



The Crank

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Set in Goudy Old Style.

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SEAN CHARD

Belief

It's two a.m. and
outside the night cafe
nothing is stirring
inside I'm thawing
white diamonds into
a small black coffee

Nicoli smokes a
deep lug of free will
turns a page of words
into a belief
which later he'll trust
and live to regret

He speaks of music
of composition
and the sound of new
life, and of the scream
of Coronis at
the pitch of arrows

Existence, love and
irony breathe like
the smoke from his lips
back towards the book
back to Kierkegaard
back to what it means.

ERIN WILSON

Ochres

'Music, born of the right hemisphere,
does not mean anything,
but is rather, meaning itself.'
— Karen Armstrong

There was a nakedness
that autumn,
to me and to the room,

the room aglow
as though it were the inside
of an oven,

my feet seasoned wood
(not dangerous, but because dry,
light).

It was the autumn
I discovered
the lost music,

the cello suites
hidden in a
thrift store shop.

I heard the door's bell.
Then, the beauty
of nearby shuffling.

I keep walking
that same six feet

in the belly of that stove.

The bow lifts;
the rosin is warm;
the bow lifts

SHANLEY MCCONNELL

Inferno

Winter came, and the maple moved like a stag,
antlered and majestic, Father in the quiet dawn,
the conifer walking beside the faun.

Overhead,
the ancient oak spread its wings like a fledging
wavering on the brim of a lift and breeze,
coaxed from the nest with a motherly nudge

The soft dialect of bark is heard underfoot
rustling in the trees' renewed openness, to the sky,
the great creature lifts himself to bow before the deer

the Keeper of the wood.

Darkness, the breathing cartography
where Dante, led by the stag, discovers Golgotha
half by choice, half by chance

Fate is a fork in the fire and ice
licked clean by grief, and a serpent
whose wickedness works to make something vile of man.

Heaven is quietly resolute
and mysterious in its quietude.
A man gives to earth with pierced hands.

Dante listens to God weep in the wood
The nature of his sorrow like the dream of a man

FaceTime in E-den

You are there, in the small room,
looking the way I imagine the Messiah,
not in a sacrilegious way, only I mean to say,
you radiate an unbodied peace.

But, looking through the phone,
I see uncertainty adrift in the apple
of your eye, as though I, like Eve,
do not believe you are who you say.

You are serious when you leave the tree,
gorgeous and untouched. When you tell me
we must wait until the pandemic has passed.

Every day I wake asking,
Will you be nervous when we meet?
Yes, you say, almost makes you real.

Another man slides into my DMs,
tries to trick me with grander notions,
I leave his messages on read.

My lonely Ex phones. Baby, he cries. Look
at your nakedness and be ashamed. But his words,
cursed to their underside, slither snakelike away.

We climb The Tree without lusting after its fruit,
we stay careful and disregard its view.
We are happy without the coverage of leaves.

Without sex – (the bringer together of two,
sex, our intimacy and youth)
– what is this knowing we do?

WILLIAM BOWDEN

'Not knowing the difference between Heaven
And Paradise, he called them both Heaven...'
- Rowan Ricardo Phillips, 'Kingdom Come'

My brother is young, olive-skinned
With dirty blonde hair on the brink of brown,
His gaze is rich mahogany & thickets.

He dreams of Heaven, of a gilt opulence
Burning with burnished gold-leaf,
A rococo suite worthy of Marie Antoinette.

Day after day, if such a thing should exist
In Paradise, he nurtures a torpor in a great tub,
Complete with claw feet and bubbles.

Indulging in his divine and eternal stasis,
He notices a filament of black, a tendril
Jagged as a hack-saw splintering across

A pearlescent tile, black cracks deepen
Now to deathly fissures, until idle sins
Swallow him from his perfect idyll - He

Plunges into the depths of the underworld,
Where terrible flames and scorching sulphur
Crackle at the last wisps of steam.

In the end,
Only agony could shake him from the dream.

TOM ANDERSON

Camping at Cae Du

The bottoms of my trousers
are soaked with morning dew.
My tent is pitched near the river.
In the evening midges cruise
up the bank to mingle with me.
At night I hear water foaming

as it stumbles over the rocks.
The next tent is thirty yards away
but still soft voices reach me.
Deep inside my sleeping bag
I turn and count distant sheep
bleating on the dark slopes.

