

Actual Tigers

Poems

William Crawford

Foreword

Actual Tigers by William Crawford is a thing of alchemy, more journey than tale. The poems of this collection have a unique pulse and purpose. The keen use of language, musicality and cinematic imagery is articulate and sophisticated, yet non pretentious. As an author, Crawford not only respects the reader, he respects his poems. This is clear from the unleashing of the first “tiger”, in which he writes from the poem’s perspective.

You trapped me, you caged me,
you raised me for pure slaughter value.
Stuffed me with moon mad metaphor
and red threadbare simile over easy.
Slender means for your foie gras goose—
a famine mistook for a feast.

Quick, take the feeding hand,
stick the quill back in,
let it serve a greater purpose.

~From *Kneeling Poem’s Plea*

This piece is indeed, a feast for readers and a testament to the author’s sagacity. While many writers force poetry into frame and call it art, Crawford’s poems manifest intuitively and instinctively to the page with humble agenda and intent...

Uncut Rain

for Hart Crane

This night sleeps with thirty sailors
Stands slowly burning yet still
A broken tower without a bell
Without music to mark its own passing
As it falls with you, then within you.

You were always lost at sea
Forever drowning in your own depths.

An awkward bird of a man
Diving beak first into everything
If only to taste its decay
Describe the earthy notes
The aftertaste smacked of afterlife
It was eternally vernal,
Or did you say, *eternally infernal?*

So many eyes arresting you
As you danced drunken sarabandes
With your handsome sailor
Suited in moonlight flooding
Starboard side of the Orizaba
Two target range silhouettes becoming one
Fragments of filmy shot shadow mending.

Then the murderous sun of morning
Found floundering fledging falling
And the words you mouthed failed
In the raw red meat face of day

The men it mothered and dressed
As lions in the most ignorant pride.

Hold a conch shell to each ear
Before you blow this reveille
In hopes that they will listen
To the earnest, imploring sound
Of blood in song, in sonnet,
Forever thinking it is the sea
Or just a photograph of water.

Shattering yourself in blue melody
Against shimmering sheets of uncut rain
With an unctuous tongue full of the gulf's sweat
Climbing down through cerulean chambers
While still facing the raging surface

Where the sun's truth
Is just a broken yolk
Or maybe only a golden eye
With which to see yourself reflected
In the cold fathomless water below
Crossing another bridge as it burns.

Listening all the while
For the gentle pity of laughter
Always the sound of late rain
Cut and rightfully falling
Into your cupped writing hand

Sighing, *goodbye, everybody*
Before taking that last drink

Becoming both albatross and anchor.

Actual Tigers

I just want another season,

says the wounded tiger
as he staggers back
to the place he first
found beauty

starving

seeking sustenance,
shade, mate

only to find paper
where meat used to be

poachers in the trees
blunderbusses aimed

he roars and hangs his fangs
shows glint of light from claws

the men find moon
as tiger strikes

beach red scream

a death dream of whale
swimming against current

dorsal fin ripped
into sweet oblivion

blood on sand
where bikinis used to be
that first taste of ocean
too strong and salty
to be forgotten

green and blue
in crest and crash
a strange change up

thank god
they saw it all
in colour once

tasted it on their tongues
almost mother, home

tiger licks wound
with ocean in each eye
rage, calm, rage again

waves could be horses
or guttered candles
with flames remounted

he stretches and yawns
knows their voices
as just a single playback

that misses everything
and says nothing
as it numbly roars.

The Noble Rise Above

the first time
Coltrane played Paris
the French booed
and threw copper centimes
at him

Coltrane just
closed his eyes
raw oceans gentling

and listened to
the sound of pennies
tapping the wood
of the stage

it reminded him
of rain falling down
onto the tin roof
of his first home

Coltrane mimicked
that sound with his horn
then quoted
Pennies from Heaven
for safe measure.

Acknowledgements & Permissions

Medallion level: Kimberly Schlagel, Buster McNutley, Mama Sass, Soul Sister Sookie, Tim Buck, Apryl Skies, Alicia Winski, Maria Gornell, Lynne Hayes, Karen Bowles, Marlene Lennon, Hank Beukema, Cynthia Terese Scott, Ness Bloo, Danny Bejar, D.C. Berman, Will Oldham, Bill Callahan, and The Popcorn Park Zoo.

Especial gratitude to the editors of the following publications where some of these poems were first printed: Calliope Nerve, The Criterion, Triggerfish Critical Review, Leaf Garden Press, Durable Goods, Take It to the Street Poetry Review, Edgar & Lenore's Publishing House – Edgar Allan Poet, Virgo Gray Press, Montucky Review, and Alligator Stew – Pig Ear Press.

Cover photograph: Halloween – 1964 by Grace Paynter

Cover models: