



The Crank

Edited and produced by Humphrey Astley in Oxfordshire, England.

This issue © Rain over Bouville Publications; individual parts © the contributors.

Cover image: Raul Julia in a Broadway production of *Dracula*, 1977.

Set in Goudy Old Style.

thecrankmag.com

the CRANK.

Issue 9, October 2023

* * *

Stephen Allen	Living horn	5
Clarence Caddell	Convalescence	6
	Supermarket, November	7
Joseph Chaplain	the tenth lady	8
William Clunie	murmur of marmor	9
Robert Dunsdon	Blossom (2)	10
Noam Hessler	Blue Jay's Departure	11
Dominic James	Back on the Wine Dark Sea	12
Emilia Lehvonen	Blood Moon	13
	Thunder	14
Ethan McGuire	Portrait of a Sinner's Prayer	15
John McKeown	Cry	16
	Bread of Life	17
Richard Owens	Lunar Ode	18
Mykyta Ryzhykh	'prison instead of help...'	19
Partha Sarkar	The telephone & the evening...	20
Andrew Senior	Sunday morning	21
Anastasija Svarevska	Platform 2B	22
E. J. Whitlock	New Year's Day	23

STEPHEN ALLEN

Living horn

We traipsed in single silent file
To where the sessile oaks crawl up
From ancient acorns lost in moss
When mystery defined the moors

And there we saw beside the copse
A straightened tree of modern cast
That rose up to the westward sun
With clenching roots and handsome shaft

It seemed its trunk was breaking free
Eschewing life in stunted form
Standing on a boulder-pair
From which it drew exquisite fare

And so, we felt the message clear
In silence, to admire the wood
Was supplication well enough
To all the free and fertile world

So, while an unperceptive friend
Bored us with an ivy-myth
We moved up to that living horn
And stroked the bark that sucked the stones

CLARENCE CADDELL

Convalescence

It is not suffering but how it lifts
That teaches what's worthwhile. That falling out
Of love, putting one's Legion all to rout:
We unwrap something not among the gifts
Of nature, that there are no extra shifts
To work for: nothing that a screen might tout;
It is to welcome a long-unwelcome doubt,
We catch it on our tongues as down it drifts.

Yes, keep the screen blank – no, not to resume
The novel of our lives that we have forced
Ourselves to read thus far. O it remains
Beside the sickbed with the unguessed doom
Of that protagonist, the action paused
Among the plot devices of his pains.

Supermarket, November

after Houellebecq's 'Hypermarche, Novembre'

First I stumbled into the fridge,
And feeling scared, began to cry.
Someone grumbled, what did I mean
Behaving so inappropriately?

I got up just like nothing had happened,
But noticed a shopper crossing himself
As I staggered past, wild colours flying
Out at me from the nearest shelf;

A circus feeling, a kind of debauch
Sustained me until my collapse
Before the deli counter. "Sad,
What is he, thirteen, fourteen perhaps?"

An old woman said, and with her friend
Took her sardines to the counter.
Then I saw shoes on hesitant feet,
(Again finding myself on the outer)

Heard voices wondering where I'd got
My brand-new Nikes. The manager
Arrived at length, but by that time
It made no difference who was there.

JOSEPH CHAPLAIN

the tenth lady

they were turned to stone
the ladies and the fiddler
for dancing on the sabbath

yet few know the story
of the one who turned to oak
on the other side of the circle

blowing in the wind
coloured ribbons
tied around her limbs

between branches
witches float
hanging in tribute

light shining through
a woven pentacle
and a sun-bleached bone

still she gazes
across the stones
holding them in place

william clunie

murmur of marmor

it's a magisterial ontology
that acknowledges the piece
of marble with the sword
inside it,&

the hand that holds the sword
that cuts its way
out of the block of marble.
this corporeality, this
hardness to the touch
is more than words,

it's more
than just an adjectival world,
but you can't speak of it
without words. put
the words inside the box
with me, carve
my headstone like a tongue

struggling upward through the bright

deaf world

ROBERT DUNSDON

Blossom (2)

Tell me again about Brighton, the cat,
cards in the concrete garden –
anything that matters
on a day such as this.

Step back from the absurdity
and slip behind the billboard through
nettles leaking air and anticipation;
talk about forgiveness or grace,
the shadow in a horse chestnut tree –
something persuasive on a day
floated as an idea:
warm and gently defined
and set to slip away like blossom
off an ornamental cherry.

NOAM HESSLER

Blue Jay's Departure

We hated him with the fletchings of our knifepoint arms,
And our warhorn mouths that blew inwards, that
Made every thought petty. We hated him
With our gnarled wire legs,
How he turned our feet to barbs.
We hated him for the chasing, for his warsong
And then we hated him, and hated him
For his long unanswered lovesong.

Hear this: Let it blow through you:
He left his marble pool
For a few nights
And a few nights we pecked
Until our beaks were bent and blunt
And the giant in the house
Put porridge in the feeder.

We could not eat;
How long we had fed off hate.
When the azure conqueror came home
Our fanfare was mute —
He had no need to chase.

