



The Crank

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*the*CRANK.

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RYAN RUBY

Le Tombeau de James Joyce

1.

The library on Zähringerplatz may
Not have been as stately as the one on
The Via della Madonna del Mare,
And it may have had a smaller collection
Than the one on the Rue de Richelieu,
But that mattered less than this: it was not
The one on Kildare Street. Otherwise, you
Had to admit, Zürich was a decent
City to be in exile from exile.
His family fled there twice, after all,
During both the Great War and the Greater.
He, Nora, and George are buried at Fluntern,
Their silence disturbed only by the lions,
Cunning in their cages at the zoo next door.

2.

Sometimes it takes a lawsuit over a pair
Of trousers to clarify the importance
Of things. —What did you do in the Great War,
Mr. Joyce? a veteran of the trenches
Asks the pacifist author in the play
Travesties by Tom Stoppard. His question,
That tone of voice, can still be heard today,
From those who have yet again forgotten
That the only end of war is the end
Of war. The retort: —I wrote *Ulysses*.
What did you do? Of your regiment's grim
Work in Flanders, what remains? A muddy field,
Featureless, like the face of Eupeithes,
Father of Antinous, Troy's last victim.

3.

The Irish government refused Nora's
Request to repatriate his body,
But the Swiss government didn't need to be
Asked to exhume him to a place of honor
Higher up the hill. It even commissioned
A life-sized bronze cartoon of him, complete
With dark glasses and the ashplant, cigarette
Half-smoked in the left hand, book half-opened
In the right. By whom, I wondered. Shakespeare?
Dante? Homer? Clearly I was not alone.
On a nearby sign, seven words appear
In English: *Please do not walk on the grave.*
But falling snow knows nothing of signs. The stone
Is now harder to decipher than the oeuvre.

4.

His father taught him the words to ballads. Mine?
Taught me trivia. One year, for his birthday,
His colleagues taped a quote to a cardboard crown.
—Who said it? he catechized. Category:
Dead Irish Writers. —OK, Dad. I'll take
Author Quotes for five dollars, please. —Answer:
He claimed: 'A man of genius makes no mistakes...'
—Who is Swift? —No. —Who is Wilde? —No. —Stoker?
Who said it then? —Joyce. —Who? The consolation
Prize for my errors was a used copy
Of a novel with a pale, snotgreen spine.
Paternity, as he also claimed, may be
A legal fiction, but that quote, it turns out,
Was the portal to a mystical estate.

5.

Clinamen of a strain of influenza:
Simplifying greatly, a century
Ago, a series of neurons fired
Somewhere in the prefrontal cortex that is
Now dust beneath my feet with sufficient
Force to clear the threshold of awareness,
Appearing in the abbreviated
Form he called epiphany, encoded
Into the standard symbol system known as
The Latin alphabet, and preserved in print:
If to read is to perform this process
In reverse, one does not become a writer,
One *contracts writing*: yes, literary
Influence is best understood as the

*Friedhof Fluntern
Zürich, Switzerland
19 January 2020*

PAUL TAYLOR-MCCARTNEY

Sergius

Here lies a
Roman General
Most venerated.

Famed for
Heroic stints in several
Campaigns of note.
The toast of
Pliny and Hannibal.
Twice-captured, twice-escaped.
Nigh on two years chained
To a rock, hand and foot
Bitterly hacked off
To have him show humility
Toward his captors.

Four long wars later,
He's crowned victorious.
Thousands of men killed
And only two gallant stallions lame—
(this drawing grief from him
of the worst kind).

In repose,
He sits with blacksmith
Day and night to have memory

Fashion a right hand
Made of iron,
One to match his resolve.

Emboldened,
Cremona falls.
Placentia razed to the ground.
Half of Gaul enslaved.
Sergius as praetor
Barks down any
Critics who call him infirm:
Half-man. Half-metal.

All these centuries later,
An arm still crosses
His chest;
Hand as
Appendage rusted,
But guarding his heart's as yet
Unyielded secrets.

ROY WOOLLEY

Arrival

I don't know how you made it through the roundness
of a sleeping pill, across the cobalt-dark
of the welling Atlantic, threading the blue distance
I watched from the balcony of a rented Spanish house

to find the clearest path that led to the village,
noting the low-slung roses I'd seen the previous day,
before feigning illness in a room only I could dream
where, as I tried to comfort you, you kissed me on the mouth.

