVE. Recognizing The Reasons TO LIVE AND LIVE IN JOY. (Many Of My Comrades Have Fallen. They CHOSE To Not LiVe As I Once Thought I Chose)

BUT NOW I AM SO GLAD I CHOSE TO HOLD OFF ON DEATH.

Didn't let Heroin or Cocaine or Acid or Weed or anything TOTALLY FUCK ME UP.

(For Now. We HAVE To Keep Striving. It's NOT A One-Stop Shop. It IS Devotion).

SO Today's The Day. Facing ALL Demons Of My Own Creation Head On. I Wonder If This Insta Has Become Instrumental (Possibly) To My Healing/Consciousness Journey.

1) (I was putting off getting a lung x-ray. Something is wierd in there and I know I have to stop the smoking too.) AT THE WALK-IN NOW.

2) (Mind made me so fearful of going to Edgware, to this Cafe Nero even (see photo) because all of this area holds the seat of past trauma —THAT I DON'T GO TO THE DR (& I am not a doctor person because I DO heal myself as you know) when it IS the time to do so BECAUSE MY DOCTOR IS IN EDGWARE.)

3) I AM IN EDGWARE NOW. ALSO I WENT INTO THE NERO & Was Pleasantly

Surprised At Their Vegan Sandwich & EVEN BLOODY ATE IT.



The Up-Shot Is Past Trauma, Autistic Spectrum Tendencies (which include anxiety, depression, pathological demand-avoidance) & NON-Autism related anxiety, addiction



ALL SORTS CAN CREATE WIERD WALLS To Shoot Up. From A Buddhist/Mind Science Perspective We CAN Begin To Understand It IS ALL MIND CREATION.

The Walls/Demons Are Not Real. They Are Your Creation. And YOU ARE NOT YOUR MIND was the Greatest lesson I ever was lucky enough to truly KNOW. (It took a decade to fully sink in, become experiential & become gnosis).

If We Choose ONE Thing To Truly Devote Ourselves To. Rest Assured It IS THIS.

We Are Not Our Minds & To Know That Is A Fucking Relief But It Takes Constant (& I mean constant — (look at me —NOT going to the bloody doctors when I have to —& I am a devotee to the work!) PRACTICE To Have It Become Part Of Lyfe.

I Can't Thank The Dude Who Gave Me My 1st Proper #Meditation Lesson In The Tibetan Buddhist RIGPA Some 15 Years Ago Enough For Dropping That Little



#Wisdom Bomb On Me... Bisous & No Commotion.

10 March 2020

## On Spiritual Androgyny



Joshy & Me In The 90's: There was one night when there was myself, 5 Beautiful Queens(they were happy with that honorific & I will always think of them as that) & two other cis-women on the streets of NYC on our way for some reason to Billy's Topless. If you know NYC, you know Billy's Topless is the most hetero, gross strip club in the 20's (streets)! We tried to go in. No, we didn't try we WANTED to go in — I really can't recall why.

They took one look at us & told us to fuck off. Oh except for this one 'cute,' friend of ours —she had massive breasts. I remember Miss Loritza yelling at the bouncer. We got egged in the street that night, for being a bunch of fucking miscreants I guess. For



being US. Fun times. My beautiful coat was full of egg. It could have been a racist egging, a homophobic egging - we will never know! Miss Kitty Kat was LIVID. When people call me a Queen, I defer. The true embodiment of Queen in my mind, has always been with them. So powerful & glorious & loving & kind. I am no Queen, nor



will I ever be

But I do accept what I call #spiritualandrogyny

because we all ARE ida pingala, ying & yang, sun & moon, shiva & shakti & we DO assume different energies at different times & we manifest them & I manifest what the fuck I want, when I want! Body is a sleeve. YOU are energy. Body is a temple - Adorn



it as the energy moves you.

Thankfully I have much better fitting suits now...



# Contributors

**Shari Aber** is a writer, a reader, a teacher, a learner, an activist, an observer, a mother, a daughter, a nurturer, a lover, a fighter for social justice. She believes that parenting, art, writing, and teaching all are important, that they all can make this world a better place.

**Sascha Akhtar** is an ACE-supported artist. Engaged in contemplative practice for over 15 years, she holds space for transformation & development via a syncretic & intersectional synthesis of modalities in her teaching & mentoring at universities & centres for writing. Sascha has authored six poetry collections. *Of Necessity And Wanting* — a collection of fictions will be available 14 October 2020 with 87 Press. She is a Poetry School tutor and judge for the Streetcake Experimental Prize.

**Khadija Anderson**, Muslim, mother, and Anarchist (not necessarily in that order) has been published extensively in print and online. She has two published books of poetry, *History of Butoh* and *Cul-de-sac: an American childhood*. Khadija curates a monthly Social Justice themed poetry series and is the 2020-2022 Altadena Poet Laureate.