DOMINIC JAMES

Back on the Wine Dark Sea

Scamp, sleeking down your musty thigh,
pressed on the anchorage of thought:
camp up your merry looks.

I find you in the hold and prise apart
those waxy lids, sleep-encrusted
eyes brimming with excess.

Who broke the slim amphora's neck,
put leopards on the quarter-deck
set parrots squawking stern to bow,
slipped in the water snake?

Smiles tug those sluggish lips.
And other ships at sea will crop
the green shoots of your madness.

EMILIA LEHVONEN

Blood Moon

Our light is old and dying
I do not know how pretending
Will make this more real

You don't need me and I
Do not confess nor do I need help
Exposing myself

Shards, words, space dust
Clinging to my throat
Like your fingers

I barely remember
What it was like without despair
The brightness no longer ours

We belonged

The sky will capture me
Back into my skin
There are no memories that sing to me
Without guilt

Thunder

I have counted the seconds
For you to arrive, on top of me
A familiar pressure, a roar

I have walked the yard barefoot
For you, the grass sleek and wet
Under us, our bodies

Shining in the dark with sweat
Some of it fear
Of tomorrow

When you leave
The grass needs you, the flowers
Dry up and the trees

Wait quietly
I will have sunk into this earth
Like after a beating

ETHAN MCGUIRE

Portrait of a Sinner's Prayer

God, I do not believe in who You are —
not, "Help my unbelief," but, "I'm untrue."
Come heal me, give me grace. I'm not that far

away from Heaven now — some foreign star...
Forget it, Lord; I love a man — not You.
God, I do not believe in who You are.

Some women, too, still fill my mind and car.
I feel a thrill with each new rendezvous.
Come heal me, give me grace. I'm not that far.

Wild, evil thoughts cut through my mind. The scar
You see here on my brain, it is not new.
God, I cannot believe in who You are.

My wife, for years, has been my registrar.
She lets me know our youngest has no clue,
so heal us, give us grace. We're not that far.

"Forgive me?" I ask in my wife's boudoir —
not mine, but why? I can't tell even You.
God, I do not believe in who You are,
but heal me, give me grace. I'm not that far.

JOHN MCKEOWN

Cry

The old man downstairs
starts raving earlier and earlier,
the plaintive note in his voice
a noose tightening around
life's thinning neck,
an animal's circling,
looking for rest.

And the day is old, already,
a deep, old hide,
promising nothing soft,
nothing easy.
Only that it goes deep,
deep as time, and far, far back;
and that there's no cry,
panic-stricken child,
though you become old woman, old man,
that cannot be swallowed
in silence, ultimately.

Bread of Life

I've made my bed
and must lie in it
with this last supper
of black bread
the dark nutrient of love.

I've retired early again
for I need all my strength
to keep the sun
from breaking my heart
from letting in the light.

Here, where only you can live,
an inviolable, timeless irradiation,
a predatory memory
of soft lip, dark bright eye,
and skin cold as spring.

I need all my strength
to keep this love alive
though all the hellish world of sense groans
'let it die'.
It cannot die.

This thing that once
was you and I
is now alone
my child, my awful joy,
the bread of life.

RICHARD OWENS

Lunar Ode

O Selene,
you tie my tongue.

Bed-mussed,
you're radiant.

You pull the heart
ineffably, even from afar.

Blood's drum drowns
your pure, soft voice.

A voice unheard
no poem echoes.

Sleep's a mercy to Endymion;
elsewise, he'd be lunatic.

Suffer then, Selene.
Suffer beauty's loneliness.

MYKYTA RYZHYKH

prison instead of help
coexistence instead of love
unnecessary reform
one coffee and hotel room per person

there are many ways to show your dislike

PARTHA SARKAR

The telephone and the evening was thrilled

The telephone
And the evening was thrilled
And met the sea the waves
And returned
But it was not sure whether
There was any fragrance of the light
And the leaves were hectic red.

But no telephone.

Should look at the mousetrap
Every rattrap seller
And know whether the earth is a square or a triangle.

ANDREW SENIOR

Sunday morning

In the depths of the weekend, a tiny earthquake
at the path's edge. A toddler

wild animal shrieking. His plastic windmill
spinning. From the allotments

hard working smoke drifts, and a dog-sided old lady
smiles and rests on her walker.

In The Plough, cracked crystal houses
salt-stained foil and pints multiply

in a taproom that, time after the smoke has cleared,
will overheat.

Lady and toddler long since home to bed
when Saturday succumbs, all out of sorts,

collapsing in a carnal shriek, spilling out and fighting
in the empty streets. A tiny earthquake

at the world's edge.

NASTIA SVAREVSKA

Platform 2B

I take a train away from a city that
gave me wings but blocked the skies.
And as I walk the streets with candy
wraps on every corner I'm thinking
it must be harder to raise a child
than to rise from the grave.

Cold and lonely, I step on
the abandoned silent town;
there's history under my creasing shoes
that no one knows, and no book attempts
to describe. The smell of chicken shops
carries untold secrets frying in a pan.

