

Poetry Series

**Pete Crowther**  
**- poems -**

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# Pete Crowther()

Web pages

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Born in Hull in East Yorkshire into a seafaring family, he spent some time in the Royal Navy after completing his education, before a career as chief cataloguer at the universities of Birmingham, and Hull where he served under the poet and librarian, Philip Larkin. Now retired he lives with his wife in a small cottage sandwiched between the North Sea and the broad River Humber. He first started writing poetry as a hobby just three years ago. His other interests are natural history, Egyptology, and local history. He is a keen cyclist and motorcyclist. Early this year (2006) , he had a selection of his poems published as a book, entitled "Calling the Moon", by the on-line publishers-on-demand, (

# 2005

Goodbye Two Thousand and Four,  
Bombs, disaster and war.

Welcome 2005,  
Grant love and peace shall thrive.

Pete Crowther

# A Biker's Funeral

(In memory of Stephen (Reggie) Pearce  
of Kilnsea, 1980–2005)

The wind blows cold through the churchyard trees  
and sadly tolls the passing bell  
as mourners shuffle up the leaf-strewn  
narrow path between the leaning stones.

He was just twenty-five, so young,  
so full of life, and love of life  
and laughter — killed outright one night  
in a head-on crash on his motorbike.

From far and wide we've gathered here  
to pay respect to our young friend.  
I've never seen the church so full,  
oh death, how can you be so cruel?

Who will forget this funeral?  
Four hundred strong in the nave we stood,  
family and friends both young and old  
and a phalanx of bikers in leathers and boots.

Between the holy platitudes  
and hymns they played his favourite songs;  
one had to smile to hear within  
that ancient august church of stone

come belting out the vibrant tones  
of modern rock and heavy metal.  
Who can forget the coffin passing  
in procession like a royal barque,

the biker's helmet on its lid  
resplendent in heraldic tones  
— rich gules, azure, argent, or,  
a shining light of knightly splendour?

Who will forget that send-off from

his fellow bikers when three score  
or more bright gleaming motorcycles  
with a thunderous roar led off the hearse?

Pete Crowther

# A Camera Has The Trick Of Freezing Time

The photo's small and rather creased but there  
We are, a family group in black and white.  
A camera has the trick of freezing time.  
We're posed before a boat outside our house,  
It is to be a sort of caravan  
For holidays. It has a cabin newly built  
Upon a hull that's often sailed the Humber.  
Each one of us is smiling in the sun.  
The cabin's shadow says it's afternoon,  
The trees' and hedgerow's leaves proclaim it spring.

The War is over now. My father's home  
On leave and looks relaxed. My mother's pleased,  
I remember how she wept and prayed for him  
On D-Day when his coaster carried troops  
And petrol to the beach at Normandy.  
My grandad stands erect and rather stiff,  
And grandma, too, sits very upright, posed,  
For both were born in Queen Victoria's reign.  
Their daughter, Eileen, looks so young. I think  
She misses wartime dances and romances.

And is that me, that boy with folded arms  
And hair as fair as any Anglo-Saxon?  
I cannot now recall what I was thinking then,  
What it was like to be a boy of ten,  
Now that my hair is grey and I've grown old  
And all those people in that photograph  
Are talking, laughing, drinking, full of life  
Within my head though fifty years and more  
Have passed, and all of them are long since dead.  
A camera has the trick of freezing time.

Pete Crowther

# A Childhood Lesson

Some call it checkers,  
I call it draughts.  
Don't play with me  
If you think it's just a game  
And you don't mind losing.  
I play a mean game. I play to win.  
Old Peter Salaveros taught me  
When I was a boy.  
We played on a scrubbed table  
In the seamen's mess,  
Just him and me.  
We played seriously.  
Neither of us smiled.

Pete Crowther

# A Cold Day In January

Last year my mother died.  
I was not there; she died alone.  
It was mid-winter when  
we buried her. The roads were treacherous  
that day, the coldest of the year.  
Few people made it to the funeral,  
the church was nearly empty.  
My son and daughter each  
read out a poem  
she had written in her younger days.  
The priest, who had not known her,  
said the prayers. From there we went  
by car, the tyres crunching on the ice,  
to where the grave had been prepared  
in the cemetery that waited  
on the outskirts of the town.  
The ground was frozen hard.  
We stood and listened to the prayers  
the priest intoned, tall and upright  
there above the open grave while  
all the time the icy wind blew  
flurries of snow over the graves  
and by the groves of evergreens,  
So cold, so bleak, so utterly unforgettable  
the scene, but what was strange:  
I did not mind the cold,  
that seeped into my heart and bones.  
It seemed somehow appropriate.  
□

Pete Crowther



# A Fly Haiku

As I wash my hands  
The fly on the window sill  
Is washing hers too.

Pete Crowther

# A Fly In Amber

Swimming in its world of amber  
The long-legged fly can still remember

The burning heat  
Of the sun in the Eocene

From its golden sea, this fly has seen  
The dance of continents, the rise and fall

Of all ten thousand things  
Upon our planet.

In the many facets of its eyes  
Seas have filled with water, deepened, dried,

Mountain ranges risen, crumbled.  
This fly has seen the centaur and the unicorn

And the first Neanderthal.  
Nations, empires passed before it,

Wave after wave in quick succession.  
This fly was in its amber when

King Cheops built his pyramid  
And Roman Caesar conquered Gaul.

Now with this ancient creature in my palm  
I am become  
The green flash of the setting sun.

Pete Crowther

# A House Of Light

From my cottage kitchen window I can see  
Two fields away the blue, the shining sea  
And ships that slowly glide to far-off shores  
Each one a separate world with its own laws;

They pass beyond my window and are gone.  
When morning comes that miracle, the sun  
Lifts slowly from the sea, a sacrament  
Of grace and glory, or enlightenment.

My cottage truly is a house of light:  
By night shines Sirius, cold and bright  
And in the afternoon our living room  
Seems more like a sunny meadow in mid-June.

From it we see the sun prepare to slumber  
Wrapped in the gleaming waters of the Humber  
While to the south another lighthouse shines—  
Peace be to Spurn and you who read these lines.

Pete Crowther

# A Japanese-English Phrasebook

from a news item reporting an assault on a Japanese tourist who had unwittingly insulted a person by using a phrasebook deliberately mistranslated by an ex-employee of the Japanese Tourist Board bearing a grudge against his former employers

The Japanese are said to be  
Of all the nations in the world  
The most polite and courteous  
So it was strange to hear one say  
"Excuse me please, you b-r, you  
Can kiss my a-e, thank you, good day! "  
It was not what he meant to say,  
He simply wished to ask the way  
And was surprised when he was slapped  
Across the face and chased half-way  
Along the street to his hotel  
Wherein he learnt that others too  
Had found the natives just as wild  
And prone to sudden violent rage.

Ishuro Nakamura, clerk  
Translator to the Tourist Board  
Was sacked. He bore a grudge and planned  
Revenge, compiled a travellers' guide  
Containing mistranslations, thus  
"What is the cost of X or Y? "  
Became in Nakamura's book  
A direct sexual invitation,  
"How pleasant is this sunny weather! "  
In Japanese was rendered as  
"I understand your mother is  
A prostitute", while "Kindly send  
The chef my compliments" became  
"This soup is vomit, take it back! "

The repercussions were immense,  
No less than fifteen Japanese  
Were summonsed to appear in court  
On charges that they had disturbed

The peace and three were up for GBH.  
The phrasebook had to be withdrawn  
Some fifty thousand copies trashed.  
Returning tourists flying home,  
Quite traumatized, upset and shocked  
Were offered counselling paid for by  
The Tourist Board. There was no sign  
Of Nakamura, he had fled;  
His phrasebook now immortalized  
Is greatly prized by book collectors.

Pete Crowther

# A Lottery Prayer

St. Abune Teklehaimanot, I pray  
You help me win the Lottery today.  
I beseech, entreat and beg  
You who stood upon one leg  
That you may grant my fervent plea  
And the winner of the jackpot will be me!

□

Note: St. Abune Teklehaimanot (by some regarded as the patron saint of gamblers) is famed for his extreme piety which included standing upright at prayer on one leg for seven years without a break.

Pete Crowther

# A Night In The Old Lighthouse

The lock is stiff, the heavy wooden door  
On rusted hinges creaks as I walk in.  
Tonight I am to sleep here in this lighthouse.  
It's twenty years since last its scything beam  
Shone out at night to warn approaching ships  
Where danger lay in sandbanks, shoals, and rocks.  
For more than ninety years each night the light  
Was lit and monitored by quiet careful men,  
The lighthouse keepers. I can see them now  
In dark blue uniforms and caps, brass buttons  
Polished, mutton whiskers, waistcoats, pipes  
And silver pocket watches hung from chains.  
How different now, just empty rooms and ghosts  
That throw pale shadows on their rounded walls.  
I climb alone the winding spiral stair  
And listen to the echoes of my steps,  
They seem too loud and likely to disturb  
The crowded ghosts that lurk behind each door  
And might resent my presence here tonight.  
The light that filters through the narrow window  
On each floor begins to fade as finally I reach  
The top and climb into the glass-walled room  
That used to house the turning lantern light:  
The sea is calm tonight and far below  
The distant ships seem little more than specks  
Upon the darkening waters of the coming night.  
I'm loth to turn and leave this still light room  
To pass those empty rooms and hear their echoes  
Or see upon the curving stair some darker  
Shadow that may be something lurking there.  
It seemed a good idea to volunteer  
To spend a night in this lighthouse all alone  
But that was in the pub, all light and laughter.  
I start reluctantly my downward steps  
Below and know this night has scarce begun ...  
□

Pete Crowther

# A Particular Potted Plant

Trichocaulon cactiforme\*

Slow in growth but rather rare  
Year on year it's never altered  
Candle shaped and coloured grey,  
What a boring plant it is!  
Always measuring just two inches  
Never mind my loving care  
Watering, feeding, heat in winter,  
Nothing ever makes it budge.  
Other cacti burgeon, flourish  
Trichocaulon stays the same—  
Or it did, until today!

Scarcely could I credit it  
First to see a little offset  
Candle shaped and coloured grey  
Then, by Jove, there was a flower  
Quite two millimetres wide.  
Quick! Indoors and get the camera,  
Tell the neighbours, phone the press  
Trichocaulon cactiforme  
Has produced a miracle.  
Never now shall I complain,  
All my work was not in vain  
Nor will you hear me any more  
Calling Trichocaulon boring.

□

\* pronounced 'cac-ti-for-may'.

Pete Crowther



# A Question Of Philosophy

When evil strikes  
In fire and flood  
Or untimely death by dread disease  
We sometimes wonder "What of God? "

The ancient Greeks  
Long before us  
On this very same question reflected.  
Wise Epicurus put it thus:

"If God is willing but not able  
Such evil to prevent,  
Call Him 'God' still, if you will,  
He cannot be omnipotent."

"And if He's able but not willing  
Such evil to prevent,  
God He may be, but I say  
He is malevolent."

"If God is able and willing, too,  
All evil to prevent,  
Why in the world should pain and death  
Afflict the young and innocent? "

Pete Crowther

# A Rat In Springtime

It was a lovely day,  
The hawthorn hedge  
Was coming into bloom  
And on the lawn  
Just freshly mown  
Something slowly moved.

It was a rat  
So old its fur was caked  
With dirt, its skin  
Was scaled with scabs  
And on its back  
Like something

Pornographic or obscene  
A tumour glistened.  
It was the most  
Disgusting thing  
I'd ever seen.  
It stumbled

As it made its way  
Across the grass.  
It did not seem  
To match the day,  
The singing birds  
Now busy with their broods,

The butterflies  
That fluttered in the sun.  
This rat had had its day.  
I tried to put myself  
Into its head.  
It could not see

Or hear the birds,  
It could not smell  
And was in desperate pain.  
The poor thing

Was trembling,  
And lost.

Have pity on this tortured soul,  
It could be you or me.

Pete Crowther

# A Registered Vegetarian

At the tender age of twelve  
my daughter, bless her,  
was registered as a vegetarian.  
She was duly accredited  
with the appropriate documents  
and vaccinated with chlorophyll.  
Now she is authorized  
to eat zucchinis, papayas  
and winter cabbages  
not to mention  
French beans, celeriac  
and best of all—  
mouth-watering mangold wurzel.

Pete Crowther

# A Secret Whisper

I rarely go by bus but when I do  
For safety's sake I choose a seat well back.  
Today the bus was crowded like a zoo,  
My seat companion wore a plastic mac,  
He looked quite foreign, dark, and rather nervous.  
To break the ice I said "It's very warm",  
He rolled his eyes and said that God would save us,  
Began to rant and wildly wave his arm.  
I looked around but no-one seemed to notice,  
And I am jammed against the window, blocked,  
So can't get past this madman now at prayer  
Intoning loudly "God will not be mocked".  
To calm him down I asked "Why are you here? "  
"Suicide bomber", he whispered in my ear.

10/8/03

Pete Crowther

## A Sonnet In Memoriam For A Dead Pet

Alas he's gone our little friendly rat,  
we'll miss that trusting paw, those gentle ways,  
as snuggling close to us content he sat.  
Where now that little eager furry face,  
those twitching whiskers, beady eyes? Such grace!  
Poor Jack, you should have lived as long again  
had you but had your rightful span of days.  
You've left us now for where there is no pain,  
which should console, but yet I must complain  
to lose so soon this loving pet and friend.  
The world may scoff and show its harsh disdain,  
forget that we all share the self same end.  
So Jack, we'll say a very fond goodbye,  
rememb'ring that at last we all must die.

Pete Crowther

# A Special Low-Cost Shuttle

Consultants have been tasked with formulating  
A special low-cost shuttle  
To provide a cheap, efficient, and friendly service  
Based on consensus and inclusiveness.  
In a vast universe of 100 trillion galaxies  
Chuck Hunter was given the green light  
To find that perfect designer treat  
Using symbols such as lighted candles  
But the view of how the voluntary service  
Should be funded is changing  
And Pringle, Gucci, and Chanel  
With the Royal underwear suppliers, Rigby and Peller,  
Whose certification will be subject to character references,  
Need to attract younger people and those from minority groups.

In Cactus Pete's Casino  
Slicked lips are a summer must  
With whalesong, birdsong and rainshowers  
And madness is photogenic.  
There minerals and true seeds  
Of moonlight and pillows,  
Tea sets, glassware, lamps, and toby jugs  
Provide the embodiment of elegance and refinement.  
At almost 8 trillion miles  
The dark side of life is  
A pinprick of light from a dying star  
Where the term, 'Dark' simply indicates that we believe it is there  
For the hand has full mobility  
And the cord uncoils in the open casket.

□

Note: A collage poem taken from: The Holderness Gazette, Yorkshire Evening News, Sunday Times Magazine, Pan Newsletter, and East Yorkshire Coast News (ERYC)

Pete Crowther

# A Spell To Bring A Loved One Home

Come lover, come home,  
Come from the sea,  
Come home to me.  
Come through the crests  
And the troughs of the waves.  
Come through the spray,  
Come through the foam.  
Come though the winds  
And the waters protest.  
Come through the fog,  
Come through the storm,  
The thunder, the lightning  
That flashes on deck.  
Come through the darkness  
Of cold moonless nights.  
Steer by the stars  
That glitter above.  
Steer for the harbour, the haven,  
So safe and so calm.  
There you will find me,  
Loving and warm.

Pete Crowther



# A Spell To Catch A Rat

Come dear rat, gnawer of wood,  
Come dear rat, hungry for food.

Come leave your home under the floor,  
Come up through the hole you made before.

Come follow the scent that tickles your nose,  
More sweet it is than any rose.

It's peanut butter, your favourite taste  
So do not let it go to waste.

Come follow the trail of this lovely smell,  
Be not afraid, all will be well.

Just a few steps and there's your prize,  
To leave it now would be unwise.

There it sits in that beautiful trap  
So in you go, there's a good chap.

Come dear rat, just step inside,  
See how the door is open wide.

There's nothing to fear, the trap's humane,  
I guarantee you'll feel no pain.

So in you go and take the bait,  
Take it now, it's not too late.

Well done, brave rat, you've gone inside,  
My spell tonight has been your guide.

The trap has sprung, the door has shut,  
But do not be disconsolate,

I'll help you start a new career,  
Though many, many miles from here.

□

Pete Crowther

# A Summer Storm

There's going to be a thunderstorm quite soon,  
The air is still, the sky is growing darker,  
Clouds tower above and menacingly loom.  
I'm sitting in the summer house beneath  
The apple tree, late afternoon. Out there  
And unaware of me are lots of birds.  
They seem to lead such active busy lives:  
Two swallows flutter in among and under-  
neath the apple leaves to seek out flies  
That congregate and shelter there, in vain;  
The little perky nut-brown jenny wren  
With jaunty tail is like a tiny mouse,  
Now here, now there, and everywhere she goes;  
On centre stage the tattered father blackbird  
Who all summer long has toiled each day  
His ever hungry importuning young  
To feed is here attended by two portly  
Daughters whose gaping bills he tries to fill;  
From time to time the curious bright-eyed robin  
Comes to sit upon the chimonière  
From where he looks at me, the only bird  
To know that I am watching from within.

The stage begins to clear then when a peal  
Of thunder says the storm is nearly here.  
The pattering on the wooden roof begins  
To quicken, rain falls upon the paving stones  
Outside in furious floods until again  
It slackens and becomes desultory.  
The stage is empty now, the curtain down,  
All actors gone save for the garden toad  
Who slowly crawls across the dampened grass  
Enjoying all this wetness everywhere,  
With raindrops sliding off his wrinkled skin.  
And afterwards when now the storm has passed  
A cool and welcome freshness fills the air,  
The curtain lifts, and one by one the cast  
Returns to centre stage, the play goes on.



# A Surprise Visit

At four o'clock she knocked at the door  
I'd never seen a goddess before.  
She wore a dress of shimmering light  
Around her waist a cord drawn tight.

Upon her head a crescent moon  
(Not quite the thing for the afternoon)  
And strangest yet a pair of horns  
Such as you'd see on elves and fauns.

Her eyes below that rounded brow  
Reminded me of a Jersey cow.  
Those features soft and feminine  
Demanded that I let her in.

She'd come to us with a tale of woe  
Her car had stalled and would not go.  
She had a meeting with Thoth and Isis  
And other immortals, but now this crisis!

She'd lent her mobile to Father Ra  
So was not able to phone the AA.  
Her eyes began to fill with tears  
As she recounted all her fears.

I calmed her down with a cup of tea  
And let her use the phone for free—  
Not much I know, I would've done more  
For not everyone gets to help Hathor.

Pete Crowther

# A View From My Window On A Late Sunday Afternoon In Winter

The sky has cleared, it is a duck-egg blue,  
so still, so light, the clouds are few and white  
like Royal Icing on a Christmas cake,  
no wind, or very little. I watch my neighbour's  
chimney smoke across the road, it rises  
in a thin and fitful plume that gently drifts  
sideways, then soon disperses in the air  
like prayer. On either side the window frames  
a lattice-work of branches, stark and bare  
against the sky, like Chinese characters  
in black ink, or pebbles of dendritic agate  
such as one finds sometimes upon the beach.  
Beside the darkened escallonia hedge  
a cloud of winter gnats perform their dance  
in the lonely air, they rise and fall, advance,  
retreat, frail bodies that for a moment catch  
the misty light from the setting sun. There are  
no birds or other insects in the air.

