



The Crank

Edited and produced by Humphrey Astley in Oxford, England.

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Set in Goudy Old Style.

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NICOLE LEE

Lady Ghost Writer

Mama played the erhu
petals slowly falling
when I spoke of home
she smiled air stilling
teardrops slowly falling

At six I could write
better than the tutor
at fourteen the Emperor
smiled my hand was his
its only value this

Who are you? No-one
the other consorts said
as I traced my name they
smiled behind their fans
I wrote it again again

Councillor Han defied me
with the Emperor's brush
he died in Yujin Garden
I split his bitter gourd smile
with the Consent Imperial

Snow falls in the courtyard
owls fly in the pavilion
under my foot the broken
trigram *kun* ䷁ and smiling now
I Yin Nothing Darkness Tao

Pen-and-Ink Sketch

I dip the nib in the bottle
the ink rises up the barrel
and I'm in Saturday school
again from forty years past

I write crane it is not a crane
I try again like this: 飞鹤
Ink smears on the paper
Night settles on the marsh

Ink on the callus on my left
hand's index finger ink on
my nose my high cheekbone
just like in Mandarin class

The inky tide rises like a
silent eyelid sweeping shut
the lonely crane drowned
in the darkness that it casts

SEAN CHARD

Grotte de Lascaux

This cave wall is all I
Have of you, a silent
Outline of red pigment
From where you once blew
The earth around your hands
And drew new sketches of
Freedom in red and black
Of unbroken colts, wild
On a four-beat ride across
The prairies, and across
The sky of my mind like the
Lost light of the heavens
Reflected in your eyes.

And in this darkness you're here
With me and your hands are
Still warm with life on this
Cave wall, and you're real to
Me, no matter how much time
We've lost, you've shown me
The stars and the planets
And the true nature of how
Life spoke to you on the
Walls of this sacred place.

ANDREW NIGHTINGALE

A set of tools for bringing the light

What does this require? A piqued sextant, a pick
as fine as a second hand, a hand steady as an hour,
the finest calibrations on the swing of a pendulum,

a moral compass point, a vacuum chamber heart,
a hacked orrery for scooping brain,
miscellaneous gouging tools hooked

to brassy astrolabes, internal maps detailing
where the monsters are and a will, a smooth glass will
with an edge as sharp as electricity and pain,

it necessitates pain, the scalpel weaponised, grist
to the mill that grinds out copies of bodies, bodies
in an endless parade of teased gristle.

This is the work, it's what's required, the body
with organs removed, an empty vessel upended,
and a sure sense the original's the latest copy.

OZ HARDWICK

A Census of Preconceptions

No test is perfect. Lights flicker like wings on the edge of heaven and journalists rake through ashes at the foot of a dormant volcano. There are points to be raised about rights and privileges, scores to be apportioned for elegance and grace, and reports to be written concerning adaptation to 21st Century mores. Whoever's responsible has appointed an unbiased panel of three witches and three wise monkeys, furnished them with cauldrons and bananas, and fitted them all with radio mics and bodycams. They're forbidden to speak to reporters but can't resist dropping broad hints and banana skins to be paraded for the public once the ashes have been washed off. Preliminary analysis suggests a spike in shapeshifting, though this should not be mistaken for social mobility, and demonisation rates remain more-or-less constant. Levitation is the new normal – with or without wings – and light bends itself like a clown's balloons. No test is perfect and every day presents fresh problems, but trends are encouraging if we maintain a sense of decorum and keep believing in our regimen of placebos.

