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,
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
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 summoned 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.
Pete Crowther
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 Tolstoi)

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 Tolstoi)

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
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 abbatoir?
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
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
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, thunderbolts,
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
'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
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”,
“Well 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
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 Wellingsons 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
"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
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
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
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
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
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
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 leathery 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
cconcerned a man with diarrhoea,
a 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
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
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 coccinilifera
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 ‘Fifty’ 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