Pete Crowther

# A Window Seat

Five miles high  
in our chartered jet  
we fly in Fairyland,  
all shining light, the  
sky sea-bright, and  
blue as lapis lazuli;  
white as Dover's cliffs, clouds  
form a floor — a field of floating ice  
below, so cold, so pure  
like summer  
in Antarctica  
before mankind.

□

Pete Crowther

# A Word Of Advice

If you never give up  
and never lose hope,  
you'll get there  
in the end,  
trust me!

Pete Crowther



# Addiction To The Weed

Do you remember when you used to smoke  
those times, usually late at night  
when the shops had all shut  
and you suddenly found  
you had smoked your last cigarette?  
Then the Hunt began,  
a desperate search, a rummaging  
through coat pockets  
trouser pockets,  
shirt pockets,  
ash trays—looking for a single  
smokable tab end. Nothing!  
So now begins the grovelling,  
the groping down the backs  
of arm chairs, settees,  
lifting up and  
looking under cushions.  
Somewhere in the house  
there must be one—  
but no, so then begins,  
all dignity gone,  
the breaking up of tiny tabs  
retrieved from ash trays and  
waste paper baskets,  
the gathering of the sodden flakes  
like gold to be rolled in the folded paper  
and licked into a  
matchstick-thin  
apology for a cigarette.  
God, how glad I am  
I've given up!

Pete Crowther

# Aegir: Norse God Of The Sea

I am Aegir, Lord God of the Sea,  
Husband of Ran, goddess of storms.  
I have dominion over all the oceans  
And all the waters of the Earth.  
My nine daughters move the waves  
At my behest. The winds of the world  
Blow as I command, gale force nine  
To hurricane or gentle breeze  
According to my whim. Within its walls  
On the ocean bed my great hall holds  
All the treasures of the seas, garnered  
From every sunken ship or wreck  
That ever was or ever yet will be.  
Gold, silver, shell of abalone, mother-of-pearl,  
Jewels, chalices, drinking cups and porcelain,  
Fine wines and honeyed mead  
All stored within its glimmering walls.  
Come taste my fabled hospitality,  
I brew the finest ale that ever foamed  
On land or in the sea. Come feast, eat, drink  
And merry be, enjoy my hospitality,  
Let your ears ring with the siren songs  
Of the seals and whales and be beguiled  
By the mermaids' tales of the watery world  
And the enchantment of Atlantis.

I'm a moody god at the best of times  
And I like to see my kingdom filled with people.  
At the least excuse my good spouse, Ran,  
Will whip up a storm and the girls will call  
Up a giant wave to founder and swamp  
The soundest ship afloat. Then Ran and I  
Will powerfully swim with our magic nets,  
By Loki blessed, to gather in drowned men  
With which to fill my kingdom's caverns,  
Under the sea, yet I'll have you know  
That in my wide hall on the ocean's bed  
Below, there's always room for more.



## After Rain

And now at last  
the rain has passed.  
See the flowers  
freshened by showers  
their petals bright  
reflecting light  
In garden beds  
they raise their heads  
and by the breeze  
are gently teased  
to fling off drops  
Like little mops  
in circles twirled  
before they're furled  
and put away  
for another day.

Pete Crowther

# After-Care Of Your New Tattoo

Remove the dressing  
after one hour  
then wash your tattoo  
with soap and warm water  
until all the dried blood  
has gone.

Rinse well with clean water,  
pat dry.

After a few days  
a light scab will form.  
DO NOT PICK IT OFF.

Keep the tattoo clean,  
avoid dust,  
grease, oil, cement,  
etc.

If you use a sunbed,  
cover tattoo with a cloth  
or tissue.

REMEMBER!

A tattoo is for life,  
not just for Christmas.

□

Pete Crowther

# An Early Morning In Winter

Still dark outside at six a.m.  
And all asleep save me. I see  
The fire's still in but just a glow  
So I must go and fetch some coal.  
The door creaks open to the world  
So cold and crackly under the stars,  
A bright full moon and a few white clouds  
Faintly seen. Meanwhile out there  
Somewhere, two fields away, the sea  
Growls and mutters to itself,  
Impatient for the sun's return.

Pete Crowther

# An Only Child

It doesn't matter now  
But then it did.  
When I was young  
I would have loved  
A sister or a brother.  
My mother used to say  
An only child was fortunate  
To have so much —  
So many toys, a bicycle,  
A room all to myself  
And holidays beside the sea.  
"We couldn't give you those"  
She used to say  
"If we'd had any more."  
I did not argue but  
Deep down inside  
With all my heart  
I'd disagree.

Pete Crowther

## And After Autumn Winter Comes

Soft-footed as a mother when her child's asleep  
So gentle autumn tiptoes in unseen  
To take the summer's place. We are surprised  
Each year to find the nights now cool, the evenings  
Shorter. Yet signs there are for all to see:  
The morning mists, the spiders' webs that hang  
Their looping ropes of pearls to shake and tremble  
In the silver light, the bright and golden fields  
Of summer corn replaced by shining stubble,  
And all too soon the plough and fresh-turned clay,  
Along the hedges hips and haws gleam red  
While purple elder fruits droop down in bunches,  
A feast of welcome for the winter thrushes.  
Now in the fields the birds begin to flock—  
Rich golden plovers, lapwings, gulls—while rooks  
Take to the sky in clouds like scattered leaves  
That soon the equinoctual gales will tear  
From twig and branch to dance along the lanes,  
And over the plains and rolling hills of England,  
Then when the days begin to fade, far off  
We hear the heavy tread of dread November  
And smell the smoke of smouldering leaves, and him,  
The guy we burn each year in sacrifice  
To grim King Winter, waiting in the wings.

Pete Crowther



# April

Like a young girl  
Running barefoot  
Across the dewy fields  
And meadows,  
So April comes—  
Welcome as the cowslips,  
Fresh as the first lambs of spring.

Pete Crowther

## As It Was In The Beginning...

That morning by the empty beach  
Just you and me, the sea,  
The sighing waves that break  
Upon the sand, the sun, the sky,  
White billowing clouds sailing by,  
No living soul save you and I  
To gaze upon the waters where  
Ten thousand silver sequins  
Glitter in the sunlight, dancing  
On the surface of the sea.  
Time has no meaning here:  
This scene has been the same  
Unchanged a million years, or more,  
Long, long before man came.  
True, too, you may be sure, it will remain  
The same when we shall be no more —  
The sea, the sand, the waves  
That break upon the strand,  
The sun, the sky, the rolling clouds  
And sunlight dancing on the water.

Pete Crowther

## At Four O'Clock This Afternoon

There's a V-shaped gap where the tall hedge parts  
By the garden gate and it frames a view  
Of a sycamore tree with a field beyond.  
In summer there'd be a herd of cows  
But it's empty now — just a bare-branched tree  
And the high green bank of an estuary.  
At four o'clock this afternoon  
Behind the tree and above the bank  
I saw the sun about to set  
Orange-red in a plain grey sky.  
The world for a moment then was just  
A setting sun, a leafless tree,  
A field, a river bank, and me.

Pete Crowther

# Avalanche

Beneath the clouds the rocky cliff  
Rose up a thousand feet at least  
And seemed to dominate the vale  
Like some enormous castle wall  
By giants built to subjugate  
All lesser races such as we.

The climb was classed as 'very severe'  
Far harder than I'd done before  
But nonetheless the time had come  
To kit ourselves with ropes and slings  
With cramponed boots and carabiners  
And all the tackle that climbers use.

The rock felt good both hard and sound  
As reaching up I slowly groped  
And found a lovely 'jug' to grasp.  
No other thought had I beyond  
Where next to place my hands and feet  
No time for fear to take a hold.

At last I reached my fellow climber  
And found myself an anchorage  
My back to rock on a narrow ledge.  
It was a shock to see below  
Between my feet like tiny flies  
A flock of jackdaws wheeling there  
In miles and miles of empty air.

And on the snaking valley road  
A car and bus in slow procession  
Unreal they seemed, like children's toys,  
So far away they made no noise.  
Alas I had forgot the rule  
That tyro climbers don't look down!

Exposure hit me like a fist.  
The ledge now shrank to inches only  
And all my limbs had turned to water.

I could not move or think at all  
Stuck half-way up a vertical cliff  
One step away from certain death.

How long the fit of panic lasted  
I cannot say, it seemed an age  
But very slowly strength returned  
And by the time I had to start  
My feet could move to face the rock,  
My thoughts return to concentrate  
Where next to place my hand and foot.

We carried on that afternoon  
Up chimneys, overhangs and cracks  
Until at last the final pitch  
And then what joy to reach the summit.  
This climb is known as 'Avalanche'  
It is the longest route in Wales.

All day we'd climbed without a rest  
And lying on the springy turf  
I realized I'd passed a test  
And learnt something about myself  
To help me fight the demon Fear.  
Whenever now it shows its face  
I simply murmur "Avalanche".

Pete Crowther

# Beltane

Beltane tonight  
so boys and girls  
be glad,  
leap,  
sing and dance  
about the flames  
of youth  
and happiness.

All life  
rejoice  
in earth's  
fecundity.

Pete Crowther

# Beyond The Five-Barred Gate

I know a secret place where time stands still,  
It lies beyond a five-barred gate, enclosed  
By hawthorn hedges heaped up high with drifting snow  
In maytime when the barn owl glides, pale ghost,  
Above the grasses. Here come timid deer  
To drink beside the reed-fringed pond, it is  
The haunt of fox and hare, a haven for  
The hunted, safe home for mole and water vole.  
At dusk you'll see white ghost moths dance above  
The swaying rushes. Not far away from here  
There is a place where others, too, may dance—  
A druids' grove of seven trees that grow  
In a magical ring, in a sacred circle of seven.  
I'll give you their names, then when the next full moon  
Sends down its silvery light you may join the dance  
To celebrate our love for good Mother Earth.  
Here in the ring the tallest tree is the cherry,  
Then comes the crab, the copper beech, the rowan,  
The stripling oak, the tree of streams, the alder,  
And queen of all, that lovely small-leaved lime,  
So let's link arms, and sing and dance, be merry.  
Let the billow roll, let the wave of life uplift us  
For it is Life itself we celebrate  
In this magical place beyond the five-barred gate.

Pete Crowther

# Black Hole

A black hole is hungry,  
it swallows light,  
even the odd galaxy  
like a Hoover,  
but get this—  
they say it blows out  
(at the other end, I guess)  
new universes  
like frogspawn  
or bubbles, just think:  
a froth of universes,  
each as big as ours  
but all different.  
Man, it's mind blowing!

Pete Crowther



# Blood On The Floor

Where religious beliefs  
are strongly held  
and faith is a rock  
of certainty,  
there you will find  
Rectitude,  
Morality,  
Righteousness,  
and blood on the floor.

□

Pete Crowther

# Bureaucrats

“Do not fear us — fear God! ”,  
The notice in the visa office says,  
But is that what they really mean?  
I fear not! For bureaucrats,  
And minor Ministry officials  
In all countries are the same,  
They wear dark suits, they do not smile,  
Those men who exercise the power  
To refuse. They never bend the rules,  
Those rules they say they do not make  
But just apply. Oh the pleasure  
That they get from saying that!

At home they may be hen-pecked,  
Over-ruled, and never get the chance  
To have their say, but when they don the mantle  
Of their office, see them grow:  
A little power is a heady thing!  
They feel like puppet masters,  
The ones who pull the strings that make you dance.  
It gives them lots of pleasure  
If they can make you quake and tremble  
For they're just like playground bullies —  
And I'd like to kick them all  
Up the arse!

Pete Crowther

# Calling The Moon

The oyster, the mussel, and pearl  
belong to the Moon, it is said,  
and when she is gone, like a girl  
who is lost, you can hear them cry,  
oh, longingly from where they lie  
in the sand of the soft sea bed.

Pete Crowther

# Caring For A Dead Fish

When the cupboard is bare  
And the cat's had the cream,  
Who cares about a dead fish?

When the house is on fire  
And the birds have all flown,  
Who cares about a dead fish?

When your loved ones have gone  
And you're left all alone,  
Who cares about a dead fish?

When the seas have dried up  
And the land is all desert,  
Who cares about a dead fish?

When the Sun has gone Nova  
And we're all blown to bits,  
Who cares about a dead fish?

When it's all empty space  
And there's nothing at all,  
Even a dead fish would be worth caring about.

Pete Crowther

# Clean It Up

When we walk down the road at night  
past all the houses with lighted windows  
and no curtains drawn, you like to look in.  
You say that's why people leave their curtains open  
because they want other folk to see  
how well off they are and what good taste  
they've got, but i always turn away  
and refuse to look in. I don't know whether that's  
just being old fashioned and polite  
or whether i don't like being manipulated,  
that is, if you are right, anyway  
i like to keep my eyes open  
for dog shit left lying on the path.

Pete Crowther

# Cold Moons Of Winter

(The moons of December, January and February were once known by our forebears respectively as Long Night or Cold Moon, Wolf or Storm Moon, and Snow Moon)

Cold moons of winter  
The wolf and the storm  
Ice crystals splinter  
The long night is born  
Grey shadows lope  
Over the snow  
Yet still there is hope  
Though fires burn low.

Pete Crowther

# Contentment

Just me and the dog  
On the rug in front of the fire  
And the wind that blows  
In gusts against the window pane  
Outside in the winter dark.  
The dog is busy gnawing her bone  
And I am writing a poem.

Pete Crowther

# Cyber Friend

I've never heard your voice nor seen  
Your face or felt your touch but yet  
I feel I know you better than  
I know my sister or my brother.  
Perhaps because we are so far  
Apart the normal rules don't hold:  
We can relax and be ourselves —  
No need to raise the usual  
Defensive barriers and fences.  
Instead we share our inner thoughts  
As though confiding to a diary.  
If either one is feeling blue  
There'll be no lack of sympathy.  
We know each other's tastes and sense  
Of humour: you may not hear me laugh  
Nor see me smile but yet I do,  
It's great to share a joke and have  
A laugh, but best of all I like  
To pass the time in friendly chat  
With you. It cheers me up no end.  
Oh yes! I recommend  
A cyber friend.

Pete Crowther



## D/C; Or, A Net Surfer's Frustration At Being Off-Line

Miss A. Berhane

Will be going insane,  
All day deprived of the Internet  
Like Romeo without Juliet.  
To be so long without a link  
Is sure to drive her mad, I think.  
If it's not back soon, I've got a feelin'  
She'll up and kick the bloody screen in!

□

Note: D/C = Disconnected

Pete Crowther

# Dancing In The Wind

Lightly the leaves  
shiver in the breeze  
as it blows to and fro  
a slender fine stem of bamboo  
that grows in my garden  
not far from the sea.

It curtseys and dips  
do-si-do, do-si-do  
so fresh and so green  
each leaf seems to glow  
be alive to the dance  
in the sunlight of late afternoon.

Deceptive, unreal are  
these brief sunlit spells  
when winter still lurks  
and spring like a  
giddy young girl  
simply teases and simpers and flirts.

Pete Crowther

# Death Of A Whale

Like some great fallen king  
or god from outer space  
it lies now dead and lifeless  
on the shore. I estimate it weighs  
some thirty tons or more.  
We stand around, a little crowd  
of pygmies who have crept  
out from the shelter of the trees  
to gawp at it and feel  
an unaccustomed sense of wonder  
and amazement as we gaze upon  
its sheer bulk and size.

It was a week ago  
when early in the morning  
this great whale turned and  
swam into the river's mouth.  
Somehow he'd lost his way  
and found himself alone  
and far away from his home waters  
in the rolling ocean deeps  
of mid-Atlantic in whose dark depths  
he moved and had his being,  
plunging down to seek the  
giant squid on which he fed  
and bursting through the waves  
to breach in all his majesty  
of power, and beauty too.

It was the worst mistake  
he ever made to swim into the river  
for starved and dehydrated, he  
soon lost the estuary's deep-water channel  
to struggle in the shallows  
on a falling tide then find himself held fast  
in clinging mud. The more he threshed  
and flailed, the more he sank  
into its soft embrace and as he rolled  
it oozed into his blowhole; thus he died.

It came too late the next high tide  
that lifted him to float again  
and wash him clean of mud.  
For seven nights and seven days  
he has drifted up and down  
the river with the tide,  
but now he's beached,  
this lovely whale we mourn.  
Look well upon him for  
tomorrow the fellmonger will come.

□

Envoi

Coincidentally  
in today's newspaper I read  
that Japan, a civilised nation,  
slaughters more  
than one thousand  
whales per annum, all  
for scientific research, it's said.  
Sadly supply of whalemeat  
for human consumption  
exceeds demand so  
most of these noble creatures  
with whom we share our planet  
end up as dog food in Japan.

Pete Crowther

# Diminishing Returns

This pretty girl has style and flair,  
Will she invite me to her lair?  
I swear there's something in the air.

Should I invite her for a drink,  
Suggest a date at the skating rink  
(For writing an ode is a waste of ink) ?

These things don't come upon a plate,  
Or if they do, they come too late  
Like something nasty that we ate.

So, dear friend, please do not scold -  
Our warmest days give way to cold  
And youth itself like love grows old.

Pete Crowther

# Do You Recall That Evening? (Trans. Of Count Alexei Tolstói)

Do you recall that evening, the murmur of the sea,  
The nightingale that sang in the eglantine,  
Those scented white acacia sprays  
That trembled in your bonnet?

Between the fallen rocks and thickly clustered vines  
Where the path was barely six feet wide  
We rode together side by side  
Our arms entwined with one another.

You were a picture, stooping from your saddle  
To pluck the scarlet eglantine  
And pat the shaggy ruffled mane  
Of the little bay horse that you loved.

Your dress, too light, would not keep straight  
And caught upon the branches,  
Light-heartedly you laughed to see  
So many flowers everywhere—about the horse,  
And in your arms, and dancing in your bonnet.

Do you remember the roar of the rain-swelled torrent  
That filled the air with its spume and spray,  
And how our grief seemed far away,  
And how it was forgotten?

Pete Crowther

# Do You Remember, Maria? (Trans. Count Aleksei Tolstói)

Do you remember, Maria,  
That old house  
And the ancient limes  
Above the drowsy pond?

The quiet paths,  
The overgrown old garden,  
The lofty gallery  
Hung with portraits side by side?

Do you remember, Maria,  
Those evening skies,  
The low, flat fields,  
The distant village bells?

The river bank beyond the garden  
Where flowed the lazy stream,  
And in those golden fields of wheat  
The cornflowers of the plain?

And the grove, where first  
We wandered by ourselves?  
Do you remember, Maria,  
Our lost yesterdays?

□

Pete Crowther

# Dogs

How do you describe a dog?  
A friend or a foe?  
Or maybe just a pet.  
Whatever you describe your dog as,  
They're always special to you

Pete Crowther



# Don'T Mention The Weather

Do not ever, ever, ever  
ask an Englishman about the weather.  
Believe you me, it's a big mistake  
that you should never ever make.

For he'll go on and on forever  
until you think that you will never  
get away from his mad tirade  
about Fahrenheit and Centigrade.

They learn it at their mothers' knees:  
it is the national disease  
where they all seem quite possessed  
by this strange climatic zest.

They'll talk and talk for simply hours  
on the possibilities of showers  
or the outside chance of freezing fog  
should you want to walk the dog.

Thunderstorms will get them going  
and they really love it when it's snowing.  
Especially they find it pleasing  
to prophesy a spell of freezing.