FREDERICK POLLACK

On Culture

On a ledge under a clerestory
window, playing sedately
with the light, a mask like a face
or a face like a mask. Pale
blue-green, features barely
incised in powdery
ceramic as if hidden
beneath the threshold of expression.
Despite himself, my guest is drawn to it.
“Often when I look at it,” I say,
“I think of Cycladic sculptures –
those beings who hug themselves thin
as if preparing for some reason
to be fish or arrows – too snooty
for any organ but a nose.
I always wanted one of those,
but of course...” “Where’s it from?” he growls.
“I’ve no idea,” I lie.
“It could be very ancient.”
“Perhaps they want it back,” he says,
“it might be sacred.” “Well, they’re most likely
dead,” I smile, “their seed
dispersed, in you, in me... So it
belongs to the future we are.
The same holds if I got it from
an artist. For art, if paid enough, is generous.”
He stares at it so as not to glare
at me, and speaks in heavy tones
about culture. Not wanting anything
to break, I don’t dispute
the term, only say that my aim
is to own and emasculate

all gods. He leaves angrily,
walks fearfully
among those types whose taste for violent
amusements scarcely substitutes for violence
and who like neither him nor me.

Must Go On

Rehearsals were dogged by illness, weather,
bad checks, breakdown of lights
and sound, the incompetence
of assistants, the habits of the director.
But the star wanted (needed)
the role, showed up, helped out, set
a standard. Then disaster struck.
As she picked herself up
and staggered among shards
of sets, grid, catwalk, lights, she
hugged to her breast the swaddled
doll from the second act.
Hushed it, cupped
its head, drew round it her vivid
serape, now almost too
convincing because of the dust.
Motivation is never a question but
a need. Not What happened? but rather,
say, Water. A child onstage
is all need. Through ruinous air
she peered for some way out of the village,
the flames. But the ghost
of the leading man (a friendly guerrilla)
came to encourage her and
she delivered something resembling
her lines.

GUY MARTYN

Some Paper Trees

The language speaks itself through us
unfolds our tongue with fingers thin
as edges in a five-card flush
the white gloves write a flourishing
denouement of small death just once
just look this once and die again
your speech suits my nude mouth's recurrence
is written down in rings of grain.

MATT BRYDEN

Divination

The six-year-old's perfect bones
are about to pronounce.

The entourage dons white gloves
for reading. One leans

on the Alfred jewel set at the head of a staff,
the scops

fertilise the bands, grip their cane handles.
All see the boats coming

overland, each hull carried by fifteen-plus.

Mute

He gave her an origami swan
whose wing held a message.
The tag around its ankle was orange.

She applied lipstick in the taxi-cab
but at the picture-house entrance
he did not reach for her hand.

Outside the Cantonese as rain pelted down
he wished her happiness,
lifted and snapped the swan's wing

with an audible crack. Its inks
pooled and ran towards the central crease
falling, diluted, as he slipped

his arm beneath a loose raincoat,
left her trailing the backwards-running water
near the comb of a sluice gate.

LORELEI BACHT

Love of a Cabin Boy

wide awake at 3 a.m. a wave
of panic descends upon me
no hope to breathe no air no dreams
my bed the bottom of the sea

my mother drowned her mother drowned
her mother's mother drowned yet I
imagined I would live what a foolish
and tender little thing a waterlogged heart is

as I founder grasp for water gasp
for whatever I used to have I remember
small warm bodies I held and kissed
to sleep someone used to call me mommy

how did I accomplish the infinite necessities
of a human existence to laugh to breathe
to remember one's name hold someone's hand
it seems marvellously impossible to me

ROY DUFFIELD

songbird chick
thrown from the nest—
vow of silence

JEFFREY PRIVETTE

syphilis is proof that Nietzsche loathed women
and *Ecce Homo* proves he was also insane –
he said rude things to cretins and *Fick dich* to churchmen
and on Bismarck and Deutschland shat gallstones of blame –
but for all his dementia, perversion, and shame
he was a clear and insightful thinker, philosopher sublime:
the great pity is that he died still quite in his prime –

BRIAN JACOBS

Homocaust

faggot
performer

exhausting
a burning stick

I am
god's gunt

a reject
in a Georges Bataille compost

Lazurustingly adrift
in the Jain burial sky

that unfurls
shock

into the marginal sassafras' den
of this *Lucretia*

LEX KWAM

Soil

dreams come true are deceptive;
I've lost my mind in your mouth
and not even you can say
how far gone I've grown.

how far gone I've grown—
so long, spring in my
step! it's Spring.

