



*The Crank*

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# *the*CRANK.

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ALAN DUNNETT

## Scriptorium

This is where I find you, seated, your back  
to me. If you turn, I must see your face  
as it was though I start at the rictus

and, if you stretch out a hand that's a claw,  
I must withdraw in spite of what you were,  
in spite of myself.

You have been working

in this place of paper and leather: still,  
in repose, reflecting, as in a dream.  
I am here now, dreaming too, my fortune

behind me; where, on that door's other side,  
a shadow waits. There is no other way  
out. No sword is sharp enough? No breastplate

thick enough? I am here, damn you, walk up  
into daylight with me and brave them all.

R. C. DEWINTER

## Unshriven

Where do I find forgiveness  
now that my confessor is dead?  
I'm heavy and dark,  
my heart an antediluvian stone.

Now that my confessor is dead  
I have no compass.  
My heart an antediluvian stone  
stained with the ink of guilt.

I have no compass.  
The wind sings in the key of alone,  
stained with the ink of guilt.  
I wander the wilderness of the lost.

The wind sings in the key of alone.  
I'm heavy and dark;  
I wander the wilderness of the lost.  
Where do I find forgiveness?

SPARTAKOS ANAGNOSTARAS

## A blanket

Chaotic city, you are a farmers' market that gets up at seven every morning to campaign against war and love

Strange city, life is the snow and life is the life of a beggar sitting by the side of the road and feeling the coldness of snow when snowflakes fall into his empty cup

Big city, I offer you my naive warmth and the beggar smiles wrapped in a blanket

My city, can you see with your vacuous stare the undertakers that are collecting the rubbish?

Never-sleeping city, death is the neighbourhood in which a blanket serves the forgotten

My charming city, the night is the drug-dealers that put their Bible on empty fruit stands and preach with a surgeon's skill

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CLARISSA AYKROYD

## Return to the Night City

after 'The Night City', W. S. Graham

Night, Blackfriars. Unmet again.  
I walked with a grumbling suitcase  
Behind me and the river smoked  
With rain. When I first arrived here  
You told me this would be my life.  
Seventeen, I didn't listen  
And then again at twenty-six.

The night watchmen circled round me  
Eyeing my unchanging accent  
And then climbed trees to fall asleep.  
I sat by the steaming river  
Where Holmes found me and kissed my hand  
Or else it was Joseph Conrad.  
(A Pole would do that, but not Holmes).

Dawn overwrote the night and I  
Found Smiley standing next to me  
Polishing his damp glasses with  
The fat end of his tie. I rose  
And asked my faithful suitcase to  
Follow. It shook itself awake  
Like a dog for a morning walk.

KYLE NEWMAN

## Backcast

Following the feeling of calling my childhood home  
and getting the disconnect tone, I step into the gorge  
with the intent to con the cutthroats' colors.  
I illicitly stream jazz off the clouds. If what I'm about  
is as protean as these baby rapids, then I'm inclined  
to finally do something for it. Break the switch  
I keep flipping. Adjust the dichotomy of these demons.  
Anything to get lost, and then find me again  
within the inflection of a long-hummed hum  
where I know the chorus, and leave it at that.

JOHN NEWTON WEBB

## Behold the Man

Now that his mind is digital,  
he sees life with tranquil clarity;  
uncomfortable thoughts he judges residual.  
When they asked him about the man that he killed,  
he lectured about humanity.  
*It is not right for a machine to feel shame  
or to shy from our one knowable  
trait: we are broken as soon as we're built.  
Man-made consciences are decoding our rituals;  
life is a murder mystery game:  
genetics, screen-time, spiritual  
crisis, caveman reflex. We have created guilt.*  
Here's how he proved his thesis:  
he broke a man's head into jigsaw pieces.