They like their weather pretty dire  
in places such as Staffordshire  
and when it comes to wind and gale,  
they play fine tunes on the Beaufort Scale.

Most of all, they really get boring  
explaining why it'll soon be pouring,  
and you'll learn more than you want to know  
of drizzle, rain and sleet and snow.

So I will give you this advice:  
"An Englishman can be very nice  
but keep him off all talk of weather  
or you'll be stuck with him for ever."

□

Pete Crowther

# Drank Too Much At Sunday Lunch

Drank too much at Sunday lunch  
had a nap and woke at five,  
thought it was morning and felt  
like hell. Slumped in front  
of my computer —  
no messages  
on Poem Hunter.  
Who's on line? No-one I know,  
God I'm feelin' well below  
par, yes very far,  
even my head  
is hanging low,  
think about what  
a friend told me today,  
how his mate last week  
had an awful pain  
in his left shoulder,  
it got worse and worse,  
so he took him to the hospital  
and in the car he began to sink  
into a really parlous state  
yelping with  
the awful pain.  
Heart attack, it  
turned out to be and he was only  
forty-three. The evening stretches into  
infinity, and as for me  
I'd like to be some place else,  
in another me,  
in a different time and place

Pete Crowther

# Dream Encounter

Last night in my dream  
I saw Philip Larkin.  
He was talking to the teller  
at the bank—heads bent  
both whispering of money.  
I asked him how he went about  
the business of writing a poem.  
"I always use a songbook",  
he explained, "the words are almost  
poetry already. It makes it so much  
easier that way to write in verse".  
Two sparrows by his bed  
began to peck at crumbs  
from the fragments of two cakes  
on a plate, on his bedside table.  
When they made as if to eat  
the untouched chocolate cake,  
I shooed them both away—  
their flight was slow. I told him  
Andrew Motion, the Poet Laureate,  
had asked me to attend his reading  
of a Larkin poem. He made a moue  
but did not say I should not go.  
Beside the bed and next  
to the untouched chocolate cake  
there was a very rotten apple.  
Light as gossamer it was,  
though when I picked it up to give to him,  
he shrank away. His face  
was slightly swollen. It seemed  
to glisten. I thought he looked sickly  
as he did the last time I saw him,  
that time he smiled at me.

Pete Crowther

# Echoes Of Egyptian Goddesses

Egyptians turned to her in crisis, Isis  
Was the favourite of most mothers. Others  
Tended rather to prefer her  
Who appeared as a cow, how  
I do not know, though  
It was magic I suppose: those  
Egyptian goddesses were very good at that!  
She was very popular, the Lady of the Sycamore, Hathor,  
Goddess of love, dance, and music, too. Who  
Could not warm to such a one? None.

Pete Crowther

# Empathy

Have you ever thought how it would feel  
To be a cow, or horse say, munching grass  
In some wet field with flies all round your eyes,  
No hands to shoo them off, or worse,  
To be a chicken in a battery farm  
Under the lights all day and night, the smell  
And the heat, or a sheep, or a sow  
In a truck on the way to the abattoir?  
I mean – to be really inside the animal's head  
To see what it sees, to feel what it feels,  
Its fear and its pain  
Or just the plain discomfort of its life.  
Can you think as an animal would?

Chuang Tzu did it.  
Long ago when the pharaohs reigned  
He dreamed he was a butterfly  
And when he woke he wondered  
If he really were a butterfly  
Dreaming he was Chuang Tzu.  
We too need to practise such a seeing  
Through another being's eyes, that way  
Perhaps we might become more loth  
To kill and torture one another  
And learn to treat each fellow being as a brother.

Pete Crowther

# Every Day Something New

Every day  
Something new I learn.  
Today it is  
That fresh  
Well-cultivated grass  
Provides ALL the needs  
Of the dairy cow  
In ideally balanced  
And readily  
Assimilable form.  
For this information  
My thanks are due  
To the Crown Chemical  
Manure Co. Ltd.,  
Now alas  
Defunct.  
□

Pete Crowther

# Exchange Of An Unsuitable Pet

In a little family group they stood  
Aggrieved on the petshop floor.  
"It bit me and me mam and our Gladys,  
And 'im, that boy by the door".

The ferret dangled like a dishcloth,  
Totally in disgrace  
And listened appalled as its sins and shortcomings  
Were paraded in front of its face.

The petshop assistant was doubtful, and said  
They'd had it as a kitten,  
And neither customer or staff  
Had it ever bitten.

But when she'd seen the scars and scratches  
On Gladys's hands and face  
She said they might have another ferret  
To take the miscreant's place.

"No thanks, no way", they said, as one,  
"We'll have a different pet,  
Something soft, preferably toothless,  
Anything but a ferret"!

They humm'd and haw'd and messed about  
With many a poke and dig  
And finally chose in exchange for their ferret  
A gormless guinea pig.

Pete Crowther



# Father And Daughter

I never thought I'd live  
One day to see my daughter be  
A Human Resources Policy Executive.

But then perhaps  
My daughter'd rather  
Not have a would-be poet for a father.

Pete Crowther

# Finding Comfort In Cosmology

The universe, they used to say  
exploded once from a tiny point  
and all the bits—  
planets, stars and galaxies  
shot out like bullets from the centre,  
expanded outward into space  
and everything moved away  
from everything else.  
They prophesied that gravity at last  
would slow things down,  
all outward movement stop,  
go in reverse  
and then contract  
again, back to a point—  
a singularity so small  
it must explode  
so “Bang”—a new universe  
is born again  
and so the cycle endlessly  
repeats—expand, contract  
like breath, the process  
somehow seems comforting:  
it seems to say  
that life goes on  
even though you are not there  
to enjoy it.

Cosmologists are fickle creatures  
for now they say  
it doesn't happen quite  
like that, instead the universe  
just keeps on expanding  
forever and ever,  
each star, each world  
getting further and further away  
from its nearest companion in space,  
diminishing and dwindling,  
moving away out into space,  
faster and faster

for ever and ever  
dwindling, diminishing,  
becoming colder  
and colder, and  
lonelier and lonelier.  
This is how, they say,  
the universe will end  
or rather will not end.

I think I prefer  
their latest speculation  
where multiple universes  
are born from black holes  
billions of them bubbling and frothing  
like frogspawn.

I favour life  
over death.

□

Pete Crowther

# First Love

My first true love was only seven  
Her hair was fair, her eyes were blue,  
She was an angel straight from heaven,  
We shared a desk at infants' school.

Beneath its lid our knees were pressed  
Together tightly, warm and friendly  
Like two little birds in their own nest,  
She was my love, I loved her tenderly.

The golden hairs upon her arm  
Even today I can recall,  
That clear skin and gentle charm  
Of my young sweetheart, Ann Goodall.

Pete Crowther

# First Snow

It is snowing in Vineland,  
The first flakes are falling  
Gently as blessings  
Through the still air.  
Who cares for the moon  
When snowflakes are drifting,  
Drifting so softly  
Down through the darkness,  
Down to the rooftops  
Covering the sleepers,  
The dreamers, in Vineland tonight?

Pete Crowther

# Fog

From dawn this misty  
morning we have heard  
the doleful calling of the distant  
foghorn warning all the sailors  
of the dangers on the waters of the deep.

Would that we likewise were warned  
when dangers loom and threaten  
to destroy, when wars, disease and greed  
weigh down their woes upon us  
and we find that we are blinded  
by the cold and clammy fogs  
of ignorance, intolerance and hate.

□

Pete Crowther

# Forget Me Not

We will each take a picture of 'Time',  
here is mine —  
four fossils, a wristwatch, and flowers  
so go back  
two hundred million years,  
imagine a warm shallow sea  
where the ammonites lazily swim  
near the surface enjoying the sun  
while below on the dark sea bed  
the other two cosily snuggle  
with their kind  
in a blanket of soft warm mud.

The flowers are forget-me-nots,  
they speak of love.  
They grow where it's damp  
by the banks of becks and streams.  
Do you know how they came by their name?  
Once a girl to test out her lover  
pointed her hand to a clump  
on the bluff of a bank of a swift moving river,  
"Get me those", she said with a frown,  
straightaway down the steep bank he scrambled,  
caught his foot in a root, tumbled down,  
was swept away by the torrent  
soon to drown.  
Faintly she heard his last words  
carry over the water so sadly  
"Oh my love, oh my love,  
forget me not."

Like little blue stars shining brightly  
the flowers only last for three days  
then fade and die.  
True love, though, is like the ammonite  
it shines bright still even after  
two hundred million years  
and laughs at Time!





# Fresh Sea Breeze

In the summer sky  
the leaves of the trees  
on the highest branches  
are dancing;  
they sway in the breeze  
to and fro,  
to and fro they go  
from side to side  
unceasing and slow,  
always in motion,  
so high up above  
in the clear blue sky,  
shining and dancing,  
like a woman in love,  
stirred by the sea's fresh breeze.  
□

Pete Crowther

# Gaping Ghyll

Wet walls of rock enclose  
a caverned space — earth's womb  
wherein we wander like  
lost souls in exile  
from our sunlit world above.  
Here chthonic gods and goddesses  
of darkness rule. There is no sky  
but far away and high above,  
faint daylight from the surface  
filters through the cracks  
and chimneys in the roof.  
The only sound down here  
is trickling water and the  
crash and splash of three tall waterfalls  
that fall so fast  
through all the emptiness of this  
great cavern underground. They say  
it is so vast, a whole  
cathedral could be lost  
and swallowed up within its maw.  
Before these towering walls  
and buttresses of rock, as old  
as time, I feel a need  
to kneel, for never before,  
in any cathedral made by man,  
have I felt such a  
terrible sense of religious awe.  
□

Pete Crowther

# Gimme A Camel

If I had the room  
And the money to spend,  
I'd buy a white camel  
And call it 'My friend'

For the camel is an animal  
With bags of attitude,  
Sometimes supercilious,  
And sometimes rather rude.

Yet I really do admire  
Its independent air  
And however long the journey,  
It will always get you there'

So on my camel's back  
I'd sit up tall and proud  
For he who rides a camel  
Stands out in any crowd.

And every weekday morning  
To work I would commute  
And for rising petrol prices,  
I wouldn't give a hoot.

So should you see a camel  
On E-bay up for sale,  
Just give me a buzz old matey -  
And I'll be on its trail!

Pete Crowther

# God Bless This Bread

"God bless this bread  
And God preserve  
The breadwinner", I murmur  
Making the sign  
Of the cross in the dough  
Though I don't believe  
Any more in a personal god.

Yet still I say this prayer—  
Say, twice a week  
When I bake bread  
In the way I was taught  
By my grandmother long ago.  
She learned the art  
Of baking bread and this ritual  
Prayer as a slip of a girl  
From the lips of her Irish mother.

I see her there, my grandmother  
Still young in her flowered dress,  
sleeves rolled, she bustles in  
And rakes the fire, puts on  
More coal to heat the oven  
Until it is just right.  
Breadmaking then was an arcane art  
Involving dampers, rods  
Pulled in and out  
Like organ stops. She played  
Whole symphonies upon that  
Kitchen range, while nowadays  
I use dried packaged yeast  
And turn the gas to number eight.

But yet I do perform, indeed,  
Could not omit, this magic rite,  
This ritual prayer of invocation  
And every time there comes to mind  
A winding line going back in time  
Of mothers and their dark-haired daughters,

Beautiful soft-voiced Irish women  
Solemnly blessing the sacred bread.

Pete Crowther

# God's Favourites

J.B.S. Haldane,  
though it seemed rather odd,  
was asked to explain  
what he thought about God.  
He pondered some time  
but at length he replied:  
"Forgive the forced rhyme,  
but I'm quite satisfied  
that despite all His laws and decretals  
God's got an inordinate  
fondness for beetles."

Pete Crowther

# Grendel's Mother

We never should have let her in,  
Grendel's mum, you said that we'd be sorry  
If we did, but I was feeling generous  
After several double gins  
And when she knocked at six o'clock  
Quick up I jumped and called "Come in".  
A thundercloud stood on the step!  
It wasn't just that she was big,  
She was obese, with eyes the size of saucers  
And hot breath enough to burn the curtains  
When she coughed. Like some enormous  
Tyrannosaurus Rex she lurched  
Into the room sending all the ornaments  
Flying from the mantelpiece,  
Splintering the floorboards, frightening the cat.  
Then she started getting nasty  
When I asked her to refrain  
From chewing up the tablecloth  
And spitting out the bits.  
The telephone was still intact  
So I dialled nine-nine-nine.  
When the operator asked me  
What service I required  
I didn't want an ambulance,  
I didn't want the police  
I didn't want a fire engine,  
Not one of them could cope,  
So I screamed into the mouthpiece  
As the monster ran amok:  
"I need someone to slay a beast,  
Please send St. George or Beowulf".  
□

Pete Crowther

## Hannah' S Poem For 2006

At the Crown and Anchor,  
On a cold winter's day,  
Drinking coke and orange  
And playing dominoes,  
Having a great time  
On New Year's Eve.  
Christmas has come and gone.  
It's sad when it's over  
But a new year is coming,  
Packed with lots of adventures,  
It's so exciting!

Pete Crowther



# Happy Valentine

How can I tell you what you mean to me?  
All words fall short of what I want to say,  
Proof of my love though deep as any sea  
Perhaps must be expressed some other way.  
You cannot know how each and every day  
Very seldom passes but I think of you  
And warmly smile within myself, and pray  
Lest anything should come between us two.  
Eternally to you I will be true  
Nor will I ever leave you in the lurch.  
True love will always by itself renew  
Its own clear flame that nothing can besmirch.  
No tempest, fire, nor storm or avalanche,  
Ever, Love, can think our love to quench!

(acrostic sonnet)

Pete Crowther

# Hathor Of Dendera: A Litany

Hathor of Dendera, great is your name  
Lady of the Universe, the power is yours  
Lady of the Sky, perfect in grace  
Mistress of the West, source of all pleasures  
Mistress of the East, fount of delight  
Red Hair, Bright Hair, hear our prayer  
Daughter of Re, raise up our hearts  
Mansion of Horus, send us your blessings  
Lady of Byblos, come and be with us  
Lady of the Sacred Land, come to us  
Lady of the Southern Sycamore, come to our call  
Lady of the Headland of Manu, come and refresh us  
Lady of the House of Jubilation, fill us with joy  
You from Khemmis, may you be near us  
You from the Land of Silence, bring us peace  
Mistress of Turquoise, show us your beauty  
Eye of Re, look down on us, shine on us  
Storm in the Sky, send us your light  
Great Wild Cow of the Marshes, may you sustain us  
Twin Sister of Sekhmet the Lioness, be lenient, spare us  
Mistress of Nubia, may we rejoice in you  
Hathor the Golden, Lady of Heaven, great is your beauty, great is your  
name.

□

Pete Crowther

# Hawthorn Blossom In The City

Some say that Hull's an ugly city  
All grime and muck and traffic fumes  
In truth a place that's far from pretty  
But have you seen its hawthorn blooms?

We went to Hull by car today,  
The sun was shining on the trees,  
While here and there white-castled may  
Reared crowns of snow above the leaves.

You could not see the muck and grime  
Nor hear the traffic's constant bray  
For here was other space and time  
Where ruled the lovely flowering may.

Pete Crowther

# Heaven Is Here And Now

Heaven is here and now —  
drowsing in the sun  
on a Sunday afternoon  
in early June, a distant hum  
of some machinery, the murmur of  
the sea, borne on a breeze  
that cools, and rustles the leaves  
of my apple trees near where I sit  
in this comfy chair high up  
on my garage roof where I overlook  
green fields that stretch  
for miles and miles to where  
distinctions merge in the blue and  
misty shadows of some other land  
beyond the far horizon.

In the sun-warmed air sleek  
swallows swoop and wheel  
while other birds fly to and fro  
so purposeful on errands that  
no man may know. A falcon glides  
above the trees, two butterflies  
rise high in a spiral dance  
and over there shining bright  
black and white against the green,  
heads down, a herd of Friesian cows  
lazily graze the lush grass  
that grows in a field by the sea..

All this we know will pass:  
other days will bring grey skies,  
cold winds that bite, pain, loss, disease,  
and bitter sadness, perhaps, but yet  
this summer day when the sun is high  
in a clear blue sky, we can truly say,  
"Heaven is here and now".

□



# Helpful Advice

I see him now, my grandfather,  
grey-tached and calm,  
still centre of a raging storm.  
He sits upright and puffs upon  
his old tobacco pipe,  
meanwhile my mother, frantic,  
cursing, ranting, scrabbles  
in the sideboard drawers and  
cupboards, rummages  
coat pockets, handbag, biscuit tin,  
upturns ornaments that spill  
old coins and buttons, keys  
and rings and safety pins,  
then flings chair cushions  
far and wide and fiddles  
with her fingers down the backs  
of all our easy chairs and sofa.  
This time she's lost, I think, her watch.

At last like some Greek oracle of old  
my grandad speaks those words  
that always fanned my mother's rage —  
"It must be somewhere",  
he would say, or better still —  
"It's looking at you! "  
Surprisingly he lived  
to reach a ripe old age.

Pete Crowther

# Her First Tattoo

The oldest person he'd ever tattooed, he said  
Was a widowed old lady of eighty-six, no less,  
Who ever since she was a girl had longed  
To have her very own tattoo, but first  
Her dad had put his foot down on the plan  
And then it was her husband who'd said "no",  
So frustrated all her life, she'd had to wait  
Until her husband had been laid to rest —  
Now here she was! So taking a deep breath  
Outside the tattoo parlour, and feeling rather  
Nervous she stepped in. Among the punk-  
haired girls with hollowed eyes and pierced tongues  
And boys with metal belts and shaven heads  
She felt a little out of place, but then  
She saw the glittering samples on the wall —  
A rainbow-coloured magic land of fantasy  
With wizards, dragons, lightning, thundrerbolts,  
Warriors with blazing guns — "Pow! " and "Blatt! " —  
Wild horses and women with bayonets and blasters,  
Leaping, screaming, long tresses streaming,  
Bare-thighed, wild-eyed, untrammelled, free...  
And in the quiet places on the wall  
Red roses richly entangled in thickets of thorns,  
Loving hearts and limbs entwined in blossomed arbours  
Where swallows and lovebirds go swooping and looping in play.  
When her turn came, she chose a purple dragon,  
Fork-tailed and fiercely snarling, spitting flame.  
She did not think her father or late husband  
Would have approved its presence on her arm  
But "tough! " At least she knew it would surprise  
The maiden lady who brought her 'meals-on-wheels'  
And if it didn't, she had been rather taken  
By those slender silver rods for pierced tongues.  
□

Pete Crowther

# High Tide At Night

I can hear the far off roaring  
of the breakers in the darkness  
as they pound upon the shoreline,  
and the curlews softly calling  
are but voices and as lonely  
as the moon that calls the tides in.

Pete Crowther



# Home Waters

As soon as I step upon the deck  
Of any boat or ship afloat  
I feel at home and ready to roam  
The ocean wide come wind or tide,  
Cast off the ropes, sky-high my hopes  
And full of joy like some young boy.  
So come with me, let's put to sea,  
Shrug off the years, forget our fears,  
Together sail through storm and gale  
Hand in hand and far from land  
Yet safe and sound—not homeward bound  
For home is here just where we are,  
Happy to be—safe on the lap of our mother, the sea.