Breakfast is camembert and cake,
dishes are washed in the zinc sink.
The weather improves drastically.
Unprepared, I climb Cadair Idris
shirt collar up, handkerchief on head.
The sun tenderises my skin.

Next morning the birds wake me
at five o'clock: "Cuckoo!"
Woodpigeons call and ask:
"How are you, today?"
A song thrush perches on a wire
and sings "Our day will come..."

This has never happened to me before.

MARY BROWN

Smoke and Mirrors

(Variation on César Vallejo's 'Intensidad y Altura')

I want to think straight but my mind's a glitterball,
I want to see clear but it's mirrors everywhere;
there's not a light-beam that's not tangled with another,
there's not a glass-filled lie not silvered to the air.

I want to think hard but my brain's come out in blisters;
I want to catch Now but it's Past between my fingers.
There's not a word I know will stretch around this cloud,
there's not a god up there that won't fall through.

So what the hell - this jigsaw's lost its bits.
The sea was hoovered up and all I've left is sky.
Let's hit the town, that mirror's just for lips,

fish out your old blue crowprince from beneath
the bed. Blow off his dust. Pretend you still
talk crow and aren't gone cloudy in one eye.

Acquainted with the Night as Well

(Variation on Robert Frost's 'Acquainted with the Night')

I've been acquainted with the night as well,
nights without rain or breath, shut off from stars,
beached on the giant beds of bland hotels.

I've waited in the deadest city bars.
I've followed down the longest city lane
trailing the scales and tales of snake guitars.

I've mistook dark for depth, scratched guilt from pain.
I've lain awake, disowning lips and skin,
mauled breasts betrayed by fingers in my brain.

Lonely as glass, I've let the night creep in,
thickening my blood with glitter and false light,
and every clock is wrong, without, within,

too late for balm of dreams to set things right.
I too have been acquainted with the night.

WILLIAM CLUNIE

The thing about him, his love of *freedom*.
Really? Licentiousness, more like.
Proclaimed a patriot by my Aunt Grace
he trucked it through a wasted life
protesting taxes and praising Tim McVeigh,
drinking half the time and the other half
handling snakes. Now as I spend my time
considering the teleology of a billiard ball
universe sans table, just a big stick, I remember
how his breath hurt like honey in a glass
of Jim Beam and the sound the guns made
discharging in the early hours of the night.

HARRIS COVERLEY

To the Stars

the sage told me to stop all my killing
and look to the stars

but when I looked to the stars
all I could see were the faces of the dead
and the faces of those
who would never be born.

North Pier

we go to the seaside
and we don't even look at the sea

the pain we endure
the pain we ignore.

MAEVE HENRY

Theophany

Outside this makeshift chapel where
a particle of bread in wine makes time

open as a lily in the water garden of heaven,
three candles are finger marks on daylight

in our under garden of mud and snow, where
the sky is a grey scarf draped over our heads,

and we are an icon of Theophany,
plunging a cross in a copper font like

children at play. Human, we can only
guess through tongue and touch

how matter is infused with godliness,
all water Jordan now. So splashed with

blessing from cup to bloodstream gulped,
I pray neither the black lake's monsters

nor the bitter sea will hurt you, sweet
swimmer in my amniotic dark.

MARK PARSONS

Pathetic Fallacy, Gloaming

Is there nothing holy about a baby, but the hole it came from,
Or the hole it's vacuumed into
Before it's born into a bag used for medical waste
To emerge as bloodless, feminist pink,
And what's left rises up like mercury in a thermometer
Through office floors lit up like a Translite,
An illuminated punch card at twilight in New York City, what's left
Of the baby turning pale pink the spires on top of Empire State and World
Trade Center One,
Radio antennas transmitting silent cries to God, at dusk?

A word or phrase placed underneath the tongue
Lies curled up in a ball like mercury in a thermometer,
As reluctant and responsive as a fetus trapped in the clear glass bulb
Of a medical and judicial cul-de-sac, language that doctors and lawmakers use,
As elusive as toxic liquid silver: quick and blameless and abstract,
Waiting for a judgment from the court to drive it
Like fever drives the mercury, from underneath your tongue,
So words that gleam like polished steel,
Forged by bureaucrats and lawyers in offices and courtrooms,
Can be used to rip apart the fetus in the womb of a semantic cul-de-sac.