## Jenni and Steve's Manifesto for Child-Partnering

We will not dogmatise this baby  
We will not give it a name  
We will not look down on its tenderness  
We will not put its image in a frame

We will not assume a moral order  
We will not make up its mind  
We will not teach, we will leave it to learn  
We will not let it be defined

We will not say it has made a mistake  
We will not deny it the vote  
We will not caution, encourage or worry  
We will not load it with hope

We will not permit the gods to speak  
We will not chain it to the past  
We will not affirm the conscience  
We will not say anything lasts

We will show it affection that does not coerce  
We will try not to abuse  
We will hold it loosely in our arms  
Is this love? The baby can choose.

GRANT TARBARD

## Vase of Caged Birds

after 'Flock of Paper Birds', John McCullough

I craft the father of my childhood to be gone.

I enamelled the thunder of his anger

into a vase of caged birds. They scratch out  
alphabets with their keratin nibs,

writing chainmail into my flesh, trailing  
like a dropping feather from the sky

into this poem, retching ribbons of nouns  
as morning robins. A blackbird

makes its presence known, settling  
on my tongue as an empty house

of dove-white words, making my father  
as translucent as the stem of a feather.

TOM WILL

## Dove on the Moon

What a dove, made of lead, sees on the moon, made of silver, nestling down, in  
a soft crater, he looks to me, to be a teardrop.

CONSTANTINE BLINTZIOS

## Egret

It is:

The grace of a tiger, backwards

A splash around stepping stones

A spear steadying the water

A samurai's shorter sword

A crooked neck of shepherd's tool

A long arrow, skipped from its quiver

A stanza beneath helmet's visor

A budding white cotton

Grown from the steel of a black leg

From an outline

Unless blinked through the sun's ink blot

All of you is one!

\*Egret

ROBERT DUNSDON

## Corruption

Twenty-three degrees in the shade  
of four thick walls and a white radiator  
bright but for a blemish or two  
like a degraded tulip.  
To confirm this dreadful simile  
do I dare,  
do I dare go outside?



GREG HUTESON

## The Caregiver

Long addled by a thread of cultic thoughts,  
the pensive woman tended ritual bones—  
the pelvic bone, femurs, backbone, and skull—  
that she had draped within the wheelchair's frame  
at six that steaming morning for this stroll.

Her steady hand propped up the scaffolding  
much like an aide that's avid for the stage.  
Soon, as she pushed across the frond-lined park,  
the pigeons flitted in erratic rows  
to flee her rattling load for quiet grass.

Among her friends along a concrete wall  
a few steps' distance from a climbing frame  
and with their fleshless, slack-limbed charges near,  
she listened to a convoluted tale  
of porridges and pills and less and less to eat.

The liturgy of this, the call/response  
of it, the lapping murmurs of the rest,  
might mark the place as sacred ground, she thought,  
and cracked her knuckles absentmindedly  
while peering at the oak tree leaves for nymphs.

The words all said, the morning petered out,  
she stood and stretched and raised her holy hands.  
In just a moment, she would grab the grips  
glued on the relic's battered leather chair  
and walk, now cleansed, back to the red wood door.

E. J. WHITLOCK

## The third pill is a shield

It is also shaped like a shield.

Neat etchings – some far-off taxonomy –  
emboss each pill's brittle pink shell.

It is about the size and color of the suffocated  
skin beneath my pinky fingernail.

My grandfather held, in his palm, my pill's  
demented relative. I don't know what happened to him,  
beyond that he died. And, before that, routinely saw flames  
swallow his floorboards. Our pills sorted us out.

Before I joined him, up there, we only had  
old photographs in common. In this one,  
he holds my hand as I tightrope along  
a seawall. I forgive him for failing to warn me,  
as we were young and by the ocean.

LEX KWAM

## Three broken homes

the first I am too young to comprehend,  
unlike my siblings. they inherit  
the photos, I the flashes.

\*\*\*

the second's a long, illegal night of fire-  
works, in which we're all grown-up,  
wide awake, inert.

\*\*

the third is very much my own, poor  
bastard child that has to learn  
fast. split the atom.

\*

the fourth, the fifth, the sixth; the solstices.

