

Coven Poetry



Issue No.5

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Clive Donovan

Clive Donovan devotes himself full-time to poetry and has published in a wide variety of magazines including Acumen, Agenda, Fenland Poetry Journal, Neon Lit. Journal, Poetry Salzburg Review, Prole, Sentinel Lit. Quarterly, Streetcake and Stand. He lives in Totnes, Devon, U.K. quite close to the river Dart. His debut collection will be published by Leaf by Leaf in November 2021.

OFFERINGS

Yes, leave your offered gifts in a special place:
the holy ground of spring, grotto, ancient pine
or venerable olive tree – wine, cheese, drilled stones,
a weapon, clay or metal ornament.
I have found likenesses, gear and honey-cakes.
It pleases me greatly to discover these things,
not that I hunger, thirst, or am a thief,
but I surmise the resolute burn of desire
in sure bindings of thread, protective wax,
the stopper on the bottle keeping the genie in.
Such sharp devotion revealed should scare me a little,
for I am not the god it was meant for,
merely a traveller peering into a land
still inhabited by secrets of magical aura.

WASP VILLAGE

This paper
that they make
carefully chewed up
pulped ripped from stems
and stumps and plundered pith
a compact little hub of brigands
lurking in a hedge in their
cellulose nest
everybody hates them
I write my message of doom
to demonstrate to my children
the paperiness of their thin walls
with my thick black pen like a god
but do the wasps take note or care ?
Why no this tiny sculpted village
with its factories and brood cells
is derelict now
its denizens dazed and crawling about
on rims of red juice bottles ruthless avid
drunk on sugar their junkie bodies batted away
and crushed by us whose working lair is this whole
world fragile as egg so easy to break the warning texts
a multiplication of scrawls engraved and scribbled
diverse graffiti smothers the walls flaking from
weather and time overlaid upon us all and of
our works and cities then this could be
that brief season's divine lesson is
finished completely ripe
and done

Richard Dunn

Editor's note: in lieu of a bio, I wanted to tell a brief story of how this poem came to be. At a small gathering of friends (known affectionately as the Magpies) in a dimly lit corner of an old pub, to the backing music of a slightly out of tune piano Richard read aloud this beautiful poem that was commissioned by a mutual friend of ours. It was my first time meeting Richard and hearing his work read and I am pleased that he trusted me to publish his work. I hope you all enjoy it as much as I do. Richard Dunn is wonderful poet with an extensive body of work.

Magpie

Commissioned by Alexander Bass

And so much
Has been written
Of reason and purpose

Did you ever believe
You might be
One alone
In sorrow?
Never to understand
The very basics of life?

Familiar family
Of the crochety crow cawing
Always prepared black and white
To flit and hop you know
Ready for any eventual shit
Carrion for the carcass of strife
Smelling the rich aroma
Of residue and leftovers

Or
Lovers in joy forever
And ever.
That's right
One for sorrow
Two for joy.

In these contemplative moments
You have the beady eye sparkling
For the chic of boy or girl
The ding-a-ling ring of a chromosome

I know it's make believe but hey you sing
Again meet Joe Black
Numero uno for deep sorrow
The dark Cities in my books say two for joy
The mighty brush of the urban fox running amok
Outside KFC venues of a night
Strange coups indeed for three and four.

Never fear you are a tone, an emphasis
Your purpose clearly the music of Ennio Morricone
Two trees for the consequences of living
Arbors of sliver and gold and the dollar
Secrets never told in lead

In the branches cackling mischievously
The thirst for fresh death

Drips from tearing beak
Search and seek for the moist meat
Strewn beaches of history greet your appetite.

The heart belongs to both sorrow and to joy
Both to girl and to boy
To secrets never told in the dead of night
A symphony out there for you to claim
An entitlement to
Where pain has gone and the
Stars and sun stay the same.

