



Crowstep
Poetry Journal

COLLECTION 3

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A Well

We wished as children to throw
our parents' money down. Wait
for the plink, the drip-rung chime
hoping it would earn flowers
for what liver-wort fringed returns, nothing
but the monster clinging
itself back to light on spindling
arms and a moon curving to
our purpose, as sand rained down upon
the leant body, railing us.

The well-tended grounds speak of something
perhaps wrong, of the money at bottom,
the drained parents, a ring of light—place
where rain goes to die.

Giles Goodland's books include: *A Spy in the House of Years* (Leviathan, 2001), *Capital* (Salt, 2006), *Dumb Messengers* (Salt, 2012) and *The Masses* (Shearsman, 2018). *Civil Twilight* was published by Parlor Press in 2022. He has worked as a lexicographer, editor, and bookseller, and teaches evening classes on poetry for Oxford University's department of continuing education. He lives in West London.

Orange

In that saffron
Seventies kitchen
in the Curragh,

apropos perhaps
of some question
I may have asked

regarding
nights being dark
and days being bright,

you took an orange
in hand and
named it Earth,

and by the window
set it turning on
your fingertips,

illuminating
how the dark side
advanced into light.

A sultana
fixed to the skin
on a cocktail stick

was there, then,
the kitchen, you and
me in daylight,

facing the sun
moving all the while
towards night.

We're gone
this long time from
that kitchen, those days

of radio mornings,
nursery rhymes
and washing lines,

but still it rotates,
the orange that
you set going.

Sara Mullen lives in Dublin where she works as a teacher. Her poetry and short fiction have featured in: *A Thoroughly Good Blue*, *Burning Bush 2*, *Crannóg*, *Boyne Berries*, *The Cabinet of Heed*, *FLARE* and *Poethead*. She won first prize in the 2019 Ballyroan Library Poetry Competition.

Three trees grow sideways (A wind at Thoor Ballylee)

Three trees grow sideways,
Depending on Your point of view.
I have brought broken barren cups to this stream before,
The only useful kind,
And tried to sprinkle the unkind world with light.
Come out of your tower,
Rise like hairs on arms, like an unheard wind does
Only in certain times and certain places.
Maybe you did find the door and walked right through?
While the idle march of responsibilities
Weighed too heavily on the herd to do the same.
Living ends on unseen shores,
The boatman came calling, and you floated right past
While the wooden horse and her men passed you over and passed by.
You were right to cast out a spell upon the water.
To catch only certain times and certain places
Unkept and unvisited.
The acrobats, the anarchists or what the herd have hardly missed,
On their wrong eternal pilgrimage.
Coats for sticks, From coins a kiss,
Three trees grow sideways.

Algo is from Ireland. In self-imposed self-isolation, Algo only wears black and enjoys studying at the school of Austrian Economics, reading comic books and meditating. Algo once believed he was a nihilist but now believes in something higher.

A Cup is a Journey

After Rodney Gomez's, A knife

What can be said about a cup that hasn't already been said:

A Cup is womb, lost twin, nipple, teat, wailing baby, bird beak. Cup-hands feed bran to horses, donkeys, asses. Cups are broth pots, peat bogs, digits across oceans, borders, lips of boats. Cups are homeless shelters, empty doorways, under bridges, bowels, refugee camps, food banks, belly full, or not. Cups are brackish river, sewer, tap, spills, slicks, puddles of silt, divots. Cups are optical illusion, dark moon, sun full of steam, custard. Cups are can, jar, bowl of leaves, tea cosy, slippers, wedding ring. Cups are spoons of maple syrup, marmalade, mud-cup nests, hope chests, kist's at footwells of box-beds. Cups are bells, singing bowl, sonnet. Cups are tulip, Canterbury bell, pasqueflower. A cup is Serengeti, Shenandoah, Loch Ness. Cups are hands dunked in water, slurped, lipped, lapped. Cups are picnic, pity-party, pickling hip flask. Cups were toasts, axe, knuckles, bottles, malt barrels, strangle-hands. Cups are handless on floors, smashed in sinks. Cups are font, shroud, six feet under a fistful of earth. Cups are potholes of tears, snot, cracks. Cups on console tables are holdalls for cowslips, bluebells, daffodils. Cups are origami, kintsugi, gold. A cup is the cave after King of all Kings, thorns, nails, cross — Carrier of sins, acorns. Cups are tincture of olive, psalm, salt, balm. A cup is a well of forgiveness. A Cup is a seed.