## As if she

picture a woman with very long hair.  
they say such hair flows  
but this hair is frozen. or rather a child  
is frozen in time  
at the tips. her replacement is making a statement  
about her personae:  
*look at the fawn I have slain*, she commands,  
wearing it over  
her shoulder. *I killed it before any man  
had the chance. but its spirit  
lives on in my body, and one day it might  
return as the fruit  
of a gambol. bitter or sweet – a girl  
or a boy – shall we play?*  
she bunches her hair in both hands – elbows raised,  
exposing her neck –  
as if she might suddenly tear it all out.

EILÍN DE PAOR

## At Forty-Four

Wax flesh melts, reveals bone lace,  
brittle as a frosted leaf  
set against the season's change.

There comes a point the waves  
at Dollymount expose the breach –  
wax flesh melts, reveals bone lace,

storm the mute of days,  
crash the soul's keep,  
set against the season's change,

splinter through the brace,  
blast the brain's sleep –  
wax flesh melts, reveals bone lace,

leave a hollow cave,  
ransacked by a thief,  
set against the season's change.

Beneath this sugarglass face,  
thin as gauze-edged reef,  
wax flesh melts, reveals bone lace,  
set against the season's change.

JOHN MCKEOWN

## Naivety

I never thought I'd live forever,  
but I did think time would be  
commodious enough for my dilatoriness.

How naive I was. It's my dilatoriness  
which is endlessly commodious;  
as if I were designed, not for time, but eternity.

ALISTAIR NOON

## Yue-Type Ceremonial Axe

The hand-hugged shaft has not survived,  
still less the names on which it swung  
its weight down, doing the ritual scythe,  
as some hired peasant heaved his lung.

Three thousand dull, dynastic years  
its blade-face had to oxidize,  
but that red time just disappears  
between the shape-glare and our eyes.

The in-cut ear-apostrophes  
and fence of teeth no dentist would like  
are flanks and vanguard to each eye that sees  
the target shrink before the strike,

each iris a bead that sits in a dip  
the cheekbone shapes by swooping down  
and up once more, each lid in the grip  
of the chevron eyebrows' cheery frown.

Above them runs a fringe of axe-fronds  
like somewhat Assyrian-looking hair,  
stiffer than still across the bronze.  
They made their axeheads with flair

back in the bone-script days of the Shang.  
Like everything, it's of its age,  
this lethal nib and dragon's fang  
sinking its way through the glossy page

before you, scalpel whose careful swing  
would leave the skin without a scar.

It slumbered through the Ming and Qing  
and assumes its place, *objet d'art*,

among these inky hills on paper,  
the orchard of running-style syllable-signs,  
the curling temple roofs and vapour,  
the fine, generic Asian pines.

It's come to rest in this perfect slot  
of moulded Perspex propping its chin.  
It's ceremonial. But for what?  
Look at it closely. Oh that grin

hides brutal footage of summary events.  
Bare of imprinted nape or hand,  
it lurks, and now transported hence  
three thousand years it takes the stand,

its ritual holder, let's assume,  
though no one's sure just what it did.  
My question, therefore, now to the room –  
we'll start at five – what am I bid?





## ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

**Spartakos Anagnostaras** was born in Athens, Greece and studied Linguistics at the Kapodistrian University of Athens, Computational Linguistics at the University of Essex, and Classical studies at the University of Leeds; he also studied violin at the Athens Conservatoire. He lives and works as a teacher of Latin and Greek in England.

**Clarissa Aykroyd** is originally from Victoria, Canada and now lives in London. Her poems and translations have been published internationally, and in 2019 her debut pamphlet *Island of Towers* was published by Broken Sleep Books. She is also the author of a blog on poetry and poets, [The Stone and the Star](#).

**Constantine Blintzios** is a Greek-British writer with a background in music and contemporary art; he holds an MSt in Creative Writing from the University of Oxford. His poetry, short stories and reviews have appeared in journals such as *Visual Verse*, *Ash*, *Paris Lit-Up*, the *Oxonian Review* and the *Literary Review*. His poem 'Where I Am From' was shortlisted for the 2017 Martin Starkie awards; he was also longlisted for the 2019 DISQUIET fiction prize and the Laxfield Literary Launch prize. His debut novel *The Smoke Is Me, Burning* will be published in 2022 by KERNPUNKT Press.