Pete Crowther

# Home-Thoughts From A Broad

Oh not to be in England  
Now that May is here.  
The sky all day  
Has been cold and grey,  
And it has rained since Saturday.  
The chaffinch sits hunched  
On the orchard bough  
Bedraggled and sodden and dumb  
While the whitethroat like  
The swallow wonders  
What folly made it come.  
As for the wise thrush....  
It doesn't give a damn what you think;  
Like me, it's pissed off with this sodding weather.

Pete Crowther

## Hymn To Diana (Trans. Of Catullus)

We virgin lads and lasses all  
Pledge Diana heart and soul:  
Come then you lads and lasses, sing  
In her honour now a hymn.  
Daughter-goddess of mighty Jove  
And lovely Queen Latona, who  
By Delia placed an olive tree,  
Lady of mountains, and the gate  
That leads into the greenwood's shade,  
The hidden glade, the stream that sings:  
You, Juno Lucina called to ease  
A woman's pains when giving birth,  
You, goddess of the triple ways  
That meet by Moon's reflected light.  
You, who by your monthly course  
Measure the passage of the year,  
And fill with corn and luscious fruit  
The farmer's barns and spacious loft.  
May it please you, as of old,  
That you preserve from harm and grief  
We sons of wolf-child Romulus.

Pete Crowther

# Hymn To Spring

Wild roses bloom in May  
When trees are freshly green  
And everything is bright and clean  
In a new-made world's first day.

Cold winter now is far away,  
It seems a distant dream  
That somehow was not meant to stay  
And faded from the scene.

Cast off your cares, come let us play  
Discarding dull routine,  
We'll dance a jig upon the green —  
Sweet spring has come today,  
And I'm the king of the Milky Way  
And you shall be my queen.

Pete Crowther

# Hymn To The Moon

Sacred to Isis our mother the Moon  
Ancient companion and daughter of Earth  
Waxing and waning she marks out our days,  
Changes our moods and the flux of our blood.  
Mistress of tides of the sea's ebb and flow,  
Lantern of light in the darkness of night,  
Let us give praise to her beauty and grace,  
Lovely and slim as a maiden when young  
Golden and splendid she shines at the full.  
See how she sails through the clouds up above  
Graceful and calm like a galleon she rides  
Breasting the billows of night's flowing tides.  
Goddess so beautiful, goddess of love,  
Many have worshipped her down through the years,  
'Luna', 'Diana', 'Astarte' the names  
Given to praise all her beautiful forms.  
Harvest moon, hunter's moon, crescent or full,  
who is immune to her magical spell?  
Queen of all heaven, she reigns up above,  
Come and behold her in reverence and love.

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Pete Crowther

# Hymn To The Sun

All hail to the Sun at the dawn  
Rejoice at his birth in the east,  
Be ready to stand on the shore  
Each morning to see that sublime  
Sacramental ascent from the sea.  
Give praise to the Ancient of Days,  
The giver of light and of warmth,  
Imperial ruler of Earth  
And all of her planetary kin.  
We bathe in his brightness and glory,  
Give honour and reverence to Him.  
His names are both splendid and legion,  
Adonis, Sol, Helios and Ra,  
Apollo and Titan and Phoebus,  
He is both our Father and Star.

Pete Crowther

# Hypochondriac

Feeling bad tonight—  
If the worst comes to the worst,  
I'll choose cremation.

Fearing the worst, see, I've penned this haiku  
About death and my choice of cremation,  
But I'm hoping it's only the 'flu.

Pete Crowther

# I Have Not Gone Away

When I am dead my dearest  
Do not give way to grief  
But put aside your misery  
And let your heart be glad.  
Remember how we watched the moon  
And saw the sun in beauty rise.

My ashes you will scatter  
Upon our mother sea  
Then when you hear the breakers crash  
Or mark the seagull's call  
You'll truly know that I am there  
Within the heart and life of all.

So when again you feel the breeze  
Caress your cheek or stir your hair  
Be sure, its gentle touch is mine  
And when you hear the roaring gale  
Or crack of thunder on the sea  
You'll know that I am with you still—

I have not gone away.

Pete Crowther



## If I Were 21 Today

If I were twenty-one today,  
I think I'd dance the night away.  
I'd drink champagne and polish off  
Half a bottle of the best Smirnoff.  
I'd carry on till the night had flown  
And trust my friends to carry me home.  
My coming of age they'd never forget  
Nor I remember, you can bet.

(For Tiffany Etter)

Pete Crowther

## In Other Words - 'shut Your Gob! '

'Make a less noise',  
my grandad used to say.  
'Keep silence  
in the ranks'  
our old naval cox'n  
hoarsely barked,  
and 'Tikho, tikho, gospoda'  
gently hushed our  
Russian tutor, so  
what was with all these guys  
that they were always trying  
to shut us up?

Pete Crowther

## In The Hospital Waiting Room

Not feeling like a chat that afternoon  
in the hospital waiting room, I sat  
at the back in a row of empty chairs.  
I didn't have long to wait before  
I saw him coming, slightly shuffling,  
but purposeful, across the floor  
to occupy the chair right next  
to mine — "You can get them here for free,  
they'll charge you for them at the chemist."  
"What? " — "Urine specimen bottles."  
"Oh! " — I didn't want to know.  
"They test you nowadays for  
everything — just dip it in  
and they can find all sorts of things  
gone wrong with you, no messing."  
Oh! " — I didn't want to know.  
"I had my results last week,  
after my operation..." Just then  
to my delight I spied my wife  
beckoning me to come, so  
"Sorry, mate, I'll have to go"  
and all the gory details of your cherished op.,  
thank God, I'll never get to know.

Pete Crowther

## In The Rain (Trans. Of A.N. Maikov)

Remember: we were not expecting rain or thunder—  
That sudden heavy downpour found us far from home,  
We ran to hide beneath a shaggy fir,  
Excited, laughing, but a little nervous, too!  
Behind the rain, the sun shone through,  
Under the mossy fir, we stood, as in a golden cage  
Where pearls were dancing all around us on the ground;  
From each pine needle raindrops dripped,  
Fell, shining, on your hair,  
Rolled down your shoulders, underneath your blouse ...  
Remember how our laughter stopped  
When suddenly above our heads the thunder cracked!  
You came into my arms and clung, eyes tightly shut ...  
O blessed rain! O storm of gold!

Pete Crowther

## Is It You, Dad?

Sitting on a bollard  
by the harbour wall  
that old seagull  
staring at me  
could be my dear  
departed dad,  
for they do say  
as how the souls  
of sailors loth  
to leave the sea  
do transmigrate  
and be re-born  
as herring gulls  
or kittiwakes,  
but if that's him  
I think his tastes  
have greatly changed  
for I just saw  
it eat a jellyfish,  
two juicy lugworms  
and a smelly fish.

□

Pete Crowther

# Isis Reborn

Deep in the temple's dark sanctum stands she  
Like a tall statue so still and so grave  
Only the glow from her cheek and her brow  
Speak of the heartbeat that pulses within.  
Candlelight flickers between the twin horns  
Lighting the moondisc she wears on her head.  
Slim as a deer, see her shimmering dress  
Fall like a wave from her throat to her feet.

Bare-footed priestesses praise her with song,  
Dancing around her with rhythmical steps,  
They rattle their sistrums and tunefully play  
Hymns to the goddess on lyre and pipe.  
Wife of Osiris and Horus her child,  
Egyptians have worshipped her three thousand years,  
Isis the goddess and mother of kings,  
Healer, protector and maker of spells,

Bestower of blessings on all earthly joys,  
Many have turned to her, sent up their prayers,  
Gratefully raised to her temples and shrines.  
Now in this land only Philae is left,  
Built on an island beset by a sea  
Walked on by Jesus, the new jealous god  
Drowning in sorrow all laughter and light,  
Raising the sword of religious war.

Sternly he seeks out his rivals to crush,  
So sent by Justinian to close down the shrine,  
Christian zealots on Philae converged.  
Grim Theodorus, the bishop in charge  
Pulled down the statues of Isis with scorn,  
Declared that he'd cleansed it of all pagan filth,  
Installed there a church to the Christian God,  
Named it for Mary, that virgin so mild.

But wisest of goddesses, Isis had power  
Greater than Thetis to don a disguise.  
Quickly her moondisc and sweet curving horns

Changed to a circlet of glittering stars.  
Down came her shimmering goddess's dress,  
Swapped for a simple and chaste-looking robe.  
None of the Christians noticed the change  
So now she is living in every high church  
Patiently waiting her chance to emerge  
As Isis the goddess of pleasure and love.

Pete Crowther

# Joey Brown And The New Order

After the War new suburbs rose  
And builders did a roaring trade  
But as with every new advance  
There is a price that must be paid.

Between the new neat bungalows  
Lived Joey Brown, an ageing gypsy  
Who walked about in tattered clothes  
And kept a string of shaggy ponies,  
A dozen chickens, goats and dogs,  
His yard a meeting place for cronies  
And children from the neighbourhood  
Who gathered there to have a ride  
On Joey's cart if they were good.

But his new neighbours found it hard  
To live next door to Joey's yard,  
Petitioned the Council to close it down,  
A disgrace, they said, to Beverley town,  
Remove the gypsy, dogs and all.  
The Council resolved to build a wall  
To hide old Joey from the public eye.  
This wall when built was nine feet high,  
A monument to the middle class's  
Desire to shun the unwashed masses.

This all took place in Pighill Lane,  
A name uncouth and far too plain  
So now it's known as Woodhall Way  
And quite unspoiled we're glad to say.  
We keep up standards, guard our values,  
That yard is now a courtyard mews!

Pete Crowther



# Junk Mail And

I never open envelopes  
addressed:  
"The occupier" or,  
worse still,  
"The car owner"  
especially when  
I don't even  
own a car—

you never get them  
to "The motorcyclist"  
or "The Pantheist" or  
even "Lepidopterist"  
(all more appropriate  
in my case) instead  
they come with promises:  
"We'll cut your bill",  
"Why pay more? ",  
"We'll save on your insurance"—

To hell with them,  
in any case  
I much prefer  
e-mail now, except for scam.  
I used to love to see  
the postman  
coming down the street  
and hear the thud  
of letters falling on the mat,  
my heart would start to beat,  
accelerate, in fact.

Nowadays it's just the same  
but even better  
on PoemHunter  
dot com. I think  
it is the child in me  
that gets excited  
when I see

that yellow strip  
dance on the screen,  
with bright red letters  
that proclaim:  
“[! ! ] You’ve got 1 unread message! ”

Are you the same?

Pete Crowther

# Kelbi

Wee black pup  
jumping up  
wagging tail  
like a flail,

till I met you  
I never knew  
anyone be  
so pleased to see me!  
□

Pete Crowther

# Late Summer Migrants

You see them in all seaside towns  
Late summer, say, around the time  
The schools go back. They congregate  
Like swallows do on lines and wires  
To rest before that long hard journey  
From these shores, or like late autumn  
Butterflies that find a warm  
And sheltered spot late in the day  
Before the sun goes down.

Basking there in the still warm air  
It seems as if these too prepare  
This afternoon for their long journey  
To another shore. They softly twitter,  
Snooze, recline in peaceful rows  
On hired deckchairs in the sun  
And like the swallows, in their bones  
They know that winter soon will come.

Pete Crowther

## Leisler's Bat

It wasn't so much the rounded ears  
That gave the Leisler's bat such charm  
As it hung head down on the outside wall  
Of the old church tower, fast asleep.  
What caught at the heart was its little feet  
And the toes spread out like tiny stars.

Pete Crowther

# Life's Lesson

If I have learnt one thing, it's this:  
we only have one life to live,  
this life that's here and now,  
so take it in your arms with love,  
and hug and hug and hug it till  
you both are out of breath.

Pete Crowther

# Like Hens

Like hens we humans love to turn upon  
And peck the weakest birds within the roost,  
It makes us feel a common bond of warm  
Togetherness, where we enjoy a sense  
Of moral worth and sinners get their just  
Deserts. Sometimes the pack's attention's caught  
By differences of race or colour, such  
Is enough to make them targets for attack.  
Sometimes it is belief or politics  
That singles out the hunter's prey, just think  
Of Salem, Massachusetts, and the zeal  
With which the City Fathers sought out witches  
Or Senator McCarthy's reign of terror,  
And over here the bloody Gordon Riots  
When Roman Catholics were hunted down.  
Today's no different, we have not improved,  
The targets now are Blacks or Pakistanis,  
Asylum seekers, smokers, single mums—  
Our species loves to hate, and what is more,  
As Murdoch knows, it sells the tabloid papers.

Pete Crowther

# Matins

I am a poor sleeper and rise early  
But no need to sympathize,  
There are compensations:  
Most mornings I see the dawn  
How the sky lightens, colours  
Sometimes in delicate pastels  
Sometimes deep flaming reds  
Like war banners across the sky.  
Then the sun, huge, imperial,  
Mighty heaves himself up  
To survey his inheritance.  
What do I do to acknowledge  
This giver of all life, warmth, light?  
I fling my arms wide open and mouth  
"Welcome! Welcome! Welcome! "

Pete Crowther



# Meetings With Egyptian Gods: Nut

I am the goddess, Nut,  
Begotten of Shu and Tefnut.  
Geb is my brother  
And lover.  
I straddle the earth  
Like a rainbow  
Sprinkled with stars.  
I hold up the sky  
On my sturdy back.  
Above me Nun,  
Ocean of chaos,  
Waters of darkness,  
Inchoate, formless,  
Presses upon me  
Like a shroud  
Weighted with lead,  
But I am strong,  
Strong to protect.

At dusk  
I take the sun  
Into my mouth,  
Swallow him whole,  
His boat and his crew.  
All night long  
The boat of the sun  
Sails down  
Through my body's  
Dark waters.  
At dawn he is born  
Radiant, new.  
I am his mother,  
He is my son.  
Through him I give you light,  
Through him I give you life.  
Without me you would die,  
Drowned in the waters of Nun.



# Meetings With Egyptian Gods: Thoth

Skilled in magic and  
funerary matters,  
Thoth is the moon  
god of Egypt and  
sacred to him is the ibis.

Long after sunset  
I saw seven ibises  
fly in a line,  
low over the waters  
of the Nile.  
They followed a path  
laid down by the moon  
to bring them home safe  
to Thoth.

Alone out of time  
in my mind's eye  
still they fly  
as they always flew  
low, over the Nile  
in single file  
homeward to Thoth, who dwells  
in a beautiful house  
at the further end  
of the silver path to the moon.  
□

Pete Crowther

# Miss Nellie's In The 'Fifties

The pub is old and still is lit by gas  
Its taproom walls and ceiling golden brown,  
With faded pictures from a bygone age,  
A moralizing text that's framed in oak  
And last year's farming calendar, half-torn.

In quiet comradeship, and sitting by the door  
As custom rules, the old men smoke their pipes  
Tonight no different from a hundred such.  
Across the room around a trestle table  
Sit four young men with glasses of Old Ale.

With ears alert to calls for another pint  
Miss Nellie, bent and frail, is busy at the sink  
Her eyes are bright, her movements quick and bird-like  
She wears a long dark skirt and neat black boots.  
No-one would dare to risk her disapproval.

The four young men, embarking on another round,  
Have almost reached that blissful stage wherein  
One thinks to grasp Life's deepest inner meaning,  
But strives in vain to put it into words.  
Miss Nellie gently hints that time is "getting on".

Pete Crowther

# Modern Poetry And Stuff

I send my friend a poem every day,  
It has become a sort of habit now.  
There's some she likes and some she throws away,  
Including all the ones with 'thee' and 'thou'

So out goes noble Shakespeare, which is tough,  
And Milton, Marvell, Wordsworth and his school.  
That's why I only send the modern stuff,  
The ones I think she'll find are 'aite' or 'cool'.

My problem is they're getting hard to find  
So what I'll do is send a Shakespeare sonnet,  
'cos I don't think she's really going to mind —  
Not if I put Bukowski's name upon it!

Pete Crowther

# Moon Over The Humber

A lambent golden boat  
Safe at anchor rides  
Upon dark clouds that float  
Above Humber's tides,  
Where the owl glides

Silently seeking prey  
Over reeds and fen.  
Here below, you and I  
Gaze on the Moon, then  
Turn to kiss again

Pete Crowther

# Moonrise

The sea is calm, the sun is going down  
As side by side we stand upon the shore  
And watch each wave take shape, run in, and break  
Upon the sand. No clouds just sea and sky  
Dissolving in the distance where they meet.

We gaze across the waters to the east  
And feel the emptiness of northern seas.  
Somewhere out there the moon will rise tonight  
And like our pagan forebears long ago  
We wait as if a miracle to see.

At first there is a lightness in the sky  
Then slowly rising from the sea, the moon  
Is there—a white and shining globe of mist  
As insubstantial as a wraith. It floats  
Impossibly above the far horizon.

With slow solemnity we see it lift  
Into the sky, solidify, and turn to gold  
And I am minded of the priest at mass  
Who kneels then raises high the sacred Host,  
Plain wafer bread adored as living God.

Pete Crowther

## Mrs. Sun

Mrs. Sun has shone today  
so hot it was I can't believe  
she was alone. I think  
she must have brought  
the kids along  
six smiling  
little sunlings  
holding hands  
and dancing round  
her petticoats.  
Next time I'll bring  
some sun tan oil  
(protection factor 10)  
and watch them through  
smoked glass.

Pete Crowther



# Mumab: The Mummified Man From Maryland

There once was a man from Maryland  
Who lived in Baltimore.  
He died, alas, of a heart attack  
In nineteen ninety-four.

Before he died he had left word  
That for the common weal  
His body should go to scientists  
Its secrets to reveal.

It went to the local medical school  
At Maryland U.C.  
It would be just the thing they said  
For someone's Ph.D.

Bob Brier was the lucky man  
Whose project seemed to suit.  
He was an Egyptologist  
Studying Hapshepsut.

He was into mummification, too,  
And this was his idea  
To make an all-American mummy,  
The first for many a year.

The Dean gave him the go-ahead  
And let him pick his team.  
Before you could say 'Jack Robinson'  
Bob Brier was going full steam.

You'd never believe how much you need  
To make an American mummy—  
There's animal-headed Canopic jars  
For lungs, and liver, and tummy,

An embalming table with lions' feet,  
Ushabtis by the score,  
Obsidian tools to scour the corpse,  
And amulets galore.

They went to Egypt for natron salts  
To dry out the flesh of the dead  
There, too, they bought a roll of cloth  
Of finest linen made.

One day in May, when all was set,  
Bob donned his Anubis mask  
And they all went along to the Ibu Tent:  
To begin their grisly task.

They extracted the brains with a pointed hook  
Through a hole at the top of the nose  
Then leaving the heart, they scooped out the  
rest,  
An organ for each of the jars.

They filled up the spaces with natron and stuff  
To dry out his tissues and skin  
And when in the end all the moisture was gone  
They wrapped him in finest linen.

In ancient Egypt mummies took  
Seventy days to do  
This one was done in half the time  
Thanks to the Yanks' know-how.

Of course they had missed out lots of the spells  
And prayers, and religious bits  
Preparing the soul for the afterlife—  
They thought such stuff the pits.

This mummified corpse was a great success,  
The first for two millennia,  
And just as good as Egypt's best,  
What a triumph for America.

The mummy was given the name of Mumab  
And placed in a golden casket  
But whether it liked it or whether not,  
Nobody thought to ask it.