If there's nothing holy about a baby, or the womb it's torn from,
But the metaphysical and judicial cul-de-sac of where and when its life begins,
A life the ultra-sound shows squirming on the monitor,
Trying to evade the abortionist's metal stylus,
Before a gleaming hoop of sharpened steel limned with light
Like an eye that's welling tears, before your cry,
And serrated jaws of forceps, pull apart the fetus like meat from a chicken wing
With chopsticks, and scrape the mother's walls,
Before dismembered parts of corn mush flesh and tender bones
Are vacuumed into an abortionist's vacuum tube,

Then there's beauty in the horror of the wet, red confetti and
Bloody streamers the fetus gets made into,
And beauty in the splatter of the International Women's Day Parade,
But not the one we see on Broadway.
And there's beauty also in our blindness to the horror,
The way we cover it with language that's impersonal, the most awful
Words are neutral, bloodless, as bloodless
As we have become.

JAMES OWEN

Poetica

Words get married. They buy a house to repair
out in the cheap borderland, where the tended
streets and traffic of Mind start thinning out
into the woodlots and weedy tillage of Spirit.
They get dull jobs. They are together. Years pass.
Now the words want children, and we press
an ear to the wall, holding our breath, devoted
to the creaky, quickening music of their bed springs.

CRAIG DOBSON

Tilted

Dark from dark perspective fades,
leaves me, ludicrous, alone.
My mind's no longer right.

At an age when I should settle down,
I'm setting out again.
What would the proper ghosts be saying,
if they could see me now?

I can't stay, for them or sense,
I've armed my heart for adventure.
If I don't go, only my time will;
and if I do - I know, I know -

Somewhere in La Mancha...

ALAN DUNNETT

Altering Light

In this memory, there is the inaccurate.
I go through a portal into different light
and see you past the bush turn in a mild surprise
and even speak to me – but this is mistaken.

I remember you three months ago; last Christmas;
ten years ago in the north; twenty years ago;
more than half a century ago. Now I look
at my own hands and then I plan ahead, who I

will meet with and when, of course not including you.
There will be a summer with the old outhouse made
into a studio and several canvases
on the splotched, scratched world of the floor; someone else works

alone. Your books are dispersed but the painter paints
through dusk and sometimes near the cold stairs until dawn.

ROBERT DUNSDON

Delusional

And how I long to be clean-winded,
with a clear eye and the courage to concede
that green doors and celestial omnibuses,
the whispering of nettles, of buddleia
banked along the line, are deceptions;
symptoms of COPD, delusional psychosis,
a naïve, an almost wanton unworldliness.
I want to believe that the ache of a falling arc,
the weight of expectation this side of fog
are not conspiratorial winks,
but bare, beautiful fact.

ALEX RETTIE

Kingdom

“Except you become as a little child,”
Good Christ! How I have tried:
Hanging head down from Sunday afternoon
Until I feel a weightlessness inside
As supper fastens fingers on my neck
And pushes me down. The dying day, mild
As mouths, melts itself and leaves behind
Some pebbles and the pool-cue blue of salt
Descending on me like a lightning bolt.

BRIAN JACOBS

Oswiecim

where ghosts rent
outside my room's window

near the *arbeit macht frei*
violins cried

this Homocaust kaddish
ode to a burnt stick pilgrims

Homocaust Homocaust

Sati pyre phakelos yomiagne yells
in all the light we cannot see

gather thee faggots
and fly up wing'd achene's unsolfege'd fire bush

exiled in stuprum's botany
at birth's dirge

I face the faggots I gathered
numb as angels' rejection deployed

a blue print here
for disintegrates

Allen Ginsberg
up in flames

corpse me
poetic

dragged into Reagan death pits
where James Baldwin is Martin Luther Queen's comic eunuch

and where he and Walt Whitman
marry testicles in hand

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

Tom Anderson was born in Lancashire but has lived in London for many years. He has published two works of fiction, *The Last Days of Dad* and *Downturn*. 'Camping At Cae Du' is his first published poem. Twitter @tomand07

William Bowden was born and now lives in London, having lived alternately in Cornwall, Kent and Wiltshire before returning to the city. Last year, he graduated from the University of Exeter with a first-class degree in Literature and has been published once previously by *Canon's Mouth Magazine*.