(she's not herself as long
as she's the impression in which
he spreads his sleepy hand.
nights? they're soil, not air.)

MIKE FERGUSON

Concert of the Lawn and Garden

Every culture makes
music, every sward sings,
but a field of barley is

clapping when ready
for its harvest. Samuel
loved listening to his

Aeolian grass, not
famously as in *faint moonlight*
yet pantheistically.

I noticed on this warm July day
how in direct sunlight, bamboo
also applauds itself, rhythmically.

Mowing the lawn is a
heavy metal gig; Tom Jones
intones a musicality of home.

CHRISTIAN WARD

The Burning

Flecks from the community bonfire
might be moths spiralling upwards
and outwards, landing on everything
dripping light: doorways, gaps too thin
for shadows, wing mirrors, dustbin lids,
patches in calico fur, wildflower petals
doubled like Spock's eyelids and a
broken mirror sunning itself on the pavement.
Dogs chase each fleck while their owners
look deep into the flames, wanting to cast
every sin they had into it and inhale its noxious,
venerable smoke.

RICHARD HOLTER

The Shortest Day

The leafless branches wait to grow
The leaves all rot beneath the snow
And though the robin sings in hope
The wind is strong, the sun is low.

But frozen scenes like this belie
A chain of days unbroken by
The shadow of the turning earth
The silence of the sleeping eye.

For underneath these barren fields
Potential forms of daffodils
Are pushing for the light of spring
And turning time's eternal wheel.

CAROLYN GILLESPIE

Axial Tilt

The last snowflake settled
on the crown of the sentry crow
who guarded the rookery behind the Hall.
His beak glowed emerald and opened wide.
And from the black back of his kraaing gullet
spat forth a ball of sound and light
which filled the sky with its nascent green hum.

The last primrose petal fell
on the shell of the sentinel snail
who guarded the dung heap down at the Mill.
Her shell glowed violet and the whorl uncurled.
And from the coal hole of her carbon calyx
surged forth a wave of dew and silver
which quenched the earth with its sating tide.

The last dandelion tickled
the nose of the watchdog fox
who guarded the gatehouse at the top of the drive.
His breath glowed amber and his snout flared broad.
And from the red bed of his nasal fossa
tore forth a whip of wind and darkness
which stung the trees with its auburn burn.

The last brown beech leaf dropped
in sight of the keeper kite
who guarded the path to Mad Wifie's cottage.
Her tail glowed ruby and spread, full fanned.
And from the rudder shudder of her forked tail
shot forth plumes of fire and silence
that burned the world to a monochrome hush.

Repeat

D. S. MAOLALAI

A poet, apparently

for Pat

he used to come by
selling magazines,
newspapers,
trinkets, and tickets
for door-to-door charity
raffles. my mother thought him
at least an intelligent bird –
and a poet apparently
also. She'd have him in
when he called sometimes;
feed him cups of tea,
biscuits and sweetly
strong coffee. the only man
she ever allowed
dump ash on her clean
kitchen table. I didn't
admire him, in spite
of his insights
because I was a child
and a teenager, and he
just a shapeless
grey pigeon,
oiled fluff and broken
down feathers. a son
who didn't speak to him,
a wife dead, a recovering
alcoholic. I met him
again in my twenties,
just in passing on the street
near to phibsborough.

my mother had told him
I was a poet now too
and he handed me some
of his poems. god
they were absolute
garbage. just utter
unreadable shit.

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

[Lorelei Bacht](#) is a European poet who started writing again after embracing and quitting political lobbying, moving to Asia, welcoming two beautiful children and failing two marriages. Not everything she writes is true. Her recent writing has appeared and/or is forthcoming in such publications as *OpenDoor Poetry*, *Litehouse*, *Visitant*, *Quail Bell*, *The Wondrous Real* and *The Wells Street Journal*.

[Matt Bryden](#) is a poet and teacher living in Somerset. He has a pamphlet *Night Porter* (Templar), a collection *Boxing the Compass* (Templar) and a book of translation *The Desire to Sing after Sunset* (Showwe). In 2018 he won a Literature Matters award from the Royal Society of Literature and in 2019 won the William Soutar and Charroux Memoir Prizes.