Now it lies in a hall of the medical school  
Of Maryland U.C.  
Where it's visited by dignitaries  
Of the university.

And if at night you go to the school  
And wander its corridors  
You may hear a sort of scratching noise  
And seek in vain the source.

It's the Ka of poor old Mumab  
As hungry as a horse  
For they forgot to leave him offerings  
Being Americans, of course.

So now for all eternity  
His Ka must seek the crumbs  
Dropped by careless sophomores  
From crumbly cakes, and buns.

Pete Crowther

# My Father

My father was a seaman to his bones.  
I see him now upon the bridge, legs braced  
To counteract the motion of the moving deck,  
His ruddy weather-beaten face aglow  
With health, his cheerful grin as he stands there  
Bare-headed in the breeze that stirs his curly hair.

He's telling yet another sailor's yarn,  
I hear again his quiet steady voice,  
Unhurried tone, unfold its magic tales  
Of other ships and foreign ports and men  
Like him who'd spent their adult lives at sea  
Set free from petty cares of folk ashore.

I feel his warmth. His presence is so strong  
It seems impossible to think he's dead  
But yet I wrote the words that mark his grave:  
"generous, warm-hearted, cheerful".

Pete Crowther

# My Neighbour Is A Farmer

My neighbour is a farmer, he has a hundred cows  
Every night we're lulled to sleep by choruses of moos.  
They come out in the morning and back they go at night,  
There's big ones and smaller ones but all are black and white.

How he knows which one is which I really cannot tell,  
But all of them he knows by name, Daisy and Tinker Bell.  
If one gets up in the morning and says it's feeling ill,  
It's put in a cosy paddock and treated with a pill.

Of all the farms in Yorkshire, this is the cushiest number  
And cows queue up to join the herd at Kilnsea by the Humber.  
The grass is good, the grazing fine, in the fresh sea air,  
It is a bovine paradise with views beyond compare.

They're regular as clockwork going from farm to field  
Filling their four stomachs to boost the farm's milk yield  
It is a healthy life they lead with nothing much to fear  
But when they cross the road, there's always one with diarrhoea.

The milking parlour's spotless, famed throughout the land  
And only when the power's off does he have to milk by hand  
Then all the folk of Kilnsea stand by with bucket and stool  
Ready to give a helping hand before he loses his cool.

Andrew Wells of Westmere goes up and down the road  
He sits in his blue tractor carrying some load  
Just where he's bound and what he does I'm never very sure  
But I suspect it's something to do with cow manure.

Cows are bread and butter but there's time for fun and games  
The Bannister Street Band they hope will make their names  
Andrew is the vocalist in this Withernsea band  
Wowing all the groupies at many a one night stand,

The Wells are a talented family, at the fiddle Tom is great  
Hear ma, the new Larry Adler and sis' rehearsing her debate  
While dad is plucking with his plectrum and looking at the score  
With these moos and caterwaulings I find it hard to sleep, next door.

Pete Crowther

# My Only Sister

I never met my only sister  
Never saw her save in dreams.  
Sometimes she dressed in drifting mists,  
Or else in filmy robes she lazed  
In shades of lapis lazuli and chrysoprase.

Silver rings on her slim fingers,  
See her dancing in the moonlight,  
Swirling hair and golden skin.  
I never met her, never kissed her  
On the lips, breathed in her incense,

Heard her sing. I often sought her  
In the mountains, through the thickets,  
By the sea. When she whispers  
In the springtime as the sun sinks  
In the west, I will follow

Her wet footprints through the sand  
And down into the hollow caverns  
Underground, hear the sound of distant breakers  
On the shores of darkened seas  
Where the serpent waits his prey.

Far, far away, deep in the night  
Shines the light of a moving star:  
Through the murk and the fog, fully armed  
Her crew on the watch, a vessel approaches—  
The Boat of Ra with all the gods.

My sister in her glory on the deck  
Calls to me across the water,  
Will I come and join the crew,  
Sail with Ra and her to be happy  
Ever after in the Kingdom of the Dead?

Note: The ancient Egyptians believed that each night Ra, the sun god, with all his fellow gods and goddesses sailed in a boat through the night seas, fighting off all the evil demons and especially the evil and immortal serpent, Apep, which

sought to swallow and destroy them. After what must have been a very stressful and tiring voyage they emerged at dawn.

Pete Crowther



# Nature By Night

Slowly the sun  
sinks in the west  
leaving the land  
lonely, forlorn  
lit only by  
light of the moon.

Things of the night  
shun what is bright.  
Hear the owls hoot  
hunting the small  
creatures that dread  
death from the sky.

High in the dark  
under the stars  
leather-winged bats  
flitter and flap.  
Better by far  
biding indoors.

Wait for the dawn,  
return of the sun  
when we may see  
what we prefer  
Nature to be—  
sweetness and light.

Pete Crowther

# Neonlit Apples

On the supermarket's shiny shelves  
The apples are laid in rows  
To catch the wandering eye of those  
Poor hapless shoppers like ourselves.

First on offer is Golden Delicious  
By size and colour classified  
And regularly bathed in pesticide  
Which we are told is not pernicious

But necessary for our health  
Carefully guarded by the food purveyors  
Who we trust would not betray us  
Simply for the sake of wealth.

The other apples that you may see  
Are Braeburn, Empire, Royal Gala  
Each so alike in size and colour  
You'd think they came from the self-same tree.

So few varieties are sold  
Just eight or nine throughout the land  
And every one insipid, bland  
Not as in days of old, I'm told

When apples sweet and juicy grew  
Warmed by the sun and washed by rains,  
A thousand different names and strains  
Of every shape and taste and hue.

Alas such names are not for us:  
Peasgood's Nonesuch and Kent Hogshead,  
Hagloe Crab and Michaelmas Red,  
Monstrous Pippin and Ramping Taurus.

Both Bloody Turk and Slack-my-girdle  
Have failed to clear the market's hurdle.  
We seem to be stuck with Golden Delicious,  
It tastes like paste and it's not nutritious.

Pete Crowther

# New Tricks; Or, An Old Person Considers Computers, Cell Phones, Mp3s, Dvds Etc.

'You can't teach an old dog  
new tricks', they say, pathetically,  
expecting you to nod and agree;  
nod I might to be polite  
but in my mind I'm thinking:  
'What a lot of bloody rubbish! '

Pete Crowther

# Night Thoughts

My mam and dad  
made fun of death  
like you do  
when you don't believe  
it will happen to you.  
They talked lightly of  
"falling off the twig"  
and "leaving the village".  
Now they are both dead:  
they have fallen off the twig,  
they have left the village.

What about you?  
Do you feel the wind,  
sometimes, shaking the tree,  
blowing through its branches?  
And have you yet glimpsed,  
faintly, through the fog,  
the last houses  
at the edge of the village?

Pete Crowther

# Night Visitations

There are times when I can't sleep  
so I lay awake and think  
or just dream of all the things  
that might have been, but soon  
new thoughts and old come crowding in  
to people every corner of my brain.  
Unsmiling, humourless, they clamour  
for attention, push and jostle  
to the front, shout out demands.  
Oh, what an ugly leprous-  
featured crew; so hard they try  
to tie me in their tangled threads  
of pseudo-logic and unreason.  
I turn and toss, bemoan the loss  
of peaceful sleep. Then come  
the conversations, imaginary ones  
wherein I seek to justify  
myself from accusations never made  
or formulate neat answers—  
brilliant ripostes, the ones that never came  
in those encounters that were real.  
And after conversations,  
it is time to bid a welcome  
to remembered humiliations,  
embarrassments and tribulations.  
See them march in rich array  
across the darkling plain;  
you may have thought them dead  
but here they are, alive and well!  
Oh woe is me! Who'd wish to be  
an insomniac? How we each long to see  
that little crack of light begin to creep  
beneath those curtains when we cannot sleep.

Pete Crowther

# November Blues

What is it about November  
that always gives me the blues?  
Is it the sky, heavy as sin  
or is it the wind that seems to whistle  
through the caverns of my skull?  
Is it the earth, once warm and loving  
but now grown hard and cold? Is it  
all the fallen fruit that lies  
and rots upon those grassy places  
where I tread? Everywhere there is  
the decadence and hush of dying leaves —  
decay and death, I seem to drift,  
a disembodied wraith, through mist  
that settles like a shroud  
upon that plain without a name —  
though some would call it Limbo —  
that land of stranded souls,  
lost, damned or just forgotten.  
Oh let me soon climb out of this  
slough of despond, and cast aside  
November blues to find delight  
again in love, colour, laughter, light.

Pete Crowther

## Oh, Be My Valentine (Acrostic Sonnet)

O Valentine, my love, will you be mine,  
Become my loving sweetheart that we may  
Entwine like twisting vine or eglantine,  
More closely grow together every day?  
You ask me why I love you as I do,  
Vain would it be were I to try to list  
All thousand things that make you specially you:  
Lips like twin lotus buds just made to kiss,  
Eyes clear and still like pools in which I lose  
No time but dive within to sink or swim,  
To lose all sense of time and place. I choose  
In tenderness to meet your every whim,  
No matter what you wish I'll gladly do  
Except give up, or go, or be untrue.

Pete Crowther



## On Death's Road (Trans. Of Henri Michaux)

On Death's road,  
My mother met a great ice barrier;  
She wished to speak,  
It was too late,  
A great ice barrier of cotton wool.  
She looked at us, my brother and me,  
And then she began to cry.  
We told her—though a lie—that we both understood.  
She smiled the sweet smile of a very young girl,  
Which is what she truly was,  
Such a lovely smile, almost roguish;  
Then the Mist claimed her.

Pete Crowther

# On Holding A Granite Pebble Found On The Beach

How many tides  
have rolled it round,  
this stone I hold  
warm in my hand?

Rose-pink and grey  
it is, you'd say,  
the sky at dawn,  
or held this way,  
the silver glitter  
of sun on water.

Sea-washed and smooth  
it seems to breathe,  
familiar there  
like an old friend,  
or a father's warm palm  
to the hand of a child.

Pete Crowther

# On Seeing Mars At Its Closest For 60,000 Years

Walking  
Last night  
After dark  
To the pub  
At the side  
Of the wide  
River's mouth  
With my wife,  
And her brother  
We saw  
In the sky  
Gleaming

Dull red  
The planet  
Of Mars  
God of War.  
It was brighter  
By far  
Than the stars  
And closest to Earth,  
We'd been told,  
Since that night  
Long ago  
When those fur-clad

Slouching  
And hairy  
Neanderthal  
Hunters  
Had gazed  
Up in awe  
And surprise  
At that red  
Shining light  
In the sky.  
Perhaps it was seen  
Beside a wide river

By a Neanderthal  
Man and his wife,  
And her brother.  
Did they,  
I wonder,  
Have a name  
For that light?  
Did they,  
Like us,  
Think of war  
When they saw  
That red glow?

Did you know  
That no-one  
Today  
Will be alive  
When Mars  
Is as close  
Once again?  
And who  
Then will gaze  
At that red  
Shining lamp  
In the sky?

Pete Crowther

# On Speaking French

When I heard him  
struggle  
to speak French,  
I thought: "My French,  
though not fluent,  
is better than that".

Pete Crowther

# On The Art Of War

A display of local art was held today  
In the village hall and in the children's section  
I could sense their joy in life's good things:  
Spring lambs, bright flowers, the grazing cows  
Knee-deep in buttercups, the placid sheep,  
The boats, the ball-games, girls in summer frocks,  
All happy scenes so different from the ones  
I used to draw when I was young like them.

My pictures featured war. I drew  
Aeroplanes in dogfights, dropping bombs,  
Or falling flaming to the ground.  
I drew my planes with care — the tail,  
The cockpit, wings, and fuselage  
All there. The fighters had machine guns  
Fitted to their wings and fired  
Streams of bullets at each other.  
My Spitfires had roundels on their wings  
But Messerschmitts had swastikas,  
Harsh and jagged; they were the ones  
That always got shot down and crashed.  
You'd see them nose-dive down the page  
Smoke pouring from the fuselage  
As they plummeted, down to the ground.  
Most times the pilots could be seen  
Suspended from their parachutes,  
They were the lucky ones. Not all  
My planes were fighters, I had bombers  
Too, both Wellingtons and Dorniers  
On the German side. My favourites were  
The heavy Lancasters which had  
Four engines and a perspex bubble  
At the end, where crouched the rear  
Gunner known as Tail-end Charlie.  
My bombers carried loads of bombs.  
You'd see them falling down the page,  
Menacing and slightly bulbous  
Near the nose. I always took great care  
To draw the rear fins just right.

Like stars the bombs exploded when  
They hit the bottom of the page  
Where searchlights probed the dark, and guns  
Sent streams of tracer through the night.

I was an expert in the art of war  
Yet strangely innocent for pain and death  
Had no dominion in my scheme of things.  
My bombs and bullets though so violent  
And explosive did not hurt or kill.  
My childish brain did not associate  
Its war with injury, sorrow, loss and death.

Alas, alas, how wrong I was!

□

Pete Crowther

# Our Earthly Condition

It's very odd to think we all  
Live out our lives on a spinning ball  
Along with creatures strange and various—  
The situation sounds precarious!  
We share our lot with lice and rats,  
With things that fly, like birds and bats  
And savage sharks that live in water  
Maintaining life by daily slaughter.  
We're all up there in empty space  
Flying along at a breathless pace,  
And where we're going no-one knows,  
It's best not to worry I suppose.

Pete Crowther



# Our Little Bethany

Sweet child of love we welcome thee  
To share our lives dear Bethany.  
A tiny miracle you seem,  
Perfect beyond our wildest dream,  
Your smile, your hands, your little feet,  
They are so lovable, so sweet.  
We love you in so many ways,  
To list them would take days and days.  
Dear Bethany we'll guard you well,  
Protect you from the witch's spell,  
The unkind ways of man to man  
As far as any parents can.  
Our wish for you is joy and peace,  
Throughout your life may they increase.  
May loving kindness, beauty, too,  
In all your days accompany you.

Pete Crowther

# Persephone In Springtime

Persephone's on holiday from Hell,  
Released a while from Pluto's iron spell.  
It's springtime and the air is warm and sweet,  
The lovely girl walks smiling down the street.  
See how her buttocks twitch from side to side  
Beneath thin cotton pants to match her stride.  
With every step like bobbing apples in a bowl  
Alluringly they curtsey, dip and roll,  
Two peaches that invite you sink your teeth  
Into the firm and juicy flesh beneath.  
By such allures each year she brings to birth  
With lissome grace the life of Mother Earth.

□

Pete Crowther

## Philip Larkin — Have You Heard Of Him?

"How are you keeping then? ", she wrote,

"still going on O.K.? Me,

I'm at college now, doing English lit.

This term it's Philip Larkin —

I think he's brilliant,

a bit depressive, but

he's really written some good stuff —

have you heard of him? "

Into my mind there came that long

lugubrious clean-shaven face

that always smelled of after-shave,

those heavy black-rimmed spectacles,

the hearing aid that always whistled,

that stylish belted macintosh he wore,

and his spacious room with its sprawling desk

on which incongruously sat

an aspidistra and a photograph

of Guy, the gorilla, next to where

his secretary, Betty, placed the tray

of Earl Grey tea in porcelain cups,

but most of all did I recall

his voice — its deep, slow,

rich cultured tones. So great a loss,

so kind a man and in his way

so modest too. Upon his small

neat white gravestone you'll find

no flowery epitaph, just:

"Philip Larkin / 1922–1985 / writer."

He feared death — its endless emptiness,

but don't we all, deep down?

I'll not forget his generous friendly smile

last time we met just a little while

before he died. We were not close,

but yet, he told me once that he'd dreamt of me

and I too, when he was dead, once dreamt of him,

so I may justly say to you,

"It's true, I've heard of him".



# Poor Brown Rat

Verdigris minibus  
Rattus norvegicus  
Innocent animal  
Shunned by mankind.

Creature unfortunate  
Nonconfrontational  
Blamed for the Plague, you were  
Falsely maligned\*.

Pete Crowther

## Poor Chap!

When Akhenaten's father,  
old Amenhotep,  
who had many wives,  
fell ill, Tushratta,  
his Mitanni  
father-in-law,  
who was fond of him,  
sent an image  
of the goddess,  
Ishtar of Nineveh —  
"she would cure him,  
if anyone could, "  
he thought —  
"poor chap! "

Sadly, Tushratta,  
who was a nice man,  
later was murdered  
by a Hittite:  
he deserved better  
than that —  
poor chap!

Note: Amenhotep was probably Tutankhamun's grandad :)

Pete Crowther

## Poor Kilnsea

Our little village that we call home  
is not important, large or rich,  
two dozen cottages at most,  
a farm or two, a failed hotel,  
no shops, no post office, or bus  
but yes, we have a splendid pub  
and lots of fields that lie between  
the sea and Humber estuary.  
When summer comes the hay is cut,  
the crops are duly harvested,  
and pasture's grazed by cows and sheep,  
a place of peace much loved by those  
who come to 'bird' or just relax.  
Each year the sea extracts its toll —  
two yards at least of crumbling cliff,  
we live with this and on the whole  
feel safe enough for we rely  
upon our modest sea defences.  
But that alas was in the past,  
for now, out of the blue, we learn  
from those empowered to protect  
that future policy will be  
to abandon Kilnsea to the sea:  
we are too few, lack industry  
(forget the lifeboat, pilots, ABP,  
they do not count apparently) ,  
no, we are not worth defending,  
nor can the costs be justified  
of building or repairing banks  
to stand against the sea's advance.  
The price, they say, of building these  
outweighs the value of our village.  
Poor Kilnsea is expendable, you see.  
Forget the reign of King Canute,  
Today accountants rule the waves  
And money is their only yardstick.

Envoi

It is ironic that the money  
that could protect us and our village  
will go instead to two lagoons,  
the habitat of saline worms  
and various small Crustaceae,  
that lie nearby and constitute,  
we're told, a triple S.I. — oh my,  
there must be a moral somewhere here!

Pete Crowther



# Rain

Rain slithers down the greenhouse glass  
and raindrops drip from the apple tree's  
green shiny leaves to slide and drop  
a-pitter patter on the roof  
of the little wooden summer house  
no other sound to be heard save  
the blackbird's grave deliberate song  
so liquid, too, like a rich liqueur  
poured slowly from its golden beaker.  
Green grass, green leaves and wetness,  
wetness everywhere, so grey the sky,  
so still the air but cool and fresh  
as water splashes on the paving stones,  
makes pools and runnels on the ground  
and soaks the roots of thirsty plants  
that grow in pots around the lawn.  
Soon snails appear drawn by the damp  
while birds arrive to search for food.  
Indeed, all nature's grateful for this rain  
for water does all life on earth sustain.

Pete Crowther

## Relax, Enjoy, Be Merry!

If I were given the choice, I would  
get rid of 'ought' and 'must' and 'should'.  
Such words would go in the rubbish bin  
along with 'guilt' and 'blame' and 'sin'.  
We only need to love each other  
and treat our neighbour as our brother.  
All other 'do's' and 'don'ts' don't matter;  
they're just a lot of idle chatter.  
We've only one life as far as we know,  
so let's enjoy it before we go.

Pete Crowther

# Rooks

This morning when we walked beneath the trees  
Where rooks were busy building nests, you said  
It made your spirits rise to hear them caw,  
They brought you thoughts of spring. I disagreed.  
When I hear rooks, I always think of Johnno.