Then it's too late.
Then someone knocks at my door at night
and knocks me up or knocks me out.
Here's a secret: **Я БОЮСЬ ТЕМНОТЫ.**
I can tell you more if you dare to
listen, before the skies open,
and my wings pull me away.

E. J. WHITLOCK

New Year's Day

I know years are archived threads
hardly self-assembling. Is the city

alive now that the lode is

formicary, the cathedral hundreds
of flights uptown, and the park

without all those froward hems?

I am tempted to write this year off

but what happened, exactly? I was
trying to get over this lacquered man,

contorted by a flag like Atlas on a plinth,
to the point, equidistant to the rooms —

the ones we don't live in anymore —
beneath the tracks, of those intertwined

strings of tarnished silver.

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

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. In 2022, he published a collection of poems entitled *Unfrozen* (Hobnob Press).

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.

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

Robert Dunsdon lives near Oxford in the UK. His poetry has been published in *Ambit*, *Allegro*, *The Blue Nib*, *Candelabrum*, *The Cannon's Mouth*, *Decanto*, *Pennine Platform*, *Picaron*, *Purple Patch*, and others. His book reviews have featured in *Tupelo Quarterly*, *Heavy Feather Review*, *The Lit Pub*, *Sugar House Review*, *Colorado Review*, and *Poetry International Online*.

Noam Hessler is a poet from New England. Hessler's work has been published in *Apocalypse Confidential*, *BRUISER*, and *DON'T SUBMIT*. They are currently a student at Vassar College and can be found on Twitter @poetryacct1518.

Dominic James was born in the Thames Valley, moved steadily upstream for years, now lives near Seven Springs in Gloucestershire. He follows

poetry meetings along the M4 corridor and has been widely published at home and abroad. Recently accepted by Stand and Dreich magazines, his work is described as well-crafted, warm, and humane. James has two full poetry collections: *Pilgrim Station* (SPM Publications, 2016) and *Smudge* (Littoral Press, 2022). djamespoetic.blogspot.com

Emilia Lehvonen-Shawki is a London-based queer/polyamorous poet living with her wife and their demon cat. She is often found writing sad love poems and things she wishes her mother will never read. She has most recently been published by the Travesties Press, God's Cruel Joke, Instant Noodles, and in an anthology by Victoriana Press.

Ethan McGuire is a writer and healthcare cybersecurity professional whose essays, fiction, poetry and reviews have appeared in Better Than Starbucks, The Dispatch, Emerald Coast Review, Literary Matters, New Verse News, The University Bookman, and other publications. Ethan lives with his wife and their daughter in the Florida Panhandle on the Gulf of Mexico.

John McKeown is a former theatre critic (The Irish Times, Irish Independent, Irish Daily Mail) currently living in Prague. As poet, he is the author of *Night Walk* (Salmon Press, 2011), *Sea of Leaves* (Waterloo Press, 2009), *Looking Toward Inis Oirr* (South Tipperary Arts, 2003) and the self-published *Amour Improper* (Hub Editions, 2004). As an erotic writer, he is the author of *Faustina and the Barbarians* (A Hotter State, 2013), *Vampire Abbey, Battle for Vampire Abbey* (Xcite Books, 2013) and *Aphrodisia* (2014). His latest volume of poetry, *Ill Nature*, was published by Mica Press in 2022.

Richard C. Owens is a poet, photographer, lawyer (retired), adjunct law professor (technology law and policy; retired), senior fellow in a Canadian think tank, and a journalist published in all of Canada's national newspapers as well as the Wall Street Journal. Born in Montreal, he lives

in Toronto. He is an extensively published writer on legal and policy matters. He has long been an energetic advocate for artists' rights and for women's reproductive rights.

Mykyta Ryzhykh was the winner of the international competition Art Against Drugs and the contests Vytoky, Shoduarivska Altanka, and Khortytsky Dzvony; she was made laureate of the literary competition named after Tyutyunnik, Lyceum, and Twelve, named after Dragomoshchenko; she has also been nominated for a Pushcart Prize. Her poetry has appeared in many journals including Dzvyn, Dnipro, Bukovinian, Polutona, and Rechport.

Partha Sarkar, a resident of Ichapur, West Bengal, is a graduate who writes poems inspired by the late Sankar Sarkar and his friends (especially Deb Kumar Khan) in protest against social injustices and crimes against nature. His poems have appeared in various magazines in both Bangla and English.

Andrew Senior is a writer of short fiction and poetry based in Sheffield, UK. His poems have appeared, or are forthcoming, in Vaine, Frogmore Papers, The Heartland Review, Abridged, and The Honest Ulsterman. andrewseniorwriting.weebly.com

Nastia Svarevska is a London-based curator, editor and writer from Latvia. She writes for an artist-run magazine Doris Press, and her poetry has been featured in Ink Sweat & Tears and MONO. Fiction. In 2022, she was long-listed for the MONO. Poetry Prize.

E. J. Whitlock is a writer based in Washington, D.C. His poetry, essays and interviews can be found in The Dial (Queens' College), Lunulae, and Blisspop. He can be reached at ej_whitlock.outlook.com.

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