I have brought retribution.
The mask of red.
Perhaps,
You'll let me know
How the river of the soul
Runs in you Magpie

Sascha Engel

Sascha Engel is the founder and editor of *Strukturris*, an Ireland-based journal focusing on anarchic dissolutions of text. After teaching in U.S. higher education for a while, he now experiments with scripts archaic, computational, and illusory. Twitter: @ThinkContinuum

Reading Dark Age sadness

by Sascha Engel

The so-called 'Dark Ages' of Greece are the four centuries preceding Homer, from which no written records have survived: the time between the fall of the Mycenaean palaces around 1200 B.C., and the emergence of the Greek alphabet around 800 B.C.

During these four centuries, trade across the Mediterranean collapsed, standards of living receded, and surviving pottery becomes comparatively simple. By all accounts, it's no accident that no written records survive from this time. Society contracted, and its people somehow receded. There was an age of sadness. As Ian Morris puts it: "Dark age mortals trod lightly on the landscape, not altering the earth. They were sad relics flitting through the shadows left behind by a great past, living out Zeus's plan, with little hope for a better future."

Can we really not connect with these people at all? Have they disappeared, trapped between the deep secrets of the Mycenaean palaces that came before them, and the luminosity of epic poetry after them?

Would it not be worth trying to listen to their sadness? Would it not be worth listening all the more since we, too, need to learn to tread lightly, to recede a little, to leave the earth be?

When Greek philosophy emerged, it too was beset by a deep sadness. One of the earliest verbatim fragments that is still preserved is Anaximander's:

And the things out of which birth comes about for beings, into these too their destruction happens, according to obligation: for they pay the penalty and retribution to each other for their injustice.

Is it guilt and sadness to be? Is our being just a price to be paid, a penalty and retribution for an injustice? Are we dragged into this world as a punishment, and exist only to pay off our guilt?

What if the sadness that speaks to us from this fragment is an older one? What if it goes back to the Dark Ages? There wouldn't be proof for this - after all, Anaximander lived three hundred years after Homer, after the Dark Age ended. But perhaps there is an inkling, an emotional connection? What if we can nonetheless read it that way? What if we can conjure the Dark Age sadness from this fragment, and listen?

Suppose we took the part of this phrase that is widely accepted to be verbatim:

according to obligation: for they pay the penalty and retribution to each other for their injustice

and translate it into its original Greek (with Latin letters to keep it readable):

kata to chreon didonai gar anta diken kai tisin allelois tes aditias

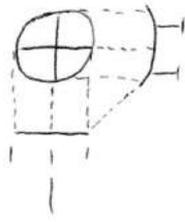
How can we read the Dark Age sadness in this phrase? Suppose we were to bridge the gap by transposing this Greek phrase into Linear B, the script of the Mycenaean people. Linear B ended when the palaces ended and the Dark Age began, around 1200 B.C. Perhaps rendering a post-Dark Age text in pre-Dark Age letters can help us bridge the connection?

Doing this, we get thirty-six syllables, which we arrange as such:

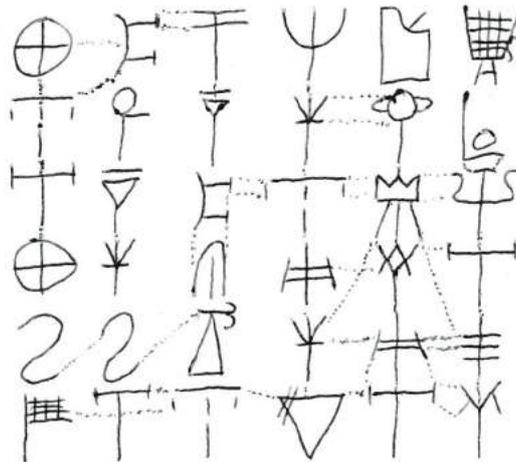


What deep secrets live in this rendering of Anaximander's passage? How can we read this to allow the Dark Age to speak to us?

Perhaps we can ask how the lines of each letter speak to each other? Take for example the top left corner: does it not look like the first two symbols in the first line, and the first of the second, generate what almost looks like a halo, or perhaps an architectural atrium?

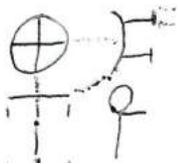


Can we complete the grid this way? Would it look something like this?



Can we read this now - trace it, describe it, feel with it? Can we listen to it? Can we listen to the Dark Age sadness?