We both were matelots and shared each watch,  
He was a regular, I was National Service  
And glad to hear the yarns that he could spin  
About the many ships in which he'd served,  
His runs ashore in ports like Singapore,

The time he'd spent in China and the girl  
Who did his dhobeying there, and what a wrench  
It was to leave, his sadness and her tears,  
What it was like to sail aboard a carrier—  
He much preferred a smaller ship like this.

And so we passed the long and quiet hours  
Of the morning or the middle watch each night  
While our fast frigate sped through northern seas  
From Iceland's freezing waters to the swells  
Of Biscay's Bay, and then swung north again

Past Shannon, Rockall, Bailey, on patrol,  
And when from time to time the ship would roll  
Unconsciously my watchmate turned his chair  
And slid across the deck to where I'd wedged  
Myself beside my set with headphones on

There listening for a brief transmission from  
An 'enemy' (really Nato) submarine,  
Then as the roll reversed he'd turn his chair  
And slide right back across the deck.  
We had this wireless office to ourselves

And got to know each other very well  
Before we docked. I was the first to leave  
The ship, for Johnno had a motorbike

And meant to spend the weekend with his girl,  
Fiancée he had said (I wondered if

She knew about the Chinese dhobey lass!)  
Before I left the ship I took my ration  
Of tobacco and 'blue-liners'—cigarettes  
And took the bus from Portsmouth to our base  
Near Bristol, glad to be ashore again.

Johnno himself was not due back until  
The stroke of oh-nine-hundred Monday next.  
It was a lovely autumn dawn when he set off  
But misty, thickening further west to fog  
So dense he did not see the concrete post

Plumb in the middle of a roundabout.  
He died before he knew what he had hit,  
A fractured skull and multiple lacerations.  
We all were shocked to hear such dreadful news,  
He was so young and young men did not die.

That day I found myself enrolled to be  
Included in his funeral firing party.  
All week, we trained intensively and learned  
The art of sloping arms, the proper way  
To do the slow and ceremonial march.

We went by service bus to the funeral, dressed  
Resplendent in white gaiters, caps and belts,  
Stiff lanyards, silks and gold-badged number ones.  
Even now I can recall the steps of that  
Slow march, the country church, the open grave

The weeping girl, collapsed with hopeless grief,  
The sudden crack, as we the firing party,  
And Johnno's friends and shipmates fired a volley  
And all the startled rooks gave voice and rose  
Together in a cloud above the churchyard trees.

Pete Crowther

# Sartori

This lovely morning I went walking  
In a meadow where the air was sweet  
It made my feet go dancing over  
Growing grass and clumps of clover  
Bird's-foot trefoil, bedstraw, thistle  
Nectar-sweet for butterflies.  
Bright buzzing bees were everywhere  
While in the air the gentle yet  
Insistent hum of hoverflies  
Seemed like a psalm to praise the sun,  
And all around, above, beyond  
Birds called and sang their songs  
Of summer and of love until  
Quite suddenly all time stood still  
And like a dream I could not tell  
Just where I stopped, and where all else  
Began, and in that boundless state  
I smiled to find such joy and gladness  
For I was standing in the heart  
Of my true home, my family  
And I loved it and it was me.

Pete Crowther

# Schadenfreude

When I was a student,  
In Lucretius I read  
Of the pleasure that people found  
In watching from shore  
The great troubles of others  
On stormy and turbulent seas.  
It seemed to me then  
(for I knew it a truth;  
the same was inside of me)  
And it seems to me now—  
Mankind can be very unkind.

Pete Crowther

# Sea Dreams

Mournful indeed is the bell of the buoy  
That rolls in the wash of wave and tide.  
Some places there are I've never been  
Though I've seen them afar from the sea.  
I grieve to think I'll never know  
Those places that my ship passed by.

The Faeroes when I saw them seemed  
A wonderland of mist and promise  
With cliffs of cloud that towered beyond  
The wavetops of that northern sea  
But soon those islands'siren songs  
Were lost in the wind and far astern.

Then on a sunny afternoon  
Once in the Skagerrak I saw  
The home of Thor, the thunder god,  
Slipping away on the starboard beam.  
Do we not dream sometimes our ship  
Will alter course and let us land

On foreign shores where people live  
By different laws, where we may find  
Some special kind of Shangri-la  
In which as children we believed  
Or has our world become too small  
And have we ceased to dream at all?

Pete Crowther

# September Afternoon

How lovely was that autumn day,  
That late September afternoon  
When the sun was high in a cloudless sky,  
In an ocean of heavenly blue,  
Just a gentle breeze to stir the leaves  
Of the garden trees, while the hum of bees  
Was soothing to those who lazily dozed  
In the shimmering heat that made you believe  
It was really July, and only the apples  
That lay on the lawn made you remember  
It was now September. The mallow flowers  
Were still in bloom, and butterflies  
Like handkerchiefs around them fluttered  
Then flew across to the buddleia bush  
With its bountiful nectar-rich blossom  
And now and again a quarrel broke out  
When the garden sparrows chirruped and chirped  
And feathers flew, but it didn't last  
For peace like a blanket floated down  
While overhead the swallows swooped  
And turned and wheeled in graceful flight.  
Such light and warmth and teeming life  
Uplifts your heart, makes your spirits sing  
So glad to be a child again  
At home in the bosom of good Mother Earth.

Pete Crowther



# Shut Your Eyes And Jump

Sometimes in life  
it makes good sense  
to close your eyes  
and jump that fence  
regardless of  
all consequence.

For if you choose  
to cringe and creep  
and always look  
before you leap,  
you might as well  
stay fast asleep.

Pete Crowther

# Sitting In My Garden

The cheerful lemon yellow faces of the marigolds,  
The pink flowers of the mallow leaning seductively out from the hedge  
and swaying on their stalks,  
The twisting column of beanstalks with their high red-lipped flowers  
and the sinuous long green beans that hang below,  
The tasselled tufts of the honeysuckle blossom,  
The little black hoverfly that sits motionless on empty air, and seems so  
intent on something in front of it,  
The flies that suddenly appear on sunlit surfaces,  
The busy buzz of a passing bee on an important errand,  
The glory and splendour of the Red Admiral flexing its wings on a spike  
of buddleia,  
Three downy feathers floating in the dirty water of the bird bath,  
The black-capped great tit always on the look-out for its next meal  
And quick to seize every opportunity,  
The strident cheeps of the self-confident extrovert sparrows,  
The starlings busy and bustling, coming and going,  
The distant clanks of farm machinery,  
The sea breeze that suddenly ruffles my hair,  
And the high white clouds overhead in a sky of heavenly blue.

Pete Crowther

# Something In The Wind

There's something in the wind tonight,  
It whispers in our ears  
News of omens, auguries,  
Half-formulated fears  
For each and all our future years  
In the darkening of the light.

Shall we like Caesar scorn the Ides  
Though yet our days be with us?  
Do we heed not the rainbow's sign,  
Earth shall not forgive us,  
The seas and sands outlive us  
Beneath the moon's drawn tides.

Let nature calm the troubled breast  
Where in the thicket purrs the dove,  
There listen to his gentle voice  
Softly, softly call his love  
Beneath the clouds that drift above—  
Oh blessed peace, oh blessed rest.

Let us together save the light,  
Protect it from the rushing wind  
Of human greed and folly  
Then whisper to the tamarind  
How we have eco-sinned  
And so dispel the darkness of the night.  
□

Pete Crowther

# Sometimes It Is Good To Gaze Upon The Stars

Cold winter night  
Stars glitter  
Like crystals of ice  
High up above.  
So far away they are,  
So bleak their distant  
Loneliness in all that vastness  
Of the heavens' emptiness  
We find our minds recoil  
As though we tried  
To comprehend eternity;  
It hurts, yet there they are,  
The stars for all to see  
Who will and though we may  
Not care to dwell  
Too long upon them  
Yet we thrill  
To know that they with us are there  
And like the sun and moon  
Are not a dream but real.

Pete Crowther

## Spring — It Is Icumen In

There is no breath of wind today  
The fields still white with frost  
So clear the air that I can see  
For miles and miles to where  
A village church is almost hid  
By trees, and here and there  
A tiny plume of smoke betrays  
Some farmhouse tucked away.  
All seems to be expectancy:  
The very air vibrates  
And sparkles with the promise that  
Sweet spring is on the way.  
I feel my spirit lift, take wing  
To be alive this day.

□

Pete Crowther

# Spurn Light

Afraid of the dark I could not be  
For I had a light that shone on me.  
It swept away my fears of night,  
Scattered my demons and put them to flight.

Its cheerful beam put me at ease  
As it did all those who plough the seas.  
The light beamed out for miles around  
Preventing ships from running aground.

Alas this light is now no more  
And darkness reigns over sea and shore.  
Its days are done now radar's here  
To tell all ships what course to steer.

Yet still I miss that friendly light  
That brought me comfort in the night.  
Sailors, too, have told me they  
Were sorry when it went away.

The lighthouse though does yet remain  
Commanding views across the main.  
Tall sentinel of Spurn, for me  
It is a childhood memory.

□

(Re-working of a poem by a friend (Sandra Shan) recalling her childhood memories of an operational lighthouse that is now no longer functional) .

Pete Crowther

# St. Abune Aregawi

(for Brikti)

Long, long ago, or so I've heard,  
Nine holy men from Syria came  
Intent to bring God's Holy Word  
And spread the same in Heaven's name  
Throughout the godless lands of Tigray;  
They lived by vows, they did not marry,  
But every day they knelt to pray  
Especially Abune Aregawi.

He led them by his good example,  
A man of God in every way  
With vices none and virtues ample.  
Some years went by but then one day  
St. Abune Aregawi thought  
He'd go and found a monastery:  
It had to be a quiet spot,  
Uncrowded and temptation-free.

He saw a place on top of a crag  
Ideal for prayer and meditation.  
Unluckily there was a snag —  
No way up save levitation!  
He knelt upon his knees to pray  
(Until they both began to ache)  
That God would help him find a way,  
So God produced a giant snake

To do the job and no mistake  
For it was half a kilometre  
In length at least, for pity's sake!  
Believe you me, or ask St. Peter.  
Anyways this snake let down its tail  
And slid it round old Abune's waist  
(At this the saint turned rather pale  
To find himself so tight embraced) .

But before you could say "Jack Robinson"

St. Abune found himself up high  
On top of the cliff and the job was done  
With the help of God it was easy as pie!  
St. Abune called this holy place  
Debra Damo and nowadays  
All who tread this holy space  
Must climb a rope and not use stairs.

So let us praise this holy man  
Who founded Debra Damo  
In the year A.D.501  
Some fifteen hundred years ago.  
His nigdet is for rich and poor  
Upon the 14th of October  
So all go easy on the suwa  
And for 's sake, stay sober.□

Note: St. Abune Aregawi was an early Ethiopian Christian saint who founded the ancient monastery of Debra Damo. Legend has it that he chose the site at the top of an inaccessible cliff but was only able to gain access to it when, in answer to his prayers, at God's behest a giant snake lowered itself to pick him up and place him on top of the cliff. To this day, access to this ancient monastery (restricted to men and male animals) involves climbing up a rope suspended from the top of the cliff. 'Nigdet' is a saint's feastday; 'suwa' is a kind of home-made beer served at such feasts.

Pete Crowther



# St. Abune Teklehaimanot

A more surprising saint there's not  
Than Abune Teklehaimanot,  
He is my all-time favourite saint;  
There is none other quite so quaint.

He spent his time converting kings  
And once he sprouted several wings.  
He was climbing down from Debre Damo  
When he fell off the cliff with a cry of woe.

His friends believed it was the end,  
But then he started to ascend.  
Six wings he'd grown, quick as a flash,  
To save himself from a nasty crash.

Three times round his home he flew  
So all could see what he could do.  
When he got old he lived in a cave,  
All part of a plan his soul to save.

In it he stood like a planted tree  
And neither the sun nor the moon did see.  
For years and years Abune stood there  
And never sat upon a chair

Until the day one leg fell off  
This very remarkable man of the cloth.  
Undaunted, Teklehaimanot  
Just stood upon the other foot.

He kept that up for seven years,  
Four of them waterless, it appears.  
So now you'll see why he gets my vote,  
St. Abune Teklehaimanot!

□

Pete Crowther

## St. Gura'el — Patron Saint Of Motorists

I have a wondrous tale to tell  
About the good Saint Gura'El,  
The strangest saint I know by far  
Because he owns a motor car.

So gather round and I'll explain  
Just how this saint of God's domain,  
A well-acclaimed evangelist,  
Could turn into a motorist.

Now Gura'El's especial skill  
Was finding out what made folk ill  
And if their faith was good and strong  
He'd work a cure on what was wrong.

So folk with gout and broken bones,  
The blind, the sick with awful groans,  
The young, the old, all pale and weak,  
Came to his church a cure to seek.

Now mostly those who sought a cure  
Were humble folk and very poor.  
One day, however, a man of wealth  
By taxi came in search of health.

A desperate man with a dread disease  
He'd only come his wife to please  
But in the church he bent his brow  
And made the saint a solemn vow:

St. Gura'El, if you heal me,  
I'll give to you my new taxi,  
The one in which we came today  
It stands outside and it runs OK.

The good old saint just stroked his beard  
And just like that the man was cured.  
His wife though sometimes rather feckless  
Gave to the church her golden necklace

And off they went both full of joy  
Leaving Gura'El his brand new toy!  
For many a month the taxi stayed  
Outside the church becoming frayed.

The church's priests began to say  
They'd like to see it drive away.  
A man was hired for the job,  
Quite soon they heard the engine throb.

Scarce had the car begun its ride  
When suddenly the engine died.  
He tried again to move it forward  
Instead the car of its own accord

Went in reverse not to be parted  
From the church where it had started  
So there it stands this very day,  
Nothing on earth can move it away.

It's waiting there for its saintly owner  
To drive it away to Arizona  
Or anywhere else Saint Gura'El  
Might like to go to make folk well.

15/4/06

Pete Crowther

## Sub Specie Aeternitatis

This Sunday afternoon I meant  
To write a poem but fell asleep.  
I woke alone in the summer house  
To hear the raindrops pattering  
On the wooden roof. Outside the grass  
Is lush and freshly green. Beyond  
Upon the paving stones are scattered  
Apple blossom petals. Already  
They have begun to fall.  
Seasons pass and spring follows  
Spring. Each year it comes anew.  
Branches sway in the wind, the leaves  
Fluttering like shoals of fish.  
Their scales glitter in the sunlight  
Like a waterfall of time  
Splashing into eternity.

Pete Crowther

# Superstition

Never hang a mirror  
On an outside wall,  
All the wraiths of darkness  
Drifting through the night

See it as a beacon  
Calling them to light.  
Through it they'll come crowding  
Seeking warmth and life.

Hungry ghouls from graveyards  
Will be hiding in your house.  
Every room will have one  
With its nasty ways

Bringing fear and sickness  
Feeding on your flesh,  
Sucking out your life force,  
Sending you insane.

Better that you'd broken  
Every mirror in the house.  
What's a bit of bad luck  
When a devil's at your throat?

So listen when I tell you  
Before it is too late,  
'Never hang a mirror  
On an outside wall'.

Pete Crowther

# Taken Ill When Abroad; Or, My Drozhky Driver Has Been Struck By Lightning\*

"Good evening, can I help you?  
How is it going? How do you feel? "

"I'm not well, I need a doctor,  
I've got backache, I've got diarrhoea,  
I've got 'flu, my feet hurt.  
I'd like something for a headache,  
I'd like some aspirin, I'd like some bandages,  
I'd like a bottle of red wine.  
I'm English, my name is Pete".

"Thanks for everything! "

□

\*Written with the help of my favourite foreign-language phrasebook.

Pete Crowther

# Taking Shelter In A Summer Shower

Do you recall  
That afternoon  
When summer rain  
Had soaked right through  
To drench the boughs  
Of the magical yew,  
How the wine dark bark  
Of the iron trunk,  
So smooth and true  
Beneath the leaves  
Glistened and gleamed  
With a glowing light  
As rich and red  
As the lowering sun  
Before the night?

Pete Crowther

## Tb87618

It was a very little death, I know.  
They happen every day, go unrecorded,  
Unlamented; this one was lucky in that way,  
I spied it on the path beside the road  
And picked it up—it was a little cracker,  
A tree sparrow as smart as a new pin,  
Its every feather still in place, so trim  
It seemed brand new, you couldn't think it dead.  
There was a ring around its leg which read:  
TB87618. I knew the form  
And sent an e-mail to the local ringer,  
Paul, who would record it in the log  
And so bestow upon the bird a sort  
Of immortality. Let's hope  
It is a consolation to the rest  
For it was just last spring when they were ringed  
Before they'd left their mother's cosy nest.

Pete Crowther



# The Apple Tree

O wise and patient apple tree  
Stirred by the wind from across the sea  
Your branches shake unceasingly.

On sunny days your shining leaves  
Give welcome shade and sanctuary  
To cheerful sparrows, starlings, wrens,  
Bright-eyed blackbirds, collared doves;  
To all you are a place of rest  
And peace, but seasons pass, leaves fall,

Then come the snows of winter when  
Bare-boughed you slumber until spring  
And every heart uplifts to see  
Such beauty in a living tree.  
In autumn when your apples thud  
Upon the ground, we share them equally

With blackbird, thrush and butterfly  
For you are generous in your gifts.  
Like us one day you'll surely die  
Yet unlike us you do not fret  
About tomorrow, you take each day  
Just as it comes and simply be.

So teach us wisdom apple tree  
Whose branches shake unceasingly  
Stirred by the wind from across the sea.

Pete Crowther

# The Broken Vase (Trans. Of Sully Prudhomme)

A fan's light tap  
Was enough to chip  
This flower vase  
In which the roses  
Now are dying.  
No sound it made

But a hairline crack  
Day after day  
Almost unseen  
Crept slowly round the glass  
And dropp by dropp  
The water trickled out

While the vital sap  
In the roses' stems  
Grew dry.  
Now no-one doubts:  
"Don't touch", they say,  
"It's broken".

Often, too, the hand one loves  
May lightly brush against the heart  
And bruise it.  
Slowly then across that heart  
A hidden crack will spread  
And love's fair flower perish.

Pete Crowther

# The Care And Management Of Stick Insects

She was a kind soft-hearted girl  
but as a child, she said, she kept  
some stick insects in a tank as pets,  
and every morning with a spoon  
she carefully crushed their new-laid eggs;  
if not, she said, they bred and bred  
then fed like wolves upon each other.  
A stick insect with missing legs  
or abdomen half gone is not  
a very pleasant sight, she said.

That breeding tank becomes for me  
an allegory of planet Earth,  
where we, like them, voraciously  
have nearly eaten everything,  
earth's minerals, forests, water, food,  
reserves of oil and coal and gas.  
Our tank is overcrowded now,  
polluted soil, polluted seas, we've filled  
it with our mess, and have you noticed  
how it's getting hotter here inside?

Perhaps it's time kind Mother Nature  
came, and cleaned us out, or brought  
that crushing spoon, but do not fear,  
she surely will, and very soon.