If the days

are wet footprints that lead from the river
then are years those tracks in the distance
circling a house you've known since childhood
where everything is losing its name?

JOHN MCKEOWN

Real Life

I've lost track of it,
my real life; but it's there
dying of cold, close by;
its shivers running through me.

I almost pity it;
naked, radical, a bag of bones,
knock-kneed purpose, pregnant; its waters
breaking in the snow.

OLIVIA SUTHERLAND

Triptych

i) A Verse to Quarantine

Limp days drift thinly down the stairs,
sliding into nights. In pied-à-terres,
the bourgeoisie is basking in the glare
of double-glazed, mediated light.

Shameless, to write poetry
from my open-air prism.
I am playing artless solitaire.
I am hemming in my vision.

*I was the shadow of the waxwing slain
By the false azure of the windowpane:
Stilled. Airless. Metafictional.
Charmingly arcane.*

The sun-stained façade of the yellow cinema
cannot hide the slimness of the screen.
We are closer to our sickness than we seem.
We are closer to each other than we seem.

ii) The Bends

The bus is hushed with deep-sea
breathers and wet that leaks
in fissures down the glass.
Wet in the gaps of my mask
where the humbling hiss
of my own breath is issuing.

The mono-myth of my ability,
once a certainty, is crumbling.
Swept on the tide of a parallel time
that stole four months of my life,
a reified shrine of certified pride
has become a sodden relic.

Look on my words, writ in water, on the pane.
Look on the murky monitor screen,
where my double smiles and sways.

iii) Resurfacing

As nights smile broadly on our days
the world succumbs to frequent sleep,
beguiled by distant galaxies
humming in the starry deep

their far-off song – while rust engulfs
the cityscapes and the grass grows long.
The bus slides past the cinema
and I slumber behind glass,

as spectres of the Sunday film
leak, pallid, from the past
to blur themselves with phantoms
of our fitful rest turned numb:

I shake the slurring fog of sleep,
and wake, and write what dreams may come.

SAM SMITH

Snores

Snores saw through the still air
of a closed house.

Dreaming the brain is unembarrassed, clefts and runnels unloosed, thoughts unprisoned, is when infinity becomes too narrow a consideration. Here be images – a piece of rough ground, cindered gravel, frayed shirt cuff, chipped fingernail... These small scenes, unremarked during the everyday when thoughts were elsewhere, here in dream's seeming narrative they take on a worrisome significance. Now a single pine tree on a rocky outcrop. Ego happy to call it quintessentially Japanese. Before being confronted by a man with a certain knowledge of everything. Mushy organ music within a church's thick grey walls, graveyard gates of death without number; stumble upon a low circular wall, look down to

well's silver disc:
keyhole shadow
of own self

STEPHEN WADE

North with Basho

*Basho (1644-1694) felt the pull of the North.
Japan and Britain don't seem so different if you read his haiku
in any place with the litter of modernity.*

Poets do go North
in April, Basho my friend,
to take stock of love.

When forsythia glows
in suburban enclosures,
we long for wide skies.

You bared your young limbs
to the flames of mountain gods;
they licked you golden.

But why should scribblers
like me remember your words?
Because they soothe me?

No, they only hurt.
but they pain like a love-bite;
sweet words that blister.

Our world is tired now,
my fire-and-sigh friend.
We need simple poems.

Just as you wrote down,
like a peace correspondent,
the front-line action,

now, in sheer conceit,
I'm listening for the gun-shots
that only words make.

Starting your journey,
you found and pitied a child
left to die alone.

O Basho, each day here
we have eyes projecting death
into our own hearths.

The laments of kids
not understanding their loss
in a stone-faced world,

this is the image
that burns into my own soul
leaving town in spring.

In Israel a boy sobs
surveying his father's corpse;
next door, they're deaf.

You left the child, though,
old poet of the hills, to grub
around for worms, bugs,

whatever it found:
you wanted no burden but
to beat the next man
with a sound haiku.