Mandy Beattie's poetry appears in places such as: *Poets Republic, Ink, Sweat & Tears, Dreich, Wordpeace, The Haar, Wordgathering, Spilling Cocoa, Last Stanza* and *Lothlorien*. She is Winner of Poets Choice in *Marble Broadsheet* and was shortlisted in Dreich's Black Box Poetry Competition. She has a forthcoming short story in the inaugural edition of, *Howl*.

Confluence

Obviously, that floppelling water.
Probably too, an electronic whinge
underpinning the sharp-textured intent
of foraging trips by birds. But not this.

Of course, there would be pheasant,
raucously throaty, as pattered-down mud
raised morning scents. You knew well enough
to duck the fishing rope knotted to a branch.

But, when you touched the peeled-back bark,
rubbed beyond the charcoal marks, the elm
wasn't smooth, but sandpaper strange.
And the nettle's goodbye gave no sting.

Beth McDonough's poetry is widely anthologised and published. She reviews for DURA and elsewhere. Her first solo pamphlet *Lamping for pickled fish* is published by 4Word. Her site-specific poem has just been installed on the Corbenic Poetry Path. She is currently Makar of the Federation of Writers (Scotland).

Blood Brothers

We dragged you from a yellow house
to my family home, passing potholes that held
secrets in cloudy orange clay.

I poured you red wine in my mother's
cup and unfurled a yoga mat,
the bends of spines and twists of waists

were knives that sliced pumpkin-eyed slits
onto our fingertips, to spell iron-bound pacts
of unspoken words stitched to our lips.

How far can one person stretch before they snap?
From down-dog to pigeon, your head bowed and fell
like rolling marble on sloped table.
A few days earlier your father was found

face-down, floating in heaven. I always said October
felt like something I couldn't put my finger on,
bright grey days that pushed the light away.

Áine Rose is an artist and poet from Donegal, Ireland. She has a bachelor's degree in Speech & Language Therapy from Trinity College, Dublin (2017) and a postgraduate fine-art degree from the Burren College of Art, Ballyvaughan, Clare (2021). She has been awarded the Emerging Artist Bursary Award from Arts & Health funded by Irish Health Service & Irish Arts Council (2022). Her work has appeared in *Lothlorien Journal*, *Morning Fruit*, *Icarus*, *A New Ulster* and *Irish Arts Review*.

Boulders

I had a dream of my success
and of all the things I was truly
gifted at, it was stealing rocks,
boulders the size of mountains
from fields in their décor of moss and lichen
from rivers cloaked in algae camouflage,
digging through silt for sedimentary skeletons
and placing them again in my graveyard
of unmarked headstones. Lifting

these monoliths wasn't an issue
I could move solid objects the weight of Wales
as if running my fingers through sand
I was as strong as the steel that holds bridges,
my stamina that of a black hole.
The blues, greens and greys of narky
and gnarled edges bit at my hands
leaving them raw like a freshly killed pig
but I carried on rearranging Mother Earth's work

until the time came that I'd changed perceptions,
when I could stand back and lift my chest
above my crown, connecting with a thousand
strands of silk that held me
like newborn breath bawling its birth.
Then gentle as hands that touch a final goodbye
I was laid in my meadow with crag and stone
that I'd built with my own reddened bone
and I slept like a corpse, still and home.

Terri Metcalfe has been published in *Abridged*, *A New Ulster*, *Green Ink Poetry*, *Spilling Cocoa* and *Skylight 47*. She was shortlisted for the Open Window 2023 mentorship programme and will be a featured reader at the 20th anniversary of Over The Edge Literary Events held in Galway this January.

shuck

Bite down hard

Break the bone like

Stepping on a twig

Fill your mouth with marrow

And think to yourself

“This shit is ambrosia”

As it drips off your chin.

If the monster doesn't love you

Well, darling girl, then that's when you become the monster.

Shuck your clothes for wolf skins

Blood on your teeth because you earned it

Best fucking beautiful fiend the world has ever seen

And baby girl, your eyes look so big when they're fully dilated

Tell me, does the moonlight feel like home?

