



The Crank

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Cover: Illusion of Kate Moss, *The Widows of Culloden* (Alexander McQueen, 2006).

Set in Goudy Old Style.

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DAVID WARD

The Memory of Rain

In the darkened room
they slit her stomach open
and took out the key.

They stitched her belly
and left her there,
listening to the wind outside
and the memory of rain.

The key lay beside her
and she stroked it with her fingers,
twisted it slowly,
then placed it on her tongue.

And then she swallowed.

The sweet pleasure
to have it locked inside her
where no-one could see it.

She waited till the darkness faded
then walked through the open door,
trod step by step silently
down the spiraling stairs.

MARCUS SMITH

Elevated Danger

There is now the elevated danger
and in gallop technicolour brigands
flashing cutlasses and jeweled sabers.
Their dashing and daring captain
sweeps up a beauty with long raven hair,
soon to be a beloved martyr.

She is sitting with us in Pantheon Square,
lit to show it's survived two thousand years.
She is taking in the soft Mediterranean air
cooling the sweat and hot tempers
of bustling white-jacketed waiters.
This is how to live and live well today.

In the lit showcase of classical temples
dedicated to appease gods volatile as us
all that remains of the solid and good example
is the drama of heightened threats
lurking behind curtained restorations.

If the threat comes tonight with a secret stash
of nail bombs, knives and assault rifles,
if the threat attacks the café crowd en masse,
if tourists choke on nitrate by the litre,
if carnages pile up like the uncollected trash,

tomorrow will be one more terrible story
far less thrilling than imagining instead
equestrian skills by marauding villains

cinematographically big screen enough drop-dead
to satisfy a nation's unfilled dread.

The news chooses two romantic young people
lying on blasted stones of an eclipsed empire.
They bled in the throes as an entwined couple.
The twinned pair pictorially expire
in 'Images in the Year of Cold Fire.'

Follow-up reports leave unsaid
how life feels more alive during the danger
and love of any kind is elevated.
Flirting with the midnight divide, we linger
by a fountain pouring lucky water.

PARTHA SARKAR

Wants only the muchness the black sheep

Wants only the muchness
The black sheep.
There are
The idols tiered in order in the rows
And the glory of the trees.
Even in the age of losing eyes
The owl sees everything clear
And even in the daytime.
Yet, the black sheep
Does not follow the dates
To perform the duties.
So, walks along the drain
Blood to grab the shadow
Of the bodiless pride
And gets tired.

Walks without tension the futility

The chopped embryo.
The pieces of the red moon.
The stream of the sewage
And none is tired.

Sees the yellow sorrow the prism and
Tells it to be colored.
Tries the prism but cannot
Yet none gets sad.

Walks without tension the futility
Not along with the pen
But with the fabricated glory.

MYKYTA RYZHYKH

Copper night knocks
On the back of the head, asks:
“What street is this?”
And this is not a street,
This is the whole life.

Here at the age
Of 4 I drank sleeping pills,
At 14 I lost my virginity,
At 24 I lost my family,
At 34 my father died (thank God, my father died).

Now I'm free like the cry of a newborn.
I'm single, like when I was born.
A lonely body without everything
Meaningful, invented, composed.
The body, by its movement forward,
Has reached the very beginning.
Ashes close to dust.

And suddenly the night opens its
Lunar hood, and now death looks
At me with its bony eyes.

“Come on, friend,” I said to death,
“I hope you don't turn me into a zombie.”
The door of cast-iron milk opened.
And I started drinking.
My teeth turned black and fell out.
Birds pecked out my eyes.
My body fell off me. Copper night,

Pig-iron milk, golden memory.
And suddenly: emptiness.