Am I wasting time?
Do all poets and dreamers
have to leave children

and do we need hearts
of steel, cultured men with words
counting our metres

and matching our poems
while millions ask for parents?
I know your cool answer.

MARC WOODWARD

The End of New Orleans

The hump-backed moon walks the last waitress home,
stalks through south-facing yards and dog-piss lawns.

Jazz tourists weave like liquid cadenzas. A cat-house keeper,
crowned with the last bird's nest in town, smokes a 3am reefer.

Pulling at stanchions and wharf-side pilings, the ocean will one day fling
the whole city piecemeal, big and easy, into the end of all things.

It'll take what Katrina left: cars and canes and shotgun shacks.
This time even wealthy white folk floating off in Cadillacs.

On a B-flat Selmer *Taps* sounds the death of the Crescent City,
punching the air down stream where rust gnaws the Chalmette refinery.

The Earth, like some Southern dowager, is tired of silly kids.
Their noise! Their mess! Whose are these brats? Get rid!

Her gibbous cousin once lit the lost beasts of prehistory,
great leviathans split his face, a white hubcap on the sea.

KATHERINE MEEHAN

The Walk to Reading Station

Every broken-heart day I have wandered
this part of town. I'm not from around here. The Costa

stinks of home, years ago. What a shit home.
Were there klaxons ringing somewhere when I married you?

Why did I not listen to my friends? The flakes of a sausage
roll get sucked away in the wake of the X40. Someone's sick

has missed the bin yet again. This is Reading.
Culturally bald, never your first choice. Am I Reading?

Some lady has parked her pram out on Station Road.
All day I've had a spasm in my gut.

I think you will divorce me for stupid reasons
and I will not care because of the pain. The station reclines

like the world's most uncomfortable sun lounger.
Say I'm an awful place to love, but you will try.

Articles of Complaint

Our hogs were starving when the range was closed,
Our bees so hungry, honey turned to dust,
Our river's dead and gone up in a cloud,
And Satan's tramping ground is clogged with *feeps*.
Our cryptic hillside lights have all gone out,
Which may be on account of homemade gin,
The road gets pocked and beat like trash by drought
And wayward phantoms lost out in the woods
Get ignored by all. That costs a lot of effort.
The rain here smells like cum. Wal-Mart
Is out of corn again. There are not enough cashiers.
The weather has massacred my entire family, and my house
Rears up on its columns. I have seen a man lash a slave
Without bothering to unseat himself from his horse.

EAMONN STEWART

The Equerries

The worst thing in life is getting used to things.
Thousands of hangovers traded for a spark of *jamais vu*.
Cats claw at trash bags flimsy as graphene
This was the veil that was lifted from me.

Callous, like modern mountaineers.
Oblates of the craving for oblivion.
Butterflies sip nectar. Houseflies sip ordure.
Waking, I was back in Byzantium
With the sounding boards calling the faithful to prayer.
It was just kids battering the plywood
That lazy builders left behind.
The fontanelles of the loudspeakers
Shed exquisitely tangible sounds.
Still, I overheard the drunk who said
Semtex looks like earwax.
They've swapped their grandparents' fear
Of the iron lung for the sunbeds and dread
Of not enough sun.
In the Loney they would have been Lachikos
But now they are trendy Comprachicos
Whose faces are portentless Dodonas.

Do they tinkle in the dark night of the soul?
Piercings evoke some Disney Saint Sebastien—
Their integuments anthropomorphic Lascaux
That Bradbury's *Illustrated Man* would not know.

Carl Sagan said we are genetically close to trees.
Sunbeds turn their skin to bark—Ovid would have balked
At such metamorphoses.
Petals softer than real fontanelles
Pulsatile, pullulating in sloth.
The Anther is a finger and thumb
Rubbing scales from the gaudiest butterflies
Pluripotent odours, pollen climbing the viscosity of air.

An old man passing a black plastic bag:
The wind moved the neck, it looked like a Faithfull dog
As if acknowledging, the old man looked down.
On the loom of the park railings
An *eclatique* tapestry of the mundane.
The Mama and Papa tube recalled,
Like a prop from Dr. Who.
Proprieties in their Goldilocks Zone—
Pared with bigotry's microtome.