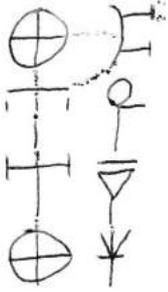
Might it say something like this?



Does the sun ever spill over, forming, beyond itself, a halo of warming rays? And yet, do these miss those that dwell underneath? Is this because those that dwell underneath have turned their backs onto the sun, moving outside its path, to reside against it?

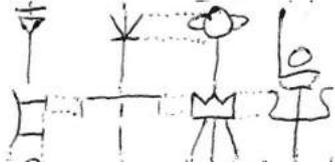


Does the sun stretch itself out and reach whoever raises their arms to receive what is good, but passes through whomever remains indifferent? Does the sun fill silos and baskets for those who raise their arms?



Does the sun return into its splendor if those that dwell underneath turn their backs, and put up their brittle defenses?

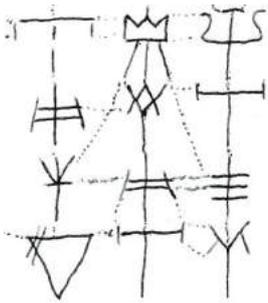
And when the sun projects its rays, does its splendor reach the earth below it? Or does the sun sink into an



abyss so low it cannot be reached?

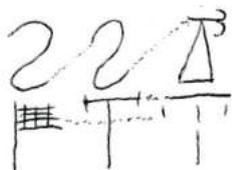
It is only if the weight of the crown is equal to that of the ship, and both are equal to the size of

those whose arms are stretched towards the sun, that abundance can rain on those who dwell underneath.



For only the splendor of crown and ship can spread to all, and strengthen their shields and scales, and make one into two and two into three, and preserve equilibrium in abundance.

And if there is no patience, and those who dwell



underneath should try to attempt to betray the sun with snake and hook, their plants will wither, and their plots will be rejected, and their guilt will be

their punishment.

Andy Eycott

Andy Eycott lives and works in South East London. Since he was diagnosed with dyslexia at forty-eight, he has been published in print and online in a number of magazines and anthologies including; Obsessed with Pipework, Marble, Green Ink, Snakeskin, The Ekphrastic Review, Orbis, Foxglove Journal and The Cannon's Mouth.

Mother and her Myth

They say she stood on the cliff top
for hours looking out to sea.
At night they say she turned into a bird
and flew high above the clouds
made mirrors of stars.

They say when she smiled that Winter fled
and the flowers of Spring burst into life.
That in their fragility,
they cupped their petals in thanks,
raised their fragrant heads high in salute.

They say when she cried rivers overflowed
yet rather than a muddy swell,
her tears healed parched earth.
The flood of her rejuvenated barren deserts
to bloom fresh and green once more.

They say when she was young all was possible
and that time would stand still for her.
They say that hers was the patience
that taught warring men tolerance,
compassion, even taught them love.

the dying of the ice

I find myself before you
a reflection,
biopsy cut from my home

snow compacted
over fifteen thousand years,
transformed

beads of breath
popping like corn,
held within me

hear me ache
your warmth diminishing me,
my purity in flux

I am ancient,
I am wounded,
bleeding back into water

roots

buried in the black earth
deep within the soil

the clay of my ancestors

dust of my blood line

the anchorage and support
for the oak of me

for my lineage of acorns

New Bud

In the boughs of an elder
you rest from the fight,
bruising entry to this realm of light

The sum of your ancestors
pulsing through your veins,
the whorls of your fingers budding

I bow to your delicate perfection,
whisper incantations of love
feel you rooting deeply at my core

Charlie Gleeson

Charlie Gleeson is a Japanese-American and Irish writer from the San Gabriel Valley. She lives in Berlin. Her work previously appears in *Mixed Mag*.