Mary Brown has worked as governess, tango dancer, translator and interpreter, and also played the other woman in a Mexican *fotonovela*. She has been a nocturnal walker in four cities. Her 'Owl Eyes' came second in the 2019 Fish Short Story Competition.

Sean Chard is a graduate of the Open University, earning a BA in Humanities with Distinction in Creative Writing. Chard has featured in various publications including *Popshot Quarterly*, *HereComesEveryone*, *Bounds Green Book Writers*, *Spot of Writing Magazine*, *The Norfolk Longbook*, and *Covid & Poetry*.

William Clunie is an American writer living in Germany. His books include *Laws of Discord* from Demain Publishing and *The Death of Clara Haber*.

Harris Coverley has had verse published in *Polu Texni*, *California Quarterly*, *Star*Line*, *Spectral Realms*, *Scifaikuest*, *Novel Noctule*, *Better Than Starbucks*, *Corvus Review*, *The Cannon's Mouth*, *Apocalypse Confidential*, *View from Atlantis*, and many others. He lives in Manchester, England.

Craig Dobson has had poems published in *Agenda*, *Butcher's Dog*, *Crannóg*, *The Dark Horse*, *The Frogmore Papers*, *Ink Sweat and Tears*, *The Interpreter's House*, *The London Magazine*, *Magma*, *Neon*, *New Welsh Review*, *The North*, *Poetry Ireland Review*, *Poetry Salzburg Review*, *Prole*, *The Rialto*, *Stand*, *Southword*, and *Under the Radar*.

Robert Dunsdon is a British poet living in Abingdon, near Oxford. His poetry and reviews have been widely published in both the UK and in America. He is a former poetry editor with *Between These Shores Books*.

Maeve Henry lives in Oxford. Her pamphlet *Why We Left* (Frosted Fire. 2021) explores themes of refugee and migrant experience. She was first runner up for the 2021 Mairtin Crawford Award and was shortlisted for the 2020 Bridport Prize. She

holds a Master's in Creative Writing from Oxford Brookes University. She works in hospital administration and is married with three grown-up children.

Alan Dunnett is a former theatre director, and was course leader at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland and Drama Centre London. Poems in *Poetry and Settled Status for All*, *Apocalypse Confidential*, *Dodging the Rain*, *The New European*, *Skylight 47*, *Stand*, *The Recusant*. *Assassin* was awarded Best Rhythm & Poetry, 2020 Berlin Underground Film Festival; *Interrogation* won Best Experimental Film, 2019 Verona International Film Festival. *A Third Colour* was published by Culture Matters in 2018.

Brian Jacobs has been teaching English for 30 years and currently resides with his husband in California, where he runs Tofu Ink Arts Press and works on his PhD. He was the assistant to Allen Ginsberg while earning his MFA, during which time he walked halfway around the world on a peace pilgrimage. He is a three-time Fulbright Scholar and NEH grant recipient.

Shanley McConnell is an interdisciplinary artist whose work has received acclaim in the *Oxford Review of Books* and *Sentinel Literary Quarterly*, with more recent poetry published in *The Napkin Poetry Review*, *eris & eros* and *Passengers Journal*, among others. Her writing often reflects her experience of immigrating to the UK as a child and considers the 'beautiful tension of belonging to more than one country'.

James Owens's newest book is *Family Portrait with Scythe* (Bottom Dog Press, 2020). His poems and translations appear or are upcoming in publications including *Grain*, *Dalhousie Review*, *Presence*, *Poetry Scotland*, and *Honest Ulsterman*. He earned an MFA at the University of Alabama and lives in a small town in northern Ontario, Canada.

Mark Parsons's poems have been recently published or are forthcoming in *Ex Pat Press*, *Dreich*, *Cape Rock*, and *I-70 Review*. He lives in Tokyo, Japan.

Alex Rettie is a poet, songwriter and book reviewer who writes from Calgary, Canada. He has poems published or forthcoming in *Light*, *Snakeskin*, and *Alberta Views*.

Erin Wilson's poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Innisfree Poetry Journal*, *The Honest Ulsterman*, *Channel Magazine*, *Poetry Scotland*, and in numerous other publications/anthologies. Her first collection is *At Home with Disquiet; Blue* is forthcoming (both from Circling Rivers Press). She lives on Robinson-Huron Treaty territory in Northern Ontario, Canada, the traditional lands of the Anishnawbek.

To be considered for future issues of The Crank, please see thecrankmag.com/subs.