**Backyard Banshee** is your divination-based friend with a flair for honesty over tea & tarot. Ran by real human secular witches. You can find us at [www.backyardbanshee.com](http://www.backyardbanshee.com) or on instagram [@backyardbanshee](https://www.instagram.com/backyardbanshee)

**Jo Barghest** is an artist and writer with a special interest in mythology, symbolism, philosophy and the occult. When she isn't making peculiar things she loves exploring, protesting, changing, making strange concoctions of food (that mostly haven't killed anyone) and swearing probably more than she ought to. Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/jobarghest/>

**Dr Charley Barnes** is an author, poet and academic from Worcestershire, UK. She has published several poetry pamphlets, most recently *Hierarchy of Needs: A Retelling* (V. Press), that she co-authored with Claire Walker. Charley also writes crime fiction under the name C.S. Barnes, and her work is published with Bloodhound Books.

**Anne Elise Brinich** is an enormous talking spider. She writes and designs in Hong Kong.

**Debz Butler** is a writer and poet based in Cheshire. She has performed her work all over the north of England and has been published in literary journals and anthologies both online and in print. She is also the founder and host of 'Testify Poetry' open mic night.

**Nellie Cole** is a Midlands-based poet. Her debut poetry pamphlet *Bella* (Offa's Press, 2018) explores the true murder mystery 'Bella and the Wych Elm', and was nominated for 'Best Poetry Pamphlet' at the 2019 Saboteur Awards. Her writing style blends literary allusion, local history, folklore, and superstition. <https://nelliecole.com/>

**Ashleigh Condon** lives in Southend-on-Sea, UK. She has a first-class degree in Creative and Media Writing and she is the Journal Editor for a wonderful national charity. Ashleigh regularly blogs about life, books, and crafts at [www.AshleighCondon.com](http://www.AshleighCondon.com), and you can find her on Instagram @AshleighCondonX and Twitter @AshleighCondonX.

**Linda M. Crate's** works have been published in numerous magazines and anthologies. She is the author of six poetry chapbooks, the latest of which is: *More Than Bone Music* (Clare Songbirds Publishing House, March 2019). She has also authored two micro-collections, and two full length poetry collections.

**Cáit Ní Dhonnchú's** writing focuses on the body's experiences within both its interior and exterior landscapes. Her work engages the body as a reflective space through which one can explore our unique experience with our surroundings, and in particular through the lens of culture, invisible illness, grief, nature and memory. She tweets @CaitNiDhonnchu

**Sam Egelstaff** lives in North Wales. She has performed at the R.S Thomas Literary Festival and is published in *Counterpoints: In response to poems by R.S Thomas* (2015). Her MA Creative Writing led to her collections 'On the Couch' (2015) and 'Carneddau Colours' (2017). She tweets as @SamEgelstaff and her blog is [samegelstaff.wordpress.com](http://samegelstaff.wordpress.com).

**Kim Fahner** lives and writes in Sudbury, Ontario, Canada. She was the fourth poet laureate in Sudbury, and the first woman appointed to the role (2016-18). Her latest book of poems, *These Wings*, was published in Spring 2019 by Pedlar Press. She may be reached via her website at [www.kimfahner.com](http://www.kimfahner.com)

**Marie Fields'** poetry has been published in Mookychick, Door Is A Jar Magazine, Royal Rose Magazine, HunnyBee Lit, The Magnolia Review, The Cabinet of Heed, Turnpike Magazine, and Tiny Flames Press. Her poetry collection, "Marie! (mah-RIE!)," is currently available on Amazon. Further support her work by joining her Patreon.

**Alicia Fitton** is a performance poet based in Manchester. She writes about lust, guilt, lies and justified feminist rage. You can read her work at [www.StormCloudKitty.com](http://www.StormCloudKitty.com) or follow her on twitter @aliciamakes. Her debut pamphlet, *So Tightly Wound*, is available now via Amazon.

**E L Flint** is a queer writer and emerging poet, whose work is predominantly sex positive, feminist, and LGBTQ focused. When she's not writing, you can find Emma enjoying a spot of baking, normally with a cup of tea close to hand. You can find her on Twitter @literateelf.

**Jo Flynn** | Twitter: @flynx13 | Insta: @flynx | [www.flynx.co.uk](http://www.flynx.co.uk) After winning the Roy Fisher Prize for poetry endorsed by the Poet Laureate, Jo's debut pamphlet *Swallowing Sand* was published and she's since appeared at the National Poetry Library in London as well as performing internationally. Jo just hopes to make sense of the world with words. And dogs.

