

National Poetry Month Featured Poet: Leza Cantoral

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1) Why poetry?

I began writing poetry when I was 13 because I was really depressed and it made it hurt less. My family had just moved from Mexico and I felt very alienated. Also, my teenage hormones were kicking in hardcore. I felt like a freak. It made the drowning and numbing feelings subside momentarily. Poetry has always been the place that I am truly free. It is where I seek to understand abstractions. When I cannot express myself, when my voice feels pointless, that is when I seek poetry. Poetry gives me words when I have none.

2) Do you feel like poetry is more or less important & relevant today?

Poetry is so important, always. I think poetry is a hard sell, these days. People have videogames, genre novels, TV shows, movies, social media, politics, drugs, shopping. There are so many ways to get a quick fix, to get off quick. The soul hungers for poetry, I think. I think a lot of people do not realize how much they need poetry in their lives. So, the issue is not so much about if it is important, but how do you package poetry so that people will buy it. I edited a collection of poetry for CLASH Books called *Horror Film Poems*. That did really well at AWP and I think it is because it had a theme. So, if you like horror movies you will get it, even if you are not super into poetry. It is a way to enter into a conversation based on a common interest. Poetry expresses the things that seem impossible to express through any other medium. To me, that is its true power, and why it will always be

necessary in society. It brings people together.

3) Tell us about one poet who has greatly influenced you as a writer and a thinker.

Sylvia Plath

4) Tell us about one lesser-known contemporary poet who you'd like more people to know about.

Stephanie M. Wytovich: [Amazon](#) / [Blogspot](#)

5) Share with us one of your recent poems and tell us a little bit about its context.

This poem was in the anthology that Joanna C. Valente edited for Civil Coping Mechanisms. *A Shadow Map* was an amazing opportunity for me to deal with something I was trying to forget. This poem is about an experience I had while in an abusive BDSM relationship. It was not abusive because it was BDSM but because my partner did not respect my boundaries or personhood. It is hard to describe the feeling of not being a participant in your own sexual experience. Somebody had sex with my body while I was not there. It is kind of my worst nightmare. My first story, *Star Power*, which I wrote years ago, was about a similar experience. In that case, the story was told from the point of view of a sentient but mute android who has been tricked into a porn career. That was fiction, this is not.

Zombie

The pills and the liquor don't mix.

I am tied up in your bed. This sex game has become a nightmare. I don't know what is going on. You fuck me in the ass while I babble incoherently.

I wake up the next morning like a zombie—hollowed out.

My body is not my own anymore because my body was yours last night and last night is like a videocassette that got taped over with white noise.

I've been lobotomized from my own orgasm.

– [*A Shadow Map: An Anthology by Survivors of Sexual Assault*](#)

[Leza Cantoral](#) is an author and editor from Mexico. She writes for Luna Luna Magazine and her first collection of short stories, [Cartoons in the Suicide Forest](#), was published by Bizarro Pulp Press. She is the editor of *Tragedy Queens: Stories Inspired by Lana Del Rey and Sylvia Plath*, coming out in December 2017 through CLASH Books. Her poems appear in *A Shadow Map: An Anthology by Survivors of Sexual Assault* published by Civil Coping Mechanisms. (Twitter @lezacantoral)