**Alan Dunnett's** collection *A Third Colour* was published by Culture Matters in 2018. He wrote/voiced the film-poem *Interrogation*, Best Experimental Film at the Verona International Film Festival 2019. 'Shot in the Head', a work informed by narratives from Columbians Displaced by Violence, appears in *The Very Edge* (Flying Ketchup Press, 2020). Other poems have appeared in *Ink Sweat & Tears*, *The New European*, *Skylight 47*, *Stand*, *The Recusant*, *New Poetry 6* (ed. Ted Hughes), *The Methuen Book of Theatre Verse*, *The Robin Hood Book* (Caparison), and *The Best New British and Irish Poets 2016* (Eyewear).

**Robert Dunsdon's** poetry and reviews have been published in both the UK and America. He is poetry editor with Between These Shores Books.

**Greg Hutesson** is a non-profit administrator. His poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *The Honest Ulsterman*, *The Brazen Head*, *Trinity House Review*, *Alabama Literary Review*, *Modern Age*, and other UK and US journals. He lives in Taiwan.

**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.

**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: (*Salmon Night Walk* 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.

**Alistair Noon** has published two collections with Nine Arches Press (*Earth Records*, 2012; and *The Kerosene Singing*, 2015) and a dozen chapbooks from various presses. His translations from the Russian of Osip Mandelstam, *Concert at a Railway Station: Selected Poems*, appeared from Shearsman Books in 2018. He lives in Berlin.

**K. G. Newman** is an Arizona State University alum and sportswriter who covers the Broncos and Rockies for the *Denver Post*. His first three collections of poems are available on Amazon; more info and writing can be found at kgnewman.com. He lives in Hidden Village, Colorado with his wife and two kids. | [Twitter](#)

**John Newton Webb** has worked as an actor and playwright and has had poems published in a variety of magazines. He currently lives in Sapporo, Japan. You can read some of his work and thoughts about poetry, especially post-war Japanese poetry, at johnnewtonwebb.blogspot.com.

**Eilín de Paor** lives in Dublin and works in health and social care. Her poems have been published by *Ink*, *Sweat and Tears*, *The Bangor Literary Journal*, *The Stony Thursday Book*, *Vox Galvia*, *Abridged*, *Dreich Wee Books*, and *An Capall Dorcha* (upcoming). Her debut pamphlet *In the Jitterfritz of Neon*, a collaborative conversation in poetry with fellow Dublin-based poet Damien B. Donnelly, will shortly be published by The Hedgehog Poetry Press. | [Twitter](#)

**Grant Tarbard** is the author of *Loneliness is the Machine that Drives the World* (Platypus Press) and *Rosary of Ghosts* (Indigo Dreams). His new pamphlet *This Is the Carousel Mother Warned You About* (Three Drops Press) and new collection *dog* (Gatehouse Press) will be out this year.

**E. J. Whitlock** is a writer based in Arbury, Cambridge. He is a regular contributor to *Blisspop* and convenes the Near-Miss Poetry Society of Philadelphia.

**Tom Will** writes poems and lives in the Southern States. He has been published in *Safety Propaganda*, *Misery Tourism*, *Apocalypse Confidential*, *Rejection Letters*, *New Pop Lit*, *Door is a Jar*, *Tragickal*, and *ZVONAiNARI*. | [Twitter](#)

**R. C. deWinter's** poetry is widely anthologized, notably in *New York City Haiku*, *Coffin Bell Two*, *Winter Anthology: Healing Felines and Femmes* (Other Worldly Women Press), *Now We Heal: An Anthology of Hope* (Wellworth Publishing), *2River*, *Event*, *Gargoyle Magazine*, *Meat for Tea: The Valley Review*, *Minnesota Review*, *Night Picnic Journal*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Southword*, *Twelve Mile Review*, and *York Literary Review*.

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