**Victoria Gatehouse** has a day job in cancer research and an MA in Poetry from Manchester Metropolitan University. Her poems have been published in numerous magazines and she has won the Ilkley, Otley, PENfro and Poetry News competitions. Victoria's pamphlet *The Mechanics of Love* was a Laureate's Choice for 2019.

**JGeorge** is a poet from Tamil Nadu, currently pursuing research at Pondicherry University, India. Her poems has appeared or is forthcoming in "The Initial Journal", "FishFood Mag", "T.R.O.U Lit Mag" and several other online and print journals. She firmly believes that poetry gives her a lease of hope.

**Anuja Ghimire** (Twitter @NepaliPoet) was Nepal-born and lives near Dallas with her husband and two daughters. Her chapbook *Kathmandu* is forthcoming from the Unsolicited Press. She's a Best of the Net and Pushcart nominee, a senior publisher in an online learning company, and a poetry reader for *Up the Staircase Quarterly*.

**SK Grout** is a poet and editor. She grew up in Aotearoa/New Zealand, lived in Germany, now splits her time as best she can between London and Auckland. She is the author of the micro chapbook “to be female is to be interrogated” (2018, the poetry annals). Read more: <https://skgroutpoetry.wixsite.com/poetry>

**Sam Hall** writes fiction and plays. Her play, ‘My Mind Is Free’ was shortlisted for the Human Trafficking Foundation’s Anti-Slavery Day media awards 2016. Published in Alphabet Soup, Litro, Emerging Worlds, The Blue Nib and in Dark London, vol 1. MA in Creative Writing from City University, London. Twitter @Wrdsmithery

**Caroline Hardaker**’s poetry has been published worldwide in a range of journals and anthologies. Her first poetry collection, ‘Bone Ovation’, was published by Valley Press in October 2017, and her second ‘Little Quakes Every Day’ will be published in November 2020. You can follow her at [www.carolinehardakerwrites.com](http://www.carolinehardakerwrites.com).

**Stella Hervey Birrell**’s poetry has been shortlisted in the Grindstone International Poetry Prize and won the Glasgow Women’s Library Bold Types Competition. Her first novel was published by Crooked Cat Books. She lives in Midlothian, with her cat, partner, and children. In that order.

**Nori Rose Hubert** is a short story author, poet, essayist, and author of the forthcoming novel *The Dreaming Hour*. A lifelong Texan, she the co-founder of Crown & Pen, an e-zine dedicated to showcasing writing and art from the COVID-19 pandemic. Connect with her on Twitter & Instagram @norirosewrites.

**Ellen Huang** is an original skit director and ace fantasy/horror writer, with a BA in Writing and minor in Theatre from Point Loma Nazarene University. She is published/ forthcoming in *Sword & Kettle Press*, *HerStry*, *Aze Journal*, *Amethyst Review*, *Diverging Magazine*, and more. Follow the magic: [worrydollsandfloatinglights.wordpress.com](http://worrydollsandfloatinglights.wordpress.com).

**Jaisha Jansena** is a writer and multimedia artist from Cincinnati, Ohio. She was born under a dark moon and abandoned at birth. She is a 2013 Academy of American Poets College Prizewinner. Find her work at [jaishajansena.com](http://jaishajansena.com).

**Natasha Kindred** is a writer, apprentice beekeeper and bookseller living in London. She can usually be found talking about - or to - headless saints, holy ghosts, gilded bones

and hangman's trees. Specialities include rare 17th Century alchemical texts, vintage map collecting, goose whispering, and endless consumption of strong Earl Grey tea.

**Catherine Kleindienst** has an ever-expanding library, a dog who might be a demon in disguise, and an unhealthy obsession with black clothing. You can follow her on Twitter or Instagram @CDKleind.

**Magda Knight** is the Co-Founding Editor-in-Chief of Mookychick. Saturn's daughter, urban scavenger, cthonian wanderer, 23rd century witch... her works have been published by the likes of For Books' Sake and 2000AD. Two of her unpublished YA novels were longlisted for the Mslexia Children's Book Awards in 2012. She is powered by coffee and shadows.

**Laurie Koensgen** lives in Ottawa, Canada where she advocates for the Arts. Her poems have appeared in The New Quarterly, Arc Poetry Magazine, Literary Review of Canada, In/Words, Barren Magazine, Juniper: A Poetry Journal, Kissing Dynamite, Re-Side, Burning House Press, Black Bough Poetry, and elsewhere.

**Juliette Kumar** is a 22-year-old Birmingham-based writer. After forcing her family to listen to her drabbles from age four, she aims to establish a voice within her local spoken word community. She is currently working on a poetry anthology that aims to interconnect experimental form with feminism and queer studies.