Pete Crowther

# The Christmas Crib

From the crib in the pub  
I carefully lifted out Joseph,  
Set him up on the roof  
Of the stable and then  
Did the same with the infant, Jesus.  
Getting into my stride, I put Mary  
Beside them. It was easy as pie,

And even the kings gave no trouble.  
Knowing oxen can often be awkward  
And donkeys as stubborn as mules  
I concluded it kinder and wiser as well  
That the animals stayed in the barn,  
But looking inside and seeing them there  
All standing around, at a loss by the cot

I knew something drastic was needed  
So I plucked from the sky that newly formed star—  
So bright in the Bethlehem night—and put it inside  
In the cot in the crib where the animals stood  
And it gleamed and it shone and it glittered.  
The shepherds were shocked but the kings understood  
And the animals fell to their knees.

Mary and Joseph seemed secretly pleased  
To take a back seat and be rid of the weight  
Of such an intolerable burden. Baby Jesus kept mum  
And, except for the ox, the animals stayed on their knees.  
In this straightforward way, without any fuss  
Or palaver, I'm happy to say,  
I changed the whole course of history.

Pete Crowther

# The Dressing Table

I got to looking at this dressing table,  
the one we share, my wife and I,  
plain white painted wood with a backing mirror,  
she has the right side, I have the left.  
Between in no man's land presides  
a large moon-faced Akuaba, mother goddess  
of Ghana, whose tranquil gaze takes in  
impassively three family photographs—  
two nieces and a son and daughter.  
Just now, my side is cluttered and untidy,  
I admit. Some things are always there,  
my mother's crystal ball in which  
I've never seen the future, or anything at all,  
the wooden inlaid Indian box for polished stones  
and pendants, the Polish leather pencil case  
from Zakopanie, a wallet with my banker's card  
and sundry papers, all these I keep upon my side  
and would expect to find them there,  
but all these other things—a tennis ball,  
a plastic can of cashew nuts, "More Poetry Please",  
a pack of pancreatic enzymes for the stomach  
(three times a day with food) ,  
an "England's Glory" box of matches,  
a notebook, spiral bound, the pages  
filled with useful phrases in Tigrinya,  
and so it goes—a five-pence piece,  
a lens, a box for holding moths without a lid,  
a trading card from Carol Nashe promoting  
best deals in motorbike insurance,  
a pile of coppers emptied from my trouser pockets every night,  
a two-pin plug for continental sockets,  
a tape cassette, a Royal Navy seaman's knife,  
a tattered clipboard and two AA batteries, now spent.  
My wife's side seems by contrast almost bare,  
a box for jewellery on which there sits  
a leather purse that holds an antique cameo brooch;  
it shows a lady in a dress beneath a tree  
beside a hunting dog and what appears to be  
a goat—it was my grandmother's once, I think.

Next to it is a plastic stand on which like Noah's ark,  
two by two, neat pairs of earrings hang,  
half-moons and moondrops, clear stones,  
galactic spirals, silver ankhs and flowers,  
two cats and a pair of silver hares. Not much besides,  
just a long-tailed comb and a fluff of cotton wool,  
a pebble picked up from the beach, now dull,  
a small shell, and a length of folded string.  
Tomorrow I have resolved to put my side in order.  
□

Pete Crowther

# The Field

John Carmichael is dead,  
he was a lovely man,  
he used to yodel and he sang,  
played cricket, liked a drink,  
and always laughter, smiles  
lurked in his sea-blue eyes.  
He loved this field with its tall ash trees,  
its pond and its hawthorn hedge  
that blossoms white in banks of snow  
each lovely May. He counted butterflies  
and watched as deer came shyly to the pond  
lightly stepping like nervous girls  
through the far gap in the hedge.  
He felt the thrill that we feel too  
when the pale barn owl hunts low  
above the sedges where the rushes grow.

This was his field as it's ours now;  
like him we take delight in all the life  
that here dwells in rich abundance,  
the nesting birds, the moles, the voles,  
the hare, the fox, the weasels and the rabbits,  
the autumn fungi and the flowering plants,  
the sticklebacks, the newts, the moths,  
the bees, the butterflies and dragonflies  
are our delight, and for a little time  
we say we own this field as John did,  
and all those others down the years,  
who here ploughed and mowed and tended sheep.

This field has been unchanged for centuries.  
We know from early maps  
it was the same three-cornered field  
of just two acres, give or take, so think  
of all those owners who would say,  
if asked, "This is my field" but that's untrue,  
we do not own, we simply keep  
it in our care a little while then hand it on.  
The field itself remains, and works

its annual miracle: each spring  
all life renews itself, it all begins again,  
afresh, new buds, new growth, new nests,  
spring flowers, bees, butterflies, they come  
year on year the same. Like us  
they live their lives as fully as they can  
and then pass on — the field remains.

Pete Crowther



# The Friendly Pig

Pigs are a lot like us,  
their skins are pink, or black, and bare.  
They're friendly and intelligent, if given  
half a chance and like it when you scratch them  
round their ears. I knew a farmer once  
who used to keep a special brush  
to groom his pig, an old enormous sow.  
She'd stand in ecstasy her eyes half closed,  
they seemed to have a special bond.  
Young pigs now scientists have found  
are playful and will thrive  
if children's toys are put into their styes.  
They'll play for hours with a squeaky doll,  
a plastic duck or a rubber ball.

Most pigs today are kept industrially  
in floodlit sanitised conditions  
on concrete floors in factory sheds  
divided into exact economic units  
calculated to maximise returns on capital  
so by and large there isn't room to play  
or even turn. Our pigs are bred for slaughter  
in sterile air-conditioned abattoirs.  
If you, like me, eat meat, you can't complain.  
Yet don't you sometimes feel a qualm  
of guilt? And have you noticed  
how, in graphic art, we always rob the pig  
of dignity? It seems we have a need  
to show this friendly fellow creature  
in a joky light, portray him as a  
cartoon figure out of Disney Land  
with his light-hearted cheeky grin  
and curly tail. It is as though  
we're trying to make ourselves feel better  
and believe the pig is really happy with us after all.

Pete Crowther

# The Grandfather I Never Knew

It's a shame but he seems like a total stranger  
Herbert Lacey, my grandfather.  
He's just nineteen in the photograph  
Taken, I'm told, in nineteen-oh-nine.  
He stares unsmiling at the lens,  
Strong nose, firm mouth, eyes set apart.

He has an air of innocence,  
Seems ill at ease as well he might  
In unfamiliar formal dress,  
Stiff collar, tie, and Sunday suit.  
A watch-chain dangles from the pocket  
Of his tightly buttoned waistcoat.

He wears a cap that seems too large  
And stands behind the studio chair  
Rigidly gripped in his workman's hands.  
Try as I might I can't detect  
A family face, except perhaps  
His ears stick out a bit like mine.

What was he like, my grandfather?  
The photo gives no clue, although  
I see he bit his fingernails.  
Poor Herbert, young and ill at ease,  
I do not know you but I know  
How you will marry, have a child

Fall sick and seven years from now  
Be dead so young and never know  
Who won the war, how long it lasted  
Nor how fair your daughter grew.  
Now I your grandson growing old  
Give you these lines in gratitude.

Pete Crowther

# The Grey-Eyed King (Trans. Of Anna Akhmatova)

Glory be to endless woe!  
Yesterday died the grey-eyed king.

Red was that autumn evening and hot,  
My husband calmly brought the news:

“Back from the hunt they brought his body,  
By an old oak it had been laid.

Pity the queen. So young is she! ...  
Overnight she has turned grey”.

He picked up his pipe from the chimney breast  
And went off to his evening’s work.

In haste I went and woke my daughter  
To look at her grey eyes.

The poplars whisper through the glass:  
“Not in the land of your king ...”

Pete Crowther

# The Milky Way

(Written after seeing a coloured photograph of the 'Galactic Bulge' area of the Milky Way taken from the Hubble space telescope)

Great God it takes one's very breath away  
To see the Hubble picture of the Milky Way,  
A million trillion separate stars that shine  
To fill with sacred light the firmament divine.

Pete Crowther

# The Millennium Yew

On Gallows Hill by Skidby Mill  
There grows a golden yew  
On ground where once the hangman did  
What hangmen have to do.

The tree was planted in that place  
To mark the new millennium.  
Treat it with care, it will be there  
For many a moon to come.

Unlike those felons hung by hemp  
The yew tree's life is long,  
A thousand years or more may pass  
Yet still its growth is strong.

You can be sure that you and I,  
Our very names obscured,  
Will have become rich loam again  
Before this tree's matured,

And Skidby Mill will lie in ruin,  
Strange structures span the sky,  
Ten thousand things will rise and fall,  
And many live and die.

Long years will pass and dusks and dawns,  
Cold winds and rain and sun,  
The seasons each will follow on  
And still the yew be young.

And when at last it has grown old,  
How will the world look then?  
Will Man be there, or will the Earth  
Have said to us 'Amen'?

Pete Crowther

# The Oil Painting

Across the cosy firelit room my eyes  
Are drawn to rest upon the sombre hues  
And heavy brushwork of a small oil painting;  
It holds my gaze—the scene is strangely haunting.

Grey formless clouds drift by in a leaden sky  
Above a domed cathedral standing high,  
Tall-walled and casting shadows on the ground  
Across the narrow streets and all around.

The darkened windows show no chink of light,  
No worshippers will worship here tonight.  
No sacred sounding music will be heard  
Nor pious sermons on the Holy Word.

Beyond this Christian church of God  
Lies wasteland and a distant pine tree wood  
But nowhere in the picture as a whole  
Can I see another single living soul,

This painting's like a window in the wall  
And easy to get through if you are tall.  
The air was cold and I was feeling stiff  
As I approached the building looming like a cliff.

Its stones were damp and dripping wet with mould:  
They must have been a thousand years old.  
I found a solid wooden door and pushed,  
It creaked ajar, then like a torrent rushed

All Mother Russia, tsars and peasants,  
dancing bears and golden pheasants,  
Volga boatmen, Leningrad mums  
trilling pipes and beating drums.

Dancing, prancing down the aisle  
came Rasputin with a smile  
and hand in hand with Lermontov  
was jolly Boris Godunov.

More and more came in procession  
one by one in gay succession:  
Pushkin's playing the balalaika  
for First Space-dog, brave little Laika'.

Old Count Tolstoy is a brick  
beating time with his walking stick;  
in his beard he wears a rose  
and plays clock golf with Gogol's nose.

Off they go into the night,  
both of them a little tight,  
Borodin and Dostoevsky  
down the Rhine and up the Nevsky.

After them came good Prince Igor  
marching his Cossacks four by four.  
They each wore a medal of Peter the Great,  
Tsar of all Russia and head of state.

Skipping, dancing, singing all  
these jolly Russians had a ball,  
lit up the night from distant Omsk  
even as far as the city of Tomsk.

Whenever now that picture draws my eye  
No longer do I feel I'd like to sigh  
For I discovered in my sleeping trance  
The soul of Russia still can sing and dance.

Pete Crowther

# The Once\*

That afternoon though I had learnt to read  
I found the public library rather boring,  
My mother, wanting peace, said I could go  
Upstairs alone to see the town museum.  
I climbed the winding stair and pushed the door,  
It creaked, no other sound and no-one there.  
The air was still and angled light cast shadows,  
The room was filled with cabinets and things  
That seemed as though they all were waiting for  
Someone to come into their quietness.

I tip-toed down the aisle with nervous steps  
And passed the old town stocks in solid oak  
Complete with metal clasps and ancient locks,  
A row of slender clay churchwarden pipes,  
A puffed-out fish of football size and spikes  
All round its leathered skin — a floating mine,  
And here a fire engine like a baby's pram,  
Its handles hinged to make a water pump.

In this dark corner, glaring through the glass,  
A creature like a leopard stands, as tall as me  
And twice as long. I read its name aloud—  
"The Once". It seems to crouch, about to spring,  
With fierce glittering eyes and teeth like knives,  
Its claws as sharp as broken glass, designed  
To rip and tear at living flesh. It looked  
At me beyond the glass and through the stillness  
Of that quiet afternoon, and then I knew  
This monster meant to get me, and I fled.

That night I could not sleep, I knew the Once  
Had not forgotten me but was it still  
Locked in its case or has it magic power  
To step outside through solid half-inch glass  
As darkness comes to shroud the silent room?  
Does it softly pad along that quiet aisle,  
Go past the fire pump like a pram and by  
The puff-fish with its swollen leather skin,



The clay churchwarden pipes upon their stand?  
Does it pause before the heavy door or pass  
Right through and down the winding stair and out  
Into the street to sniff the air and seek  
This house where now I lie in fear and dread?  
Is it slinking through the streets with measured  
tread?  
Oh, is it coming here?

Last week I visited my natal town  
And went to see the library and that room.  
Perhaps I should have known that all things change,  
The room refurbished, light and airy had  
Become a gallery showing modern art.  
I asked the staff what had become of all  
The old museum stock, the fish, the pipes,  
The fire engine that looked so like a pram,  
And especially that animal, the 'leopard'.  
They did not know where it had gone, but I—  
I think I know.

I think it's slinking like a shadow still  
Through silent streets, or padding softly like  
A nightmare Nemesis along those dark  
And hidden labyrinthine pathways of  
My brain.

\* Pronounced ONSE — 'Once', I later realized was a misspelling for 'ounce'—the  
snow leopard

Pete Crowther

# The Other Mary

Last night I dreamt  
I was in bed  
with Mary Magdalen.  
We lay side by side  
fully clothed  
and discussed  
her recent trip  
to Oklahoma.  
The scenery, she said,  
was quite spectacular.

Pete Crowther

# The Parasitology Exam

At 7.30, after morning breakfast  
it was the parasitology exam...  
I had some 40 worms  
to memorise —  
Latin names, contamination, size,  
colour, cycle, treatment, diagnosis,  
signs clinical and otherwise,  
as well as prophylaxy, reproduction,  
not to mention all the different  
types of eggs,  
their shape and size.  
These 40 worms I carried in my head,  
a salad mix you might have said.  
One question I found pretty hard  
concerned a man with diarrhoea,  
nausea and restless fever.  
I knew 30 worms that could cause that  
but this was special for the man  
had hypereosinophilia  
of five percent; percentages  
are different for each worm.  
I had a guess and chose  
the species, saginata  
of the genus, Teniae  
And thanks to Lady Luck,  
by all the gods, I got it right!  
Tomorrow we'll be tested in diseases.  
□

Pete Crowther

# The Photographic Competition

This girl I know has seen a poster for  
a photographic competition  
with prizes for the best three photographs.  
Land transport is the theme —  
roads, highways, railways, bridges;  
the field of choice is wide.  
She thinks 'why not?' and  
straightaway decides to try to win.  
That night she doesn't sleep at all,  
her mind is full of thoughts  
of roads and highways, railway lines  
and plans. Next day she tries to borrow  
from a friend his camera but he's out,  
no matter, she will try again,  
meanwhile there's much research to do  
upon the Internet and using Google's images  
to check the many ways  
that roads and highways, too,  
might variously be viewed.

When Sunday comes, still camera-less  
she walks for miles  
to where the railway line is bridged  
and gives a photographic vantage point.  
Here once a week the track's one train  
will pass beneath the bridge.  
Today she reconnoitres, measures angles,  
sight lines, calculates perspectives, rates of speed.  
Tomorrow she resolves to check  
which day the train will pass along the line.  
Meanwhile a plan of action forms:  
she'll take a holiday from work that day  
and wait with patience and a camera for the train.  
She'll get her shot.

So far so good. She next turns over in her mind  
the strategies for roads and highways —  
a week at least for staking out  
locations, planning pics. She formulates

a schedule in her mind —  
This girl is serious and intends to win  
like Soviet General Zhukov who  
in World War II triumphed against all odds.  
Her battle plans like his are based on Clausewitz,  
she's read his Art of War and follows,  
faithfully the principle he taught —  
which is to bring a force that's irresistible  
to any problem, hitch or snag,  
and in that way to overwhelm  
and crush all opposition, totally.  
This is what it takes to win,  
and I am glad she is my friend;  
I would not choose  
to have her as my foe.

Pete Crowther

# The Pipistrelle

Our cat brought home a pipistrelle,  
Intact but traumatized.  
I held it up to fly away,  
It would not leave my hand.  
Its breast was warm against my palm,  
I felt its beating heart.  
So strangely intimate it seemed  
That moment when two creatures met,  
The one so large, the other small.

Pete Crowther

# The Rat That Withdrew From The World (Trans. De La Fontaine)

The Levantines in legends say  
There was a rat who turned away  
From worldly cares and mortal strife  
To live a holy hermit's life.

His hermitage was a round Dutch cheese  
On which he'd used his expertise  
With tooth and claw to make a nest  
Wherein to feast and take his rest.

This rat grew fat and rather stout  
For God is good to souls devout.  
One day there came a deputation  
To this great soul, from the rattish nation

Seeking alms with which to bribe  
An army of the feline tribe  
Which was encamped around their city,  
A cruel foe that would not pity

Their baby rats or much loved does.  
"We'll pay you back, God only knows! "  
The august person hummed and haw'd,  
He said their case was truly hard

But his own funds, alas, were meant  
To cushion his retirement—  
Provision for a rainy day,  
So his advice to them was: Pray

For heaven's help in their sad plight  
And God would surely set things right.  
He blessed them all and then withdrew  
Now that he'd told them what to do.

How would you rate this noble rat—  
A Christian saint or a diplomat?

A Christian saint he could not be  
For Christians preach charity.

Pete Crowther



# The Rise And Fall Of The Ten Thousand Things

Lao Tsu,  
so wise,  
believed  
all things  
that rose  
in time  
would fall,  
the high  
become low,  
the low  
become high.

Let those in low places  
draw comfort from his words.

Pete Crowther

# The Sacrifice

I loved all three  
of my silver  
threepenny bits  
especially the shiny one  
with Queen Victoria's head  
so it was strange  
that I should dropp them  
secretly, one by one  
in the church collection plate  
at Sunday Mass.  
I made myself do it,  
wanting to show —  
to prove to myself  
that I loved God more  
than my lovely  
silver threepenny bits.  
What a strange child I was,  
misguided, too, I think  
— perhaps.

Pete Crowther

# The Sea And I

As far as I can see, the surface of the sea  
Is all a-glitter where  
Bright sunlight sparkles on each ripple  
Making stars enough to fill  
A universe at least. Today  
She is as calm and gentle  
As a pussycat asleep, and I  
Can scarcely hear her sighs that  
Softly rise and break  
Upon the beach. On other days  
I've known her be a raging tiger,  
Or a wolf whose gleaming teeth  
Rip, slash and tear  
Like a Viking gone beserk.  
One thing I like about her is  
Her honesty, she'll always say  
Just what she thinks and what  
You see is what you get. I've made a date  
To join her when I'm dead. My ashes  
First will float then sink into her waters  
Sweetly so that we become as one.  
We'll have our gentle moods,  
Just like today  
But I am looking forward to the time  
When we go wild and run amok,  
Make those ashore hoist warning cones  
Along the coast. The sea and I  
Will call up gales and thunderstorms  
To join the fun. We'll have a ball,  
We'll rage and roar, and laugh out loud to feel  
The salty sting of driven spray  
Upon our lips, upon our skin.

Pete Crowther

# The Six O'Clock News

Tonight the tide is running high  
And from my garden in the dark  
I hear the hidden curlews call  
And just beyond, two fields away,  
The muffled roaring of the sea.

Above my head the empty sky  
Save far away the shining stars  
And lighted splendour of the moon.  
The air is cold upon my skin,  
The wind has blown and moaned all day.