Or is it the killing that feels like belonging?

Charlotte Amelia Poe (they/them) is an autistic nonbinary author from England. Their first book, *How To Be Autistic*, was published in 2019. Their debut novel, *The Language Of Dead Flowers*, was published in September 2022.

Awaiting Spring (After Tu Fu)

A fat cloud is pierced
by the last light. The moon
rises. Leaves fall
where dark shadows
sit like old men,
sipping cold tea.
My garden lies
under winter snows,
but in my mind's eye
I see daffodils
straining toward the sky,
and bees gathering nectar
where roses will rise.
I look at the graveyard,
buried in snow,
where your body lies.

George Freek's poetry has been published in numerous journals and reviews. His poem *Enigmatic Variations* is currently nominated for Best of the Net and his poem *Night Thoughts* is also nominated for a Pushcart Prize. His recent collection *Melancholia* is published by Red Wolf Editions.

Foster Child

She knows about the shapes of things
and asks where a glimmering door leads
as she faces a tall rectangle of mirror
in the Elder's room at a Head Start
tribal preschool. We take my key
to pretend unlock the door that is not a door.

She reports an ache in her side just now
after running outside and I think of wings
where they join, tired as if a sparrow must flee
the path of raven. Pretending's mirror
of silvered magic will not tuck into her pocket
where drums resound upon her small frame.

Mary Ellen Talley's poems have been published in over 100 literary journals as well as in several anthologies. A former school-based speech-language pathologist (SLP), she resides in Seattle, WA, USA. Her chapbook *Postcards from the Lilac City* was published by Finishing Line Press in 2020.

Thirteen Ways of Looking at Crows

1.

Pick your symbols --
light, dark
death, fortune
and there you hold
a crow.

2.

Uninvited dinner guests
arrive in flurry
casting lots
for the first lunge.

3.

Ever vigilant
crows guide
suspicious travelers
into their own
beguiled darkness.

4.

You will get there
as the crow flies --
circling, darting
losing your way
to the wind in your heart.

5.

When you feel contrary
the crow bellows
barks and blinks
leaving you
in ruffled vindication.

6.

Along the creek
I am watched --
they know my face
telling the others
where I live.

7.

Mona Lisa follows
her foreign suitors
with steely crow's eyes
but no eyebrows.

8.

Edged in frost,
a murderous chorus
erupts in fields
pounding the chill
like wild hammers.

9.

A caw rips through
lyric song
like a saw
and is remembered
for its pitch.

10.

As they dapple
the sky in ebony gloss
then settle together
I know I'm surrounded
by board members.

11.

The first crow took
my father's last breath
the mathematics of it
played out in a long
black stream of air.

12.

When the snows drift
the hungry crows leave
behind a white boned menagerie.

13.

What else may
revel in rot
and find its life there
but a crow.

Rebecca Surmont lives in MN which invites exploration of the seasons and cycles of life that is often expressed in her work. Her poems have been in *Tiny Seed Literary Journal*, *Topical Poetry*, *Ekphrastic Review*, *New Verse News*, *Silver Birch Press*, *Minneapolis' Southwest Journal*, and *Seasons*, by Trolley Car Press.

Fire

In you, I see splinters of sun
with a river's rhythm
lifting you into the chimney's dark,
a cathedral of flaming spires
proclaiming warmth
as my hungry arms reach out.

I hear the breathy excitement
of those who first hatched you from a feverish act of friction,
and I wonder whether the searing of meat
come fumbling from an accident
or a curious thought,
how we've since tortured flesh
till it's shrivelled,
coated,
plated.

As you shrink into the dying slices of earth that feed you,
how can I not think of a life,
starting slender,
threaded through the things you'll conquer?

Your prime is a craze of heat and vigour,
but you'll cower and become no more
than a dotage of warmth
among ruins that soften and crack,
crumbling grey,
and even a child could sneeze you away.

Trevor Conway writes mainly poems, stories and songs. Subjects he typically writes about include nature, sport, society, creativity and interesting moments. His first collection of poems, *Evidence of Freewheeling*, was published by Salmon Poetry in 2015; his second, *Breeding Monsters*, was self-published via Amazon in 2018.

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