**Claire Marsden** enjoys writing both poetry, CNF, and fiction and is thrilled many of her pieces have found wonderful homes. Although she has chronic pain she has learned to dance with the dark, and when she isn't wild swimming or tramping through the woods can usually be found squirreled away writing. Twitter: @occulife

**Zoe Mitchell** is a widely-published poet whose debut collection, Hag, was published by Indigo Dreams Publishing in 2019. She graduated from the University of Chichester with an MA in Creative Writing and is currently studying for a PhD in Creative Writing, examining witches in women's poetry.

**Cat Rogi** is a non-binary artist based in the NYC district. Having studied media sociology, graphic design, photography, music, and cosmetology, Cat's love for the arts knows no bounds. In their free time, Cat volunteers running an Instagram account for a local cat rescue.

**Christina Rosso** is a writer and bookstore owner living in South Philadelphia with her bearded husband and rescue pup. She is the author of SHE IS A BEAST (APEP Publications, 2020), a chapbook of feminist fairy tales. Her first full-length collection CREOLE CONJURE is forthcoming from Maudlin House. Her writing has been nominated for Best of the Net and the Pushcart Prize. For more information, visit <http://christina-rosso.com> or find her on Twitter @Rosso\_Christina.

**Jess O'Shea** is a 26-year-old anxiety ridden, feminist, bisexual writer. Not particularly in that order. She loves to write about things that are all celebrated but are all indeed very painful. Such as being in therapy, being hungry, being in love and being a woman. Instagram: @\_poetrybyjess

**Monique Quintana** is the author of novella Cenote City (Clash Books, 2019). She has been awarded artist residencies to Yaddo, The Mineral School, and Sundress Academy of the Arts. She has also received entry to the Community of Writers, and the Open Mouth Poetry Retreat. Find her at [moniquequintana.com](http://moniquequintana.com).

**Carla S. Schick** is a Queer Social Justice activist. Their works have appeared in Visible Ink, Sinister Wisdom, Earth's Daughters, Milvia St., Forum & received first place in the Barbara Mandigo Kelly Peace Poetry prize. They are currently working on their Certificate in Poetry at Berkeley City College in California.

**Lynne Schmidt** is the author of Gravity, and On Becoming a Role Model. Awards include Maine Nonfiction, Editor's Choice, a 2018 and 2019 PNWA finalist for memoir and poetry, and honorable mention for the Charles Bukowski and Doug Dramine Prizes. When given the option, she prefers the company of her three dogs and one cat to humans.

**Penny Sharman** is a Poet, Photographer, Artist and Therapist. She is inspired by natural landscapes and has a surreal approach to her work. She is a published poet and her books are available from her website [pennysharman.co.uk](http://pennysharman.co.uk) Penny's artwork has been published in The High Window and other magazines.

**D. Slayton Avery** is the author of two books of poetry and one of flash fiction, with a growing number of published pieces in print-, e-magazines, and anthologies. D.'s writings can be sampled at ShiftnShake. When not writing, D. is in the woods or on the water catching stories.



**Imogen. L. Smiley** (she/her) is a twenty-two-year-old writer from Essex, UK. She recently graduated from The University of Derby, where she studied Creative and Professional Writing. She has since specialised in poetry and gothic short story writing.

**Megha Sood** is an Assistant Poetry Editor at Mookychick. Over 450+ works featured in literary journals and numerous works in print anthologies by the US, UK, Australian, and Canadian Press. State-level Winner NJ Poetry Contest 2018/2019/2020. National Level winner Spring Robinson Lit Prize 2020. Tweets at @meghasood16.

**Ghia Vitale** is a writer/witch/feminist harpy from Long Island. She's the senior editor at Quail Bell Magazine. She embraces darkness as a defining feature of her spirituality. For more updates and information, follow her on Twitter (@GhiaWasHere), Instagram (@angel0fthe0dd), and Facebook (@ghiavitale).

**Lisa Lerma Weber** lives in San Diego, CA. Her words and photography have appeared in numerous online publications, including Barren Magazine, Perhappened Mag, Pink Plastic House, Rejection Letters, and Versification. She can be found online at [www.lisalweber.com](http://www.lisalweber.com) and on Twitter @LisaLermaWeber

**Kate J Wilson's** work has appeared in 14 Magazine, The Pandemic Poetry Anthology (from Gloucester Poets), The Pendle Anthology of War Poetry and Alliterati. Her debut pamphlet, One Night in January is due from Wild Pressed Books in 2021. Find her on Twitter: @katejwilson213 or Instagram: @justonemorecliche

**Scarlett Ward Bennett's** debut collection "Ache" was published by Verve Press (2019) and has been nominated for a Forwards Poetry Prize. In the same year, she came runner up in Mother's Milk Poetry Prize and Wolverhampton Literature Festival competition, and was nominated by Saboteur Awards for Best Spoken word Poet.