We were stolen at birth and brought into this world. This world has robbed us. Cats will never again sing under the window about their nine lives in the nine circles of hell. We are no longer cats. We are no longer dogs. Only occasionally does one of us like to sit on a leash in puppy latex. We are heavy, sir. We are light, Lord, like fluff. We are airy, Lord, like chitin. We are homeless, Lord, like heaven. We are rich, Lord, like the poorest poor man. We are your angels, Lord. Wash our feet, Lord, we can't stand you. We love you, Lord, like dogs do. We are on your leash, tied to you, Lord. We are the gods of death in your realm, Lord. Ash. The last candle for your rest in our hearts, Lord.

MARK LAWLOR

Yard

We're outside in the yard of the hermit.
The painter makes soup and it is easy.

Some potatoes and smoked fish and turnip,
is not what I expected, is hazy

in a way. Our talk together simple
and true, uncomplicated it just flows.

We're in the yard of the work temple.
Your hands cup the soup pan as the time slows.

Turpentine, rag, indigo moves across
your apron, you stand and let the light come

into your blue eyes and red hair before
you fill two bowls and I gather two spoons.

We're outside in the yard where things happen.
Cat licks its paw, knows when something happens.

DICK JONES

when the master painter

when the master painter
stepped back from
the canvas having lived
for weeks an eyelash
width away from the light
the thin blades of grass
the tough meniscus on
the flood water the trees
complicating the sky
he saw that he had lost
all claim on branch and
root that the filaments
of the one might be
the filaments of the other
that he had learned
against all best intention
that whilst the world is
its own simulacrum
the mirror is both loyal
and treacherous

SIMON FRENCH

Automatonophobia

His mother & father
are nowhere to be found.
There are rumours
of chainsaws. Acid baths.
Don't be fooled
by those blue saucer eyes,
like butter wouldn't melt,
or the withered legs
& black buckled shoes swinging
if he gets to perch on your lap.
He'll only walk
when he's quite sure
no-one's watching. He'll kick
stray dogs. Shit
on your doorstep. Likes nothing more
than exposing his little resin penis
in the vicinity of playgrounds, parks
& be back in time
to hoodwink your sympathies
with that wooden mouth
looking like each side's sliced
with a Stanley knife
in some gangland punishment. Jaw
dropping like a trapdoor.
Wants you to grip his spinal cord,
work the levers & hinges,
the arterial twine. His lips,
like slithers of raw liver,
wait for your voice. Keep schtum!

He'll ferret your secrets
from the glass of water
you drink from.
Hang them
out to dry.

AIDAN FADDEN

to memory: anniversary #1

We'll need another script, if this summer's
dead-set on being a ripple-flanked, hunkered beast
coiled and ready in the long grass to pounce.

Can we zip through the rest of the film?
Can we not tease forth what 'the director',
if 'director' there is, may have had in mind?

Can we have shots of a nest, a song, cupped hands
ferrying water yet spilling half the load?
Can we rewind, please, back to winter

and to colder, easier times, get off there
from the merry-go-round, look up to when
constellations were silver stamped on woad,

until he could no more parry the blows
than Orion, shipping out into the west,
might bring down his club, raise up his sword.

LEWIS LEVERETT

Daughter Smoke-Eye

Her mother was a herbalist and a harlot
so they called her the Bitch Doctor.

One night, tired, thin and smoky-eyed,
she was paid for by a man
with a wife of leather and
with a belt of leather
he stopped her from breathing
and buried her body in a berry bush.

In Kill Magazine they called her mother
Lady Smoke-Eye.

Orphaned, torn, the world carried racing on,
and fed her ugly questions and
now she's eaten ugly questions
and her stomach is sick
but she just won't throw up.

At the other side of the Sixth Form common room
her steel prince sits, admiring Daughter Smoke-Eye's beauty.
Most nights, tired and wanting,
he says to the Lord
kindly find one girl
and he wonders now if she is her
and he wonders how he should speak to her
and he wonders how a boy like him
whose father forged his child from metal
and made him work the bar
at far too young an age
and welcome in the rusty old survivors and

the street crumbs who grumbled in the mornings and
fought in the nights,
a boy like him,
whose skin of steel is stainless such that
all that trouble never left a mark
is too scared to speak to Daughter Smoke-Eye.