The lighted kitchen is inviting.  
I heed its call and go inside,  
In time to catch the evening news.  
Of great concern as usual  
Is football, opium of the people,

A record transfer's fallen through,  
Supporters clash, abroad a stabbing,  
A player's failed a drug test,  
Comments sought from managers,  
The clubs, F.A. and Premier League,

And so it goes, until at last,  
It's time for Northern Ireland.  
And here we learn a new peace deal  
That everyone had hoped would solve  
That island's ancient tribal feuds

Has broken down, collapsed again  
And each side bitterly blames the other.  
The next item goes on to cover  
The Tories' annual conference—  
I leave the room preferring darkness and the moon.

Pete Crowther

# The Songthrush

Do you remember how the songthrush sang,  
Those lovely liquid notes that spilled  
Forth from his throat like a mountain stream  
So fresh and clean and how they gushed  
And filled the clear air of early spring?  
Do you recall that speckled breast, the warm  
Brown feathers, upright stance, the bird  
Head cocked, alert, upon the lawn,  
Say, early in the morning  
Soon after dawn when yet the dew  
Lay wet upon the grass? Now let me ask  
When last you saw a songthrush on the lawn  
Or heard one sing so that you knew  
That spring had come? This bird, too,  
Once commonplace, I fear has now become  
Just like the shrike and corncrake that our fathers knew,  
As rare a sight as some celestial comet  
Or shooting star that lights the darkness of the night.

Pete Crowther

# The Tagareen Shop

Down by the dockside  
Round the corner past the pub  
The tagareen man  
Has a tagareen shop  
Where just about anything goes.

Hats and scarves  
And rubber boots,  
Sou'wester hats,  
Second-hand clothes,  
Fishermen's jerseys,  
Dungarees,  
And waterproofs,  
You'll find them all  
In the tagareen shop  
Where nobody goes.

There's bargains galore  
Both at sea and ashore  
To be had at the tagareen shop.  
You can rummage about  
In the piles on the floor  
Like a pig with his snout,  
Rooting about in the straw.  
Somewhere in that lumber  
You'll find any number  
For everything's there  
In the tagareen shop —  
Even if nobody knows.

The tagareen man  
Has a broad range of stock —  
A bit of old rope?  
A nice pair of shoes?  
Dreams of a distant shore?  
He'll sell you his soul  
For the price of a beer,  
He'll sell you his daughter for less  
And chuck in the mother,

Her sister and brother,  
You can have the whole caboodle  
If you want, for  
Eventually everything goes.

His mother-in-law  
Sits at the back  
Of the shop, like a queen  
On top of a pile of clothes.  
She looks down her nose  
At the customers' woes  
But their money's a different thing!  
It's put in the till to be spent  
In the pub on whisky and gin,  
Fast women and sin,  
And that is where all of it goes.

Some folk, they say, wouldn't recognize  
A tagareen shop in front of their eyes.  
Well all I can say is this:  
If you find your living room  
Is all bestrewn  
With boots, and bags, odd socks  
And mags, and yesterday's newspapers,  
With bits of junk and kelterment  
All scattered across the table's top  
Then I think I can say  
That what you've got  
Is very like a tagareen shop  
As far as anyone knows  
□

Pete Crowther

# The Tjet Or Knot Of Isis

I own an amulet  
of Ancient Egypt,  
a magical charm  
to keep me from harm.

It is a 'tjet',  
the sacred knot  
worn by the goddess,  
mother of Horus,

the Lady Isis,  
skilful and wise.  
She will protect  
who wears her tjet,

or so it is said  
in the Book of the Dead.  
Here I gaze at this charm  
so cool in my palm,

the smell of incense  
on its green faience.  
I imagine it blessed  
by a holy priestess

with sistrum and drum  
whose steady low thrum  
still reaches my ears  
after three thousand years.

Pete Crowther



# The Villanelle

The Villanelle's a tricky poem to pen  
Such rigid rules for rhymes you'll seldom see,  
The same old lines keep coming round again.

Lines one and three must always finish when  
Their final rhymes each with the other do agree,  
The Villanelle's a tricky poem to pen.

Line three you'll see once more before line ten  
(It's really nine but you will pardon me) .  
The same old lines keep coming round again.

It's back again at line fifteen, and then  
At line nineteen—you've guessed—it is line three!  
The Villanelle's a tricky poem to pen.

Line one you'll know, if you have acumen,  
Is very much like three: their rules don't disagree,  
The same old lines keep coming round again.

And now, thank God, it's nearly line nineteen  
When from this poem's fiendish rules I'm free.  
The Villanelle's a tricky poem to pen,  
The same old lines keep coming round again.

Pete Crowther

# The World In A Teacup

Swirl the teacup three times round  
And stand it on its saucer upside down.  
The leaves will tell of things to come  
And brighten up your afternoon.  
"In a three"—could be days or even months,  
You'll meet a stranger, dark and tall,  
He'll be important in your life  
But do not fear for all the leaves  
Around are bright. All will be well.  
There's "something new to wear"  
And "money" near the bottom of the cup  
So don't expect it soon, and anyway  
It isn't much—a small pools win perhaps.  
"Cross words" there'll be with some one close,  
A friend, or next-door-neighbour, even  
A member of the family,  
But do not fret for it soon will pass—  
A storm in a teacup, you could say!  
There is a tiny cloud of trouble,  
A touch of sickness, nothing much,  
So do not worry, it will not cause upset.  
And nothing ever does! There is no death,  
Divorce or injury, no heart attacks,  
No cancer in these readings that my mother gave  
To visitors, like Auntie Annie, in the afternoon.

Pete Crowther

# The World, The Flesh, And The Devil

As a child I was taught  
to despise this world —  
the World, the Flesh, and the Devil,  
but the world I have found  
is a beautiful place,  
and I've nothing but praise  
for the Flesh, while the Devil  
as yet I never have met  
but I think  
He's just had a bad press.

Pete Crowther

# Tidal Rhythms

River  
Humber's  
tidal

waters  
ebbing,  
flowing,

daily  
lap the  
shoreline,

rising,  
falling  
like a

sleeping  
living  
creature's

gentle  
steady  
breathing

never  
ever  
ceasing.

Pete Crowther

# Time

In wartime, I remember, once a week  
My mother took me as a treat to town  
Where we would make a bee-line for the shop  
That sold small cactus plants in bright red pots,  
Old stock left over from before the War  
And each one priced at sixpence or a shilling.

In my collector's mind they seemed to glow,  
Those magic shapes, exotic and unique  
In those grey days of scarcity and dearth,  
They were the only 'toys' I'd ever known  
(You cannot count those flat unpainted pigs  
And sheep in shiny lead that Woolworth's sold) .

These cacti were the highlight of my week,  
They seemed to brightly shine inside my head,  
Each one so trim and perfect in its pot  
Surrounded by a ring of silver sand  
And neatly labelled with its Latin name,  
Those occult names that I can still recite—

Kleinia articulata, the Candle Plant  
With blueish waxy leaves like parted tongues,  
The green Nopalea coccinifera  
And densely spined Opuntia microdasys,  
Whose deadly barbs embedded in my flesh  
I had to probe and pluck each time with tweezers.

I can recall the choosing, and the care  
With which I carried each one home, like glass,  
And like a miser gloated over it.  
Now sixty years have passed, yet when  
I go into my greenhouse, where row on row  
Of cacti grow, I feel just eight years old.

Pete Crowther

## Time Out At The Seaside

Stepping onto the sun-warmed sand  
Littered with pebbles, dried flotsam and shells,  
Hearing the calls of the distant gulls,  
The rhythmical breath of the breaking waves  
And smelling the smell of the good old sea,  
Time suddenly stops then twists for me  
And I am become a boy again  
Not seven years old and everything  
Is new and fresh and clean:  
The world is young and sparkling,  
Unlimited like the sea  
And best of all it seems to be —  
It all belongs to me.

Pete Crowther

## Too Late Now

In the supermarket car park  
I parked my Kawasaki  
400 ZRX, new and gleaming,  
locked it took the key  
and turned to go, when  
I was accosted by an oldish chap  
who praised the bike and we  
exchanged some technicalities;  
he'd been a dispatch rider  
once, and he asked me if he might  
look closer at my motorbike.  
"You're very welcome, but I  
will have to go now,  
for I'm running late",  
I said. Too late now—I wish  
I'd given him my time,  
not walked away, but stayed to talk,  
for a look of disappointment  
flashed across his face, 'crestfallen'  
was the word that came to mind.  
I realize now that what he'd really wanted  
was a chat, and I had walked away.  
□

Pete Crowther

# Travel Tips

I was told by a  
girl in Beirut to  
beware of the heat  
when I go on my cruise  
down the Nile.  
"It will be hotter  
than England", she said  
"For Egypt is ninety-per-cent  
Saharan desert and sand".  
"Tell your wife to take her bikini".

Pete Crowther



## True Love (Trans. A.S. Pushkin)

I loved you and that love perhaps,  
Still lingers somewhere in my heart;  
But do not let it trouble you;  
I would not wish to grieve you now.  
My love was always hopeless, dumb,  
A love too bold or timid fails;  
But I loved you so tenderly and true,  
I pray God grant another so will do.

Pete Crowther

## Two Schuttelreims

I

Bleak Lilith haunts the night's dark streams  
Disturbing sleepers with her own stark dreams.

II

Weep your tears good ladies, weep mothers, weep daughters  
For your lovers are lost in the ocean's deep waters.

Pete Crowther

# Useless

Amongst the ancient artefacts unearthed  
were six dog-collars with their owners' names  
in hieroglyphs—three thousand years it is  
since Brave One and his master went to hunt  
for waterfowl among the reedy marshes  
of the Nile, near where, beneath a shady palm,  
the dogs, Good Herdsman and Reliable,  
stood guard upon their master's herd of kine;  
nearby North Wind (the fastest dog in Thebes)  
and Antelope strove might and main to keep  
penned safe a restless flock of bleating sheep,  
all steady dogs deserving of our praise.  
But who's that scruffy dog with lolling tongue  
and sideways grin that idly lollops by?  
A good for nothing sort of beast, he looks,  
too loveable to guard a house, too daft  
to herd a sheep and slow to bring back game,  
but you know his master must have loved him  
when he dubbed him with that name—can you guess?  
In hieroglyphs or English it's the same — "Useless! "

Pete Crowther

# Violets

When I was a child  
My mother took me  
To look for violets.  
They grew in a secret place  
On the edge of a wood.  
Their petals were as blue  
As my mother's eyes.  
This was long ago.

Pete Crowther

# Walking Home From The Pub Along A Country Road By A Wide River Estuary At Night

This is magic  
old as the Earth  
yet young as we  
in the wine-dark sky  
to see above  
those two celestial  
bodies float,  
the crescent moon,  
a boat of molten gold,  
she swings upon  
her sole companion,  
the evening star,  
bright Venus  
in the western sky  
high over where  
small wavelets scurry  
in the dark, unseen,  
out there,  
to gently break  
upon the sand —  
shush, shush, it seems  
the River breathes  
as we walk home  
alone, and hand in hand.

□

Pete Crowther

# War Of Words

Wise wizards  
Work wonders  
With words  
While wanton  
Wild warriors  
With weapons  
Wastefully wage  
Wicked war.

Pete Crowther

# Weather Forecast

The weather girl  
Is a priceless pearl.  
Chic and smart,  
She has the art  
Of making weather  
Altogether—  
However bloody—  
A pleasure to study.

Pete Crowther

# What Would It Be Like To Be A Bird?

What would it be like to be a bird?

Flying through the air.

Gliding so beautifully I just have to stop and stare.

Baby birds learning to fly,

Finally flying up so high.

Sleeping at night under mother bird's wing,

Snug and warm waking up to sing.

Pete Crowther



## Where Are They Now?

They say that when we die we live  
In the minds of those we've left behind,  
And it's true—my mind is full of folk I knew.  
Here they are as odd as ever,  
'Round Again' and 'Fitty' Eric,  
Snowy Hall and Loony Lenny,  
Hairy Old Twagger and little Miss Nellie.

Round Again was a German spy,  
He pushed a little pram about.  
From time to time, you'd hear him shout  
"Round again, round again"  
To let you know he was about  
Collecting rags and tins for scrap.  
Within the pram we children knew  
A radio transmitter hid  
Tuned to the German High Command.  
And when Round Again was seen no more  
We guessed he'd been arrested.

Just down the road in Pighill Lane  
You'd see Old Twagger on his bike,  
An ancient cove with whiskered face.  
He turned the pedals oh so slowly  
Moving at a measured pace.  
Tied to the bike by a length of string,  
His Old English Sheepdog padded beside him,  
Slow, old, and hairy just like him.  
The pair of them made a slow progression  
Plodding along and all alone  
While the world spun round on its axis.

Miss Nellie was the licensee  
Of the old White Horse in Hengate.  
She and her sister ruled within  
As strict as Queen Victoria.  
Miss Dorothy was tall and stately,  
Her sister small and stooping.  
Miss Nellie was quick like a little bird.

She wore black boots and often sniffed,  
And her skirts came down to her ankles.

With his mother, Mrs. Taylor,  
Poor 'Fitty' Eric lived. He was  
Quite the fattest man I'd ever seen.  
In World War Two such folk were few  
And far between. He once had a fit  
In Pighill Lane and lay across the road  
Until some kind Samaritan came  
And covered him with a tarpaulin.  
By a passer-by he was mistaken  
For a horse, deceased and awaiting  
The collection cart of the knacker man.

Old Joey Brown down Manor Road  
Kept donkeys, chickens, pigs and geese.  
He was a former travelling man  
But now he'd settled for a life of peace.  
He drove about on a pony and cart  
Followed by dogs, and children too  
All begging to ride behind the pony.

Loony Lenny roamed the town,  
Picking flowers from people's gardens  
To put in his lapel or funny hat.  
Shopkeepers gave him lots of sweets—  
For free, as long as he would leave the shop!  
Sometimes he wore a sandwich board  
That advertised the films to come  
At the Marble Arch or Playhouse.  
I don't know what became of him  
But I do recall his sunny smile.

On Hengate corner was Snowy Hall,  
A former jockey who'd had a fall  
Some time before and broken his back.  
His shop had a curious window display:  
In pride of place was a sparrowhawk  
Carefully stuffed and in a glass case  
With a label that named it a cuckoo.  
Close by unpriced three volumes stood,

In letters gold their title read:  
"The Horse in Sickness and in Health".  
And next to them a fading snap  
Portrayed a local football team,  
The players all, moustaches drooping,  
Wore shorts that came below their knees.  
"Where are they now? " the label said.

Where are they now? —these long-gone folk  
Who'd never seen a mobile phone  
Or surfed the Web or watched TV?  
Where are they now, these folk long dead?  
I'll tell you where! They're in my head!  
□

Pete Crowther

# Where They Hung The Monkey

I think it was West Hartlepool  
Or possibly Sunderland.  
It was somewhere along the North-east coast,  
I'm given to understand

It was where they hung the monkey,  
The one that came to be  
Cast up on the sandy shoreline there  
After a storm at sea.

It thought itself most fortunate  
To see the land again  
For all the sailors on its ship  
Had drowned in the watery main.

It was a sailor's happy pet  
And used to his gentle ways  
So when it saw some men ashore  
It gave its Maker praise.

And ran to them with happy cries,  
Glad of their company  
But all the men of Hartlepool  
Thought it quite uncanny.

None of them had ever seen  
Such a thing as a monkey,  
For all they knew it could have been  
A dressed-up courtroom flunkey.

They scratched their heads in puzzlement,  
Some said it was a Frenchman,  
But others disagreed and thought  
It was the Devil's henchman.

The arguments went on and on  
And no-one could agree  
Until an ancient fisherman said:  
"Now everyone listen to me,

It's plain this creature is a Frenchie  
By Boney sent to spy  
Upon the men of Hartlepool,  
So, come let's swing him high".

The monkey then was marched to gaol,  
It thought it was a game  
And danced and skipped between its gaolers  
As to the town they came.

And when they put around its neck  
The rope that hung from the tree  
It chattered with excitement  
Recalling frolics on the sea.

When it was roughly pushed, to jerk  
And dangle from the rope,  
To change its view of all mankind,  
There was not time, we hope.

Pete Crowther

# Whispers In The Mind

The poems on the printed page  
Began as whispers in the mind  
But now attentively they stand  
Neat artefacts in black and white  
Catalogued and classified,  
Crisp and neat, solidified.  
Pick them up and put them down,  
Let them fall upon the floor,  
Scatter them upon the table,  
Rattle them like poker dice  
But have a care for they are loaded,  
Less innocent than they might seem.  
Beware their false solidity  
And gaze not on them overlong  
Nor let them rest upon your tongue  
For poems melt in people's mouths  
And warmed by touch or lingering glance  
May be absorbed like tongues of flame  
Within the labyrinthine brain  
Wherein by alchemy transformed  
The man of careful calculation  
Becomes the shaman wild and strange  
Under the moon and the cold night stars.

□

Pete Crowther

# White China Tea

White tea,  
aristocrat that once  
an emperor's concubines'  
slim fingers plucked  
at dawn, dew-drenched  
upon the mountainside,  
rare oriental pearl, its  
scent so subtle and precise  
defies analysis,  
is pure delight.

Within the amber  
liquid lapped in  
palest porcelain  
tipped leaves uncurl  
to leave a taste  
upon the lips divine,  
meanwhile like  
mist or smoke  
steam rises from the cup,  
its wraiths unfurl  
about its lip,  
become a fragrant  
kiss, a lover's tongue  
that seeks a loved one's  
tongue to touch  
gently, tip to tip.

□

Pete Crowther

# Whose Is This Hand I See Before Me?

God, it scared me!  
Just woke up,  
looked down at my arm,  
hand still holding the pen —  
It didn't seem to be mine,  
the hand, I mean,  
I'd probably nicked the pen.

Pete Crowther



# Women

When I was in the RN  
All of my shipmates were men.  
For women all frigates  
Were strictly off limits,  
So no skirts or dresses  
To be seen in the messes.

Now the thought came to me  
In the long days at sea  
That a bloke is just great  
To have as a mate  
For the odd run ashore  
In, say, Singapore

But otherwise—  
Perhaps no surprise,  
I'd much sooner be  
In feminine company  
For women are much nicer,  
Like Mona Lisa

They intrigue us men  
And when  
They smile at us so sweetly  
We become completely  
Under their spell  
As they know so well.

Women are much prettier,  
Their conversation wittier,  
More subtle and more tender  
Than we the other gender  
So all of you take note:  
To women I'm giving my vote!

Pete Crowther

# Yaks Are Wonderful

Yaks are wonderful  
but they make terrible cheese.  
Their nature is kind and gentle  
unlike the spitting llama;  
sometimes you may hear them  
in the small hours of the night  
talking quietly among themselves.  
They are dreamy animals  
much given to flights of fancy  
but their manners are perfect,  
old-fashioned and gentlemanly.  
So far no-one has explained  
why their cheese is so terrible.  
Philosophers and gourmets  
have long debated the issue,  
even held joint symposia  
on the subject but still they are baffled,  
and the matter remains open for debate.  
The cheese of cows, goats, and even  
sheep is much to be preferred;  
if you take my advice,  
you will eschew yak cheese —  
it really is terrible.

Pete Crowther

# Yuletide Wish

This is our yuletide wish for you—  
May you find light in winter's skies  
May you have peace in the midst of strife  
May you have joy where sadness lies  
And may you love and be loved all the rest of your life.

Pete Crowther