Bohemia

You stroke the palm of my hand as Bohemia unfurls around us. Beyond Dresden the train runs tightly stitched with the Elbe. Through one window, cedar water foams, catching sunbeams in clinking jade jewels. On the other side, burnt terracotta tiles, distressed fish scales, decorate crumbling plaster. There is a silvery line, a worn footpath between this landscape and our adopted Prussian one, travelled by religious refugees in the eighteenth century. You are lightly floating your finger up my arm and I feel the shiver of that migration, of ours, running in a current underneath us. The town we are passing: Ústí nad Labem. Ústí, meaning mouth. River mouth. I hear a name being called, whistling through the Elbe. It doesn't belong to me but I listen again, and—

Tim Goldstone

Tim Goldstone [@muddygold](#) has roamed widely, and currently lives in Wales between the mountains and the sea. He is published or forthcoming in numerous journals and anthologies including Crannóg, Dodging the Rain, Crow & Cross Keys, Alternate States, Ghost City Review, The Speculative Book, Lothlorien Poetry Journal, The New Welsh Review, Veil: Journal of Darker Musings, Selcouth Station, Tír na nÓg, The Wild Word, Lamplit Underground, Riverbed Review, 11 Mag Berlin. Prose sequence read on stage at the Hay Festival. Poetry recently presented on Digging for Wales.

Not Giving Up

Cold tinned salmon,
grey,
flops out, undeterred,
from the can
onto the white tin plate
rusted in patches
that tips downward
at the sudden insistence of weight,
followed by
a muted thud
as the salmon slides
completely off the plate,
flopping into the long grass,
determined, driven
all over again
to reach the Atlantic
and from there to return
to its river of origin,
to its breeding grounds,
to life.

Into Thin Air

So here, searching,
his breathing hard, discordant,
he will find them.
It will look bleak, like a place
where ghosts come to die.
He is high up in the mountains
investigating, difficult
in ever-thinning air,
the huge increase
in the eagle population
thought impossible
after three consecutive
lethally harsh winters –
what can they be eating?
But what he is about to stumble upon –
in just under an hour now,
as he shakes uncontrollably,
gasping as his throat muscles
tighten instinctively –
will be the thousands of gimlet eyes
turning towards him
as the stamping of feet
sends a great deep rumbling bass
shuddering down through the bedrock.

Mark Goodwin

Mark Goodwin is a poet-sound-artist, and speaks and writes in various ways. He has books with various poetry houses: including Longbarrow Press, Shearsman Books, & The Red Ceilings Press. His latest chapbook – *Erodes On Air* – was recently published in America by Middle Creek. Mark lives with his partner on a narrowboat just north of Leicester. He tweets poetry from @kramawoodgin, and some of his sound-enhanced poetry can be listened to here: <https://markgoodwin-poet-sound-artist.bandcamp.com>

The Reverend Clifford Fleck Loves

I lock The Lord's house, screw
my sermon in to my palm. Thor's
sore clouds grow from
behind Beacon Hill, and
already rain bounces
off the graves. I kneel
as gravel crackles
under-hoof, behind
me. Some poor gaunt
horseman draws
out a long shine of English steel. *A tongue* *of light.* I do
not see but I
do feel
him. In my nostrils
lilies ache. His blade's sw
ish sli
ces here
from there so
my church's holy well erupts
the rain
-shape of My Lady, naked. Her fixed
cold sandstone turned
to Summer's flow. Her little dog, now
not curled
asleep, licks
Her sweet feet.

The Trinity of Cabinets
in A Museum of English Rituals

1.

a black pottery cat
on a mantelpiece

it never melts
never moves

the glass case is full
of candles & tears

2.

a tiny copper kettle holds

tea as dark-&-tart as sky be
yond the bottom of a day

the tiny copper kettle gathers

into its orange polish-gleam
invisible

tiny hands & lips

sipping

3.

a pair of ladies' tiny silver shoes
for dancing waltzes & fox

trots they gladden as

two white mice curled
together

in dew

Lauren Mason

Lauren Mason is a writer and musician based in Bristol, and her poems have been published in many journals and anthologies.

Winter Ritual

near sundown / rain slicked pine
distant bruise / coppiced hazel
mist & shadow / hushed lichen
vaulted copse / copper bracken
blackened thorn / hidden bird
trill & plummet / twitch & scutter
heaped offerings / wet but burning
soot & salt / tamp & scatter
circled sunwise / darkened shore
glass & river / refusing to mirror

Falling in Love with Datura

The first night I kept my distance,
whispering your names.