She saw the quiet boy looking at her
and she wasn't sure what she wanted.
Some nights, tired, wishful and wistful,
she wanted to steal a ship and
sail the sea and
see glory and
rip open the summer with her fingernails
and let the night fall and lie on the deck of her ship and look up at the
moon's face and
wonder who built the razor that shaved it and kept it so beautiful
and take a silver prince with her
who knew of pain and knew of the pain of keeping pain hidden
and get bored of her ship and take a tank of petrol and
watch her ship burn,
and some nights
the coupon child wanted
to eat no more ugly questions
and to join her mother,
not Bitch Doctor,
not Lady Smoke-Eye,
Joan,
Mum,
to join her in her dignified grave,
far away from the berry bush.

RYAN DAVIDSON

I Recall Central Park in Fall

The word “fall” usually carries some
connotation of religion, since
I don’t know much religion
(although I’ve been reading a lot about Blake
and his four-fold vision which, apparently,
would have been infinite had it not been
for the fallen nature of man)—this is a reference

to that Wayne Newton song.
Upwards, I suppose.

A few ounces won’t change the world
but it’ll definitely get me closer
to the nature of infinite vision.
I’m teaching villanelles now—
all I know is what might work,
and what might not make it
around the corner in time,
in time, in time all things are infinite.

The only doors I saw today
were clean, but locked—
and I forgot my tools.

SERAFINA CUSACK

Borderline

The ebb and flow feels like a slow piano being played by a sad boy
you see the poetry in everything you see the birds in the buildings
When you are alone it is a minor chord and a choral voice the birds are
black and grey
It feels reach-out-able
Like if you wrote the right words in the right order then someone might
understand
the ebb and flow
the rope tightening around the knots in your stomach
the sweat in your hair
they might understand how your mind goes and goes and goes
like an old machine over-oiled
They would understand that your thoughts are an accumulation of grains
slipping through the nets you have been trying to build
you cannot just *be* you cannot just *exist*
you cannot just take it as it comes
and as it goes

But they don't
well they do
when you're staring at them with hearts in your eyes and fingers touching
theirs past pints.
Then it's night and the ebb and flow is being witnessed
you have someone to try and explain the birds and
the ropes to and the grains of bright green terror to

Their hands might pull away from yours their hearts might close up
Because the ebb and flow is okay when it's slow piano poetry and minor
chords showered

pigeons and eloquent insults
Not so when it's hot and wet and spilling out of you like a hurricane they
are in the way
of your path of destruction
And they have the human instinct you might have
if the ebb didn't ebb as much or the flow didn't flow as much
They have the human instinct
to get out the fucking way
or to at least consult with their friends, ask if this is healthy
like they might be healthy now
asking friends twice removed from the
black and grey path of destruction heavy drums angry girls hot tears

HARRIS COVERLEY

I Flow

I have been observed unmoving
I have been remarked upon in the paper
I have been broken into dust
just as we had planned

the spot as well to pour me away
on this pale and tepid morning

gloves of faux-leather
lips of tissue

things can always go to plan
but the detail is the key:

I am caught in the wind
I fly with the pigeons I used to feed

I am brushed against the trees upon the riverbank
and re-join the earth to mentor the seeds to glory

I am grazed upon the rocks
ancient grooves in which to roost
until which time I move onto saltier pastures

I am one with the water
at last
(at last!)

I am now with the water

I flow
 like time

on and on
away from you
 and back again

WILLIAM CLUNIE

what do you have against water-
colors, a little garden of windsor
newton falling from the wall
with all the force of gravitas

what do you have against oil,
in bacon's hair, say, a brylcreem
piece of meat. i want to hold an arm-
less piece of marble

ERIN CLARK

uneven lines but parallel

after George Mackay Brown

The whisper-hiss of Orkney on his teeth,
a settled and not sombre frown
cascading down his cheeks – this man Brown
inscribed his island and the sharp relief

of grey ordinary beauty up against
the salt grind of war, sea and the tides
this people as if born of stone worked lives
slowly reclaimed by waves – immense

beneath the surface, only little laps above.
Uneven lines but parallel, the harbour moorings
on Hamnavoe now own their own poetic callings
to welcome in a curious and curiuser drove

of escape-seekers who have read some verse
and felt an unromantic tug towards remote lies;
for what else are tales told wintrily with illustrated skies
the colour of the sea, the island's cloak and curse?