Sean Chard is a graduate of the Open University, where he gained a BA in Humanities with Distinction in Creative Writing. Chard has featured in various publications including *Popshot Quarterly*, *HereComesEveryone* and *Bounds Green Book Writers*. On the inside he's a poet and flaneur, on the outside he's a customer service guy.

Roy Duffield is the art editor at *Anti-Heroin Chic* journal and in the last year his writing has been selected by over 50 publications, such as *Into the Void* (Saboteur Reviews Best Magazine 2017 & 2018), *The Journal of Wild Culture*, and the *London Reader's* forthcoming Counterculture issue. He obtained a First-Class Honours degree in Creative Writing from Bath Spa University, where he has since returned as lecturer.

Mike Ferguson is an American permanently resident in the UK. He is published widely in online zines and journals; his latest print collections are *The Loneliest Sound* (Knives Forks & Spoons Press, 2019) and *And I Used to Sail Barges* (Red Ceilings Press, 2020).

Carolyn Gillespie is originally from Scotland and now lives in West Horsley, Surrey. Her first book, *Pilgrim*, is a memoir of her journey to Santiago de Compostela, a pilgrimage of some 900km; she also wrote *Wonder Child*, a collection of poems for children, and recently finished a first novel, *Visitation*. Her work has appeared in *Oddity*, *Molecule Tiny Lit Mag*, *Coin Operated Press* zine and *Scotland Outdoors*.

[Oz Hardwick](#) is a York-based poet whose work has been widely published in international journals and anthologies. His chapbook *Learning to Have Lost* (IPSI, 2018) won the 2019 Rubery International Book Award for Poetry; his most recent publication is the prose poetry sequence *Wolf Planet* (Hedgehog, 2020). He is Professor of English at Leeds Trinity University, where he leads the postgraduate Creative Writing programmes.

R. J. Holter lives and works in Sussex. He is currently studying for a degree in Literature and Creative Writing with the Open University. This is his first published work.

Brian L. Jacobs has been teaching English for thirty 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 also a three-time Fulbright Scholar and NEH grant recipient.

Lex Kwam studied sculpture in the Netherlands before moving to the UK and taking up poetry. Their day job is as an assistant in human rights law.

Nicole Lee was born in Kuala Lumpur and educated at Malvern and Oxford. She has worked as a banker in London and Hong Kong and now lives in Wandsworth, where she works in Kew and writes poetry. She has been published in a number of online journals and longlisted in the National Poetry Competition.

D. S. Maolalaí has been nominated eight times for Best of the Net and five times for the Pushcart Prize. He has published two collections, *Love is Breaking Plates in the Garden* (Encircle Press, 2016) and *Sad Havoc Among the Birds* (Turas Press, 2019).

Guy Martyn is a writer and headteacher who helped set up a Free School, but with all the best intentions. He has studied Literature, Drama, Psychology, Mysticism and Religious Experience, and is training in Psychotherapy.

Andrew Nightingale's poems have recently appeared in *Black Flowers, Ink Sweat & Tears* and *Street Cake*. He lives in St Leonards-on-Sea, UK and works in animal welfare charity.

Frederick Pollack is the author of two book-length narrative poems from Story Line Press, *The Adventure* and *Happiness*; the former is to be reissued by Red Hen Press. He has also published two collections, *A Poverty of Words* (Prolific Press, 2015) and *Landscape with Mutant* (Smokestack Books, 2018).

Jeffrey Privette is a poet and philosopher living in Knoxville, Tennessee. He earned a PhD from the University of Edinburgh and practices traditional and experimental poetry with a particular interest in soundscapes. His book *Constructive Realism* is scheduled for publication later this year; in the meantime, he is writing a commentary on Ecclesiastes in verse from the point of view of a schizophrenic.

Christian Ward is a UK-based writer who can currently be read in *Culture Matters* and *Poetry and Places*. Future poems will be appearing in *Sein Und Werden*, *Impspired* and *The Pangolin Review*.

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