They've swapped their parents' fear
Of the Iron Lung for sunbeds and dread of not enough sun.
In the Loney they would've been Lachikos

But now they are trendy Comprachicos.
Carl Sagan said we are genetically like trees
Sunbeds turn their skin to bark
Ovid would have balked at such metamorphoses.
Their faces are portentless Dodonas, or
Do they tinkle in the dark night of the soul?
Piercings evokes some Disney Saint Sebastian
Their integuments anthropomorphic Lascaux

Bradbury's *Illustrated Man* wouldn't know.

Cigarette paper Golems—embouchures that rival flautists'
Send themselves off on pointless missions
Hungry as Pac Man, ravening without remission.
In synesthetic proprioception I feel
An asteroid with rings and water on the moon.
One day I will clear my mind of these things
How I bought shortcake in Brigadoon...

Here is their Burning Bush—
A creosote plant and triboelectric sand
It's message for a tribe in a rush is
It's really ourselves we cannot stand.
Cocaine is the Hamon on their blade.
They are flies on the axle of history
Drunken with self-praise they cry
'See what a dust we raise!'

Glissandos on the metal-head lice comb
One more Herostratic spliff
And their idyll ends in maundering
Chiliastic panic, the Palace of Wisdom
On the bottom of the Lethe
Where Lotos-Eaters scoff Ramen Noodles
The synteresis is snuffed out.

DAGNE FORREST

Lost in the Woods

a compressed sestina

Light abounds in our endless green prison.
A prism, it glows green, spills untold hours:
time defined by distant light around the verdant
green. The stream runs, subdued flame rippling
whorls in virescent dawn. Our doubt flowers,
grows unchecked. Adrift, at sea with our selves.

LAUREN THOMAS

Flood

I can charge those floodgates
Hit the tempo and rest in place
The air can rush in and
Slam me down
I can run to black cliff
If I want
I can see its mouth
I can carry the empty
Body lost into air
Along the beach
Littered with
All those shrunken
Shells
Worn with holes
Half spirals and shine
I can lay that weathered vessel down
I can whisper, I can
Cast it out
To sea
In a tiny wooden boat

JAMES THORNTON

Swash and backwash

Swash and backwash as sea strokes shore accreting and eroding. What falls into the swash and backwash falls away. What falls away is the pain of the heart tied tight from hours on the screen so you nearly scream though you want to smile and try to smile. What falls away is the repetitive worry sown by evidence that some who claim friendship are enemies. Though you know your enemy is your teacher the one who shows the path to patience though you know this and try to be grateful for your enemies' help along the path it is hard to recall hard to be grateful when you are dodging cars and putting in long hours in polluted cities. What falls away falls into the sea while a blackbird sings his song older than all of us. The blackbird sings by a church being rethatched for the hundredth time in its long career. His song floats above the chirruping of sparrows above the wails of gulls above the cries of children above the swash and backwash. What falls away falls away and opens into an appreciation though partial always partial and necessarily partial an appreciation of the sweep of causes that led to this moment and this falling away this grateful moment.

My spacesuit

My space helmet
is getting wrinkles
all over the surface

my suit creaky
at the joints
my battery pack
slower to charge
draining more quickly

but this is still a good
planet to be visiting

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

Dagne Forrest's poetry has appeared in or will soon appear in *K'in Literary Journal*, *Prime Number Magazine*, *Not Very Quiet*, *The Moving Force Journal*, and *Sky Island Journal*; her creative nonfiction is in *Paper Dragon*.

John McKeown is a freelance arts journalist and former theatre critic for the *Irish Daily Mail* and *Irish Independent*. He has four poetry collections in print: *Night Walk* (Salmon Press, 2011), *Sea of Leaves* (Waterloo Press, 2009), *Amour Improper* (Hub Editions, 2004) and *Looking Toward Inis Oirr* (South Tipperary Arts, 2003). He lives and works in Prague.

Katherine Meehan holds a Master's in Creative Writing from the University of Oxford. Her poetry has appeared in *Brittle Star* and *Ink, Sweat & Tears*. She is working towards her first collection.