NABIN CHHETRI

Birds

This year the rhododendrons are mad in my garden.
Their pink flowers cover the treetops.
In Early May, the sparrows make their nests
under its branches.

On an evening like this one
after the last light of the day fades
I long to sit, long and late
listen to the sparrows
and their newly hatched chicks.

I do not understand their language
but know that they have a lot to share.

And I like to think of the baby sparrows
who do not know that a few feet above their nests
a big sky awaits
nor do they know they have wings.

One day, I might as well be sitting
and without my knowing
their wings will lift them up
to the sky of their dream.

STEPHEN ALLEN

Teazel

Near where the downland flint-pile lies
A pair of chalky rounded stones,
Split by a teazel's restless rise,
Gave pass to an upstart green-spring stalk
That set apart their limestone bones

Reaching soon a flower-burst length
The bloom pushed out its petal-head
Projecting forth with urgent strength
The scented code of generation
Imperative for pollen-spread

And once the bees had done their deed
The head swayed to a gentle beat
Casting away the new-formed seed
Then, fading through a fugitive pink,
Retreated with its work complete

CLARENCE CADDELL

Closeted: A Teacher's Lament

Around here girls who are not beautiful
Turn into boys, deferring to her kind,
While boys turn into girls, so as to find
A trace of her within. In distant school
Days, you were overawed and would demur;
But this one smiles as she looks up at you
With eyes in which falsehood is what's most true,
And smilingly addresses you as 'sir'.

She is incarnate possibility—
Contemptible the one who'd give a damn
For odds or risk; your child's dependency
Alone restrains; whatever's yours, you'd give
In sacrifice—the entire pointless sham—
To come out as a man fully alive!

On Our Anniversary

Tonight you got undressed in front of me,
Those breasts, I'm certain, no less buoyant than
Before they found their proper use. It's clear
Enough you mean to do that which you can
And must to honour our anniversary
In proper style. 'I know you've longed for this,'
You grant by means of an affected leer,
Your tongue tip finding mine out as we kiss.

You'll let me keep the lamp on if I choose
So we can watch ourselves—as from a pew.
Don't bother. I've eloped with the same muse
I promised back then never to forsake:
She had your name then; nowadays, to take
The corresponding form is more than she can do.

ADRIAN BLACKLEDGE

A Faint Smell of Vinegar

Capuchin Catacombs, Palermo

As soon as the last door slams shut
and the key turns in the lock
they free themselves
from their places high on whitewashed walls
where all day they have studied the living.

Down they come, bald, hollow-eyed,
herring-bone suits and tailored coats
bearing the dust of two hundred years.
Some wear gloves of calf skin or lace.
One a tasselled hat in brushed green velvet.

Their soft leather slippers pitter-patter
on the flagstone floor
as they rattle and chatter
along corridors
never pausing for breath;

or they shuffle without purpose
shoulder to shoulder
mouths skewed in humourless grins
hardly able to remember
what it was they used to be, or do;

or gather in stoical groups
to repeat tales of loss and regret
love and betrayal

the children gone at such a young age
after all the years of prayer and devotion;

or stand apart in uncertain shadows
angular faces raised
beyond empty shelves
to where a small window offers skies
darkening to indigo.

PHEOBE BEEHOP

The Kingfisher

A great bird sat upon an old tree
and it was dry, without any leaves
upon each lower branch little birds sat
near death for such a hunger that
the old bird smote himself in the heart
with his beak. All the young birds took life
by the blood of that great bird which died
among his flock.