The second night I visited twice
to check you were real.

The third night was storm-dark
so I drew from memory alone.

The fourth night I stayed in bed
and dreamed I was arrested
for dancing you a striptease.

The fifth night I asked you how to fly.

The sixth night I phoned for help
but no sound escaped.

The last night I craved your touch so badly
I dipped my hands in wax.

Prayer for a Father

Some say the world began with a sound

and so it goes, in our skulls' singing bowls,
the gulp and gasp of each heart's mouth,
through valves, vessels, lungs, throats

*so mallet comes to hammered metal
beckoning the first thin cry*

and so it goes to edge of skin,
through stitched and woven fatal patterns
flattened into blood and shadows,
thrumming out from each sharp nerve

*so mallet coaxes singing metal
beaten bowls will warp and shake*

and back now to my childish tongue
waiting in its ageing trap, waiting
for my song, your silence

*so mallet circles shining metal,
darkening its haloed rim*

waiting to begin again.

Antony Owen

This poem comes from Antony's next collection *The Battle about mental health attributed from autism during lockdown*.

I put a sparrow out of her misery

My cat broke the wing of a sparrow

It flew into boomerang curves

arriving back to its talon.

I put a sparrow out of her misery

it flew kited with its intestines -

Bunting for a cold creator.

Serena Piccoli

Serena Piccoli (she\her) is a speechless charlatan who writes poems and plays about contemporary social issues and takes photos of nature and graffiti. <https://serenapiccoli.wixsite.com/serenapiccoli>

Twitter: @piccoli_serena

Kennel over the Marsh



Geese over the Marsh



Geese in V



The Black Cry



The Ritual of the Bird of Prey



Dan Pounds

Dan Pounds (he/him) is hoping to get a pamphlet of his work published soon and lives in the Godless Unesco City of Literature of Norwich. He enjoys long walks in the country and Mexican Black Bean Chili. His texts/images have appeared in M58, Overground Underground, Selcouth Station, Osmosis, Beir Bua and Babel Tower Notice Board.

Time & Borehamwood : Airship over Watling Street

Time & Borehamwood : Airship over Watling Street
and everyone went into their gardens looking up at
it but now it's just mythology and Paint 3D
editing and we can never locate that oral history
or remember if we saw it who told us but there
might be reports in the newspapers to fetishize
and rework rework rework into careful with that
textbox its getting close



Menaka

Shanmuganantha

Menaka Shanmuganantha was born and raised in Toronto, Canada to Tamil immigrants from the Jaffna peninsula in Sri Lanka who's currently based in Paris, France. She holds a Masters of Public Health and loves cooking, feasting, and connecting with geographies through food

spicy

Cherished by those
with a sensibility for glut,
those tempted by
mythical abundance.
Tellingly lyrical, but wait
I'd also like to declare
its opulence and danger.
Chili pepper studded noodles,
like the time he took me to
underground crystal caves
embossed with giant minerals.
Or what about cinnamon, cardamom
nutmeg buns and ground turmeric
in steaming coconut milk. Anyway did
you see me drinking zesty ginger beer,
it's an elixir for grief. I'm heartbroken
but I continue to sip hot sauce
fermented from yellow habaneros,
according to Nin Andrews
they have a reputation.
Oh, but don't forget about
mustard, wasabi paste, kimchi.
Spiking naval cavities like fire.
They make the banal magical
they are colourful wild ghosts that adorn picnics
they are psalms and a yank towards the existential.

post-industrial paradise

Vinyl fabric tablecloth.
Sheet cake frosting
teasingly drips over
nostrils. They bring it all
and then we are drunk
acid rain on our toes.
Clear skies were forecasted
but the airplanes. The anthropocene.
We haven't seen you in epochs
since before well y'know.
Children kick around a topaz
rubber ball strands of
hair gummed to their faces.
Flesh pulled from apricots
nectar slumping into dirt
wet like used coffee grounds.
Ready to pronounce my own
pronounce the secret offence.
Come eat the pizza
the corrugated cardboard is getting wet
at least have the cake it has sprinkles.