Ryan Ruby is the author of *The Zero and the One: A Novel* (Twelve Books, 2017) and *Context Collapse*, which was a Finalist for the 2020 National Poetry Series. Recently his writing has appeared in *3:AM Magazine*, *VQR*, *POETRY*, and the *New York Review of Books Daily*. In 2019, he was the recipient of the Einstein Fellowship from the Einstein Forum in Potsdam. He lives in Berlin.

Sam Smith is editor of *The Journal* magazine and publisher of Original Plus books. Author of several novels and collections of poetry, he currently lives in Blaengarw, South Wales. | thesamsmith.webs.com

Eamonn Stewart was born in Belfast in 1964. He was twice awarded 1st prize in the Irish National Children's Poetry Competition. After GCE exams he trained as an advertising photography assistant but chose to work in the community arts field. He was homeless for many years because of an undiagnosed mental illness, and was a curator at the Red Barn Gallery in Belfast. He is now retired because of chronic ill-health,

but has worked pro bono as a DP in some student films. Currently he is concentrating on large format fine art photography.

Olivia Sutherland is a poet living in Brighton. Having graduated from the University of Cambridge in 2020, her poetry has mainly appeared in student and youth publications, such as *Cambridge Notes* magazine, *TCS*, and *Hebe* young poet's magazine. She has previously won a New Writing South Young Writer's grant, and first prize in her age category in Brighton May Festival Peacock Poetry Prize. On her podcast, *Months of Sundays*, she discusses politics, film and literature.

Paul Taylor-McCartney is a doctoral researcher with Leicester University, following a PhD in Creative Writing. His research interests include dystopian studies, 20th century literary criticism, and initial teacher education. His poetry, short fiction and academic articles have appeared in a range of notable publications including *Aesthetica*, *The Birmingham Journal of Language and Literature*, *Education in Practice* (National Association of Writers in Education), *Intima: A Journal of Narrative Medicine*, and *Dyst: A Literary Journal*. He lives and works in Cornwall. | paultm.org

Lauren Thomas is a poet and senior leader in education. In between writing, she teaches English Literature in Hertfordshire. Originally of Welsh heritage, Lauren studied English Literature at Swansea University and pursued postgraduate studies at the University of Warwick.

James Thornton is a poet, writer, ecolawyer and Zen priest. His first collection of poems, *The Feynman Challenge*, appeared in 2017 and his second, *Notes from a Mountain Village*, in 2020. He is a judge of the Laurel Prize for Poetry for 2021. Born in New York, he is a citizen of Ireland and the USA. James is also the founding CEO of the global environmental group ClientEarth, which uses law to protect planet and people. His most recent work of nonfiction, *Client Earth*, co-authored

with husband Martin Goodman, won the Judge's Category, Business Book of the Year Award 2018. He lives with Martin in London, Lowestoft and the French Pyrenees. | clientearth.org

Stephen Wade has been involved in the world of poetry for many years, writing numerous essays and reviews for *Agenda*, *Acumen* and other poetry journals. His first collection, *Churwell Poems*, was published by Littlewood Arc in 1987 and his next, *Stretch* – based on his work as a writer in prisons – is out in 2021 from Smokestack. He is currently writing a memoir of said prison work.

Marc Woodward is an Anglo-American poet and musician living in rural Devon, England. He has been widely published and was shortlisted for the 2018 Bridport Prize, commended for the 2020 Acumen Prize, and the 2021 Aesthetica Creative Writing award. In 2018 he was a Writer-in-Residence at The Wellstone Center in Santa Cruz, CA. His collections include *A Fright of Jays* (Maquette, 2015), *Hide Songs* (Green Bottle, 2018), and a collaboration with Andy Brown, *The Tin Lodes* (Indigo Dreams, 2020). | marcwoodwardpoetry.blogspot.com

Roy Woolley resides in Derby. He graduated as Master of Studies with Distinction in Creative Writing from the University of Oxford in 2009 and was one of the winners in the 2010, 2013 and 2016 Radcliffe Science Library Parallel Universe competitions. A prose piece, 'Three Attacks from the Hip', is forthcoming in *Powder*.

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To be considered for future issues of *The Crank*, send up to four previously unpublished poems in a doc/pdf to contact@thecrankmag.com with 'Submission' in the subject line. Simultaneous submissions welcome. Please see thecrankmag.com/subs for details of deadlines, etc.