Those birds that had
wished for leaves; that tree which had
wished for water; those branches which had
listened for thunder that brought water;
(not thunder that was a rumour of thunder).
For air that was not punctured with violet
nor light that was a shadow of light.

A blue flame like an arrow
darts down the river and through the reeds.
Only the water-king has an answer to light
on the turquoise of his wing.
What interest have you in this little island?
Like the sapphire, you belong to exotic places.
So why are you here next to the by-pass, in the
dull stream a few metres from the roundabout?
Almost mistaken for a blue plastic bag.
You should be up in the summit of Heaven.
Not down here among this detritus of death,

or among the detritus of life,
in the shadow of this hollow valley.
On your little wing a rock is founded,
through spring and autumn, birth and dying
you carry a kingdom and its castle.

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

David Ward was born in Northampton. He is co-founder of The Windows Project, running creative writing workshops in community venues on Merseyside since 1976, and editor of Smoke magazine. He has toured to Singapore, Hong Kong, and Harbin (Northern China), and broadcast on BBC TV and radio. Poems in over 200 magazines and anthologies, including Poetry Review, Abridged, Ambit, and Poetry Wales. Collections include Tracts and On the Edge of Rain (Headland), Jambo (Riot Stories Ltd and Impact), and Inside Pale Eyes (Hawkwood). He has been Visiting Writer-in-Residence, Nanyang University, Singapore; and Honorary Fellow in Creative Writing, Liverpool Hope University. His writing as David Greygoose includes Brunt Boggart (Hawkwood, 2015; Pushkin, 2018), and Mandrake Petals and Scattered Feathers (Hawkwood, 2021).

Marcus Smith's latest work includes a Stickleback pamphlet and inclusion in the Soho Poly Project/Being Human Festival. Previous books and pamphlets include SEZ/Suddenly Everything Speaks (Live Canon), Text (The Text), and Urban Idylls (Recours au poème). Other work has appeared in Ambit, Acumen, The North, The Rialto, and Stand; and has received Plough and Poetry on the Lake prizes. His reviews have appeared in PN Review and Envoi.

Partha Sarkar is a resident of Ichapur, a small town in West Bengal, India. A graduate, he writes poems inspired by his late relative Sankar Sarkar and by his friends (especially Deb Kumar Khan), often in protest against social injustice and crimes against nature. His poems have been published in various magazines, both in Bangla and English.

Mykyta Ryzhykh (Никита РЪЖИХ) was the winner of the international competition Art Against Drugs, bronze medallist of the festival Chestnut House, and laureate of the literary competition named after Tyutyunnik. She was also longlisted for the Lyceum, Twelve, and award named after Dragomoshchenko. She has been published in the journals Dzvin, Ring A, Polutona, Rechport, Topos, Articulation, Formaslov, Colon, Literature Factory, and Literary Chernihiv; as well as in the literary newspaper of the Ukrainian and in the almanac Syaivo.

Mark Lawlor's poems have recently appeared in Blackbox Manifold, Magma, the moth, Cyphers, Chasing Shadows, and Skylight 47.

Dick Jones' work has been published in magazines both in print and online. His first collection, Ancient Lights, is published by Phoenicia (phoeniciapublishing.com/ancient-lights.html). His translation of Blaise Cendrars'

influential epic poem ‘La Prose du Transsiberien...’ was published as an illustrated collaborative edition with artist Natalie D’Arbeloff by Old Stile Press (oldstilepress.com/osp_book/trans-siberian-prosody-and-little-jeanne-from-france/).

Simon French has had many poems published in a range of poetry magazines and has been placed in various poetry competitions over the years. He has had two poetry collections published, *Joyriding Down Utopia Avenue* (2021) and *The Deadwing Generation* (2022), both by Coverstory Books. He is currently working on his third.

Aidan Fadden is an adjunct professor of creative writing and composition at John Cabot University in Rome. His poems have appeared widely in print and online magazines including *Orbis*, *Magma*, *Stand*, *The North*, *The Journal*, *Cordite*, and *Ink, Sweat & Tears*.

Lewis Leverett is a poet, short story writer, and singer-songwriter from Essex. He has been published in the *Anansi Archive*, the University of Winchester’s *Vortex* magazine, and the *Smashing Blobfish* magazine.

Ryan Davidson has just begun his eighth year as an assistant professor, having recently taken a position as Assistant Professor of Literature at the College of Micronesia. He received a Ph.D. from the University of Glasgow, where he wrote on the influence of William Blake on Walt Whitman. His first book, *Under What Stars*, was published in 2009 by Ampersand Books; his second collection, *Statues Need Stories*, was published in 2019 by Cyberwit Books. More recently, poems have appeared in *The Frogmore Papers*, *The Equinox Journal*, *Type Review*, *Taj Mahal Review*, *The Journal*, and *The Temenos Review*.

Serafina Cusack is a playwright and poet from London living in Glasgow. She recently won the Book Edit Writer’s Prize, and has been published in *Fleet Magazine*, *JAKE*, *Blue Villa*, and *From Glasgow to Saturn*. She is currently studying for a Master’s in Creative Writing at the University of Glasgow.

Along with previously in *The Crank*, **Harris Coverley** has had verse published in *California Quarterly*, *Star*Line*, *Spectral Realms*, *Scifaikuest*, *Silver Blade*, *The Vampiricon: Imaginings & Images of the Vampire* (Mind’s Eye Publications), *The Flying Saucer Poetry Review*, *The Lotus Tree Literary Review*, *Songs of Eretz Poetry Review*, *Apocalypse Confidential*, *Corvus Review*, *Tigershark*, *Yellow Mama*, *View from Atlantis*, and many others. He lives in Manchester, England.

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

Erin Clark is a queer American writer living and working in London whose poetry, fiction, and essays have appeared in places such as *The Scores*, *About Place*, *Pilcrow & Dagger*, and *The Merton Journal*. They are the author of the nonfiction book *Sacred Pavement* (2021) and have a day job as a parish priest. www.emclark.co.

Nabin K. Chhetri is a poet and a writer based in Scotland. He graduated with an MSt in Creative Writing from Oxford University and a degree of MLitt in The Novel from the University of Aberdeen. A creative writing tutor, he has conducted workshops/readings in various institutions, including Oxford University and Robert Gordon University. His first poetry collection was published by Red Mountain Press in the US; his second, *I Father*, will be published by Eyewear (blackspringpressgroup.com/blogs/news/eyewear-author-to-conduct-a-writing-retreat-in-kathmandu).

Stephen Allen is a British poet with a particular interest in the natural world, wildlife conservation, our deep human past, and the complex threads of mystery and perception that bind us to Nature. By profession he is a physician, having been educated at Kingswood Grammar School and the University of Manchester. He now lives in Salisbury, UK, and has also worked in Manchester, Dorset, Zambia, and Hong Kong. He recently published a collection of poems entitled *Unfrozen* (Hobnob Press, Gloucester, 2022).

Clarence Caddell is the author of *The True Gods Attend You*, a collection of verse published by Bonfire Books. He takes this opportunity to remind the reader that, current poetic mores notwithstanding, the author is not necessarily to be identified with the speaker.

Adrian Blackledge is a past winner of the Eric Gregory Award and was Birmingham Poet Laureate 2014-2016. His poems have been published widely, including in *The Spectator*, *Encounter*, *The London Magazine*, *Orbis*, *The Rialto*, and *The Reader*.

Pheobe Beehop was the winner of the University of Exeter's Teaching and Learning War Research Network's Creative World Wars writing competition (2018) and The Oxford Research Centre in the Humanities' French poetry translation competition (2020). Her work has also been highly commended by the National Theatre and the BBC. She blogs about film, music, and literature at medium.com/@Frou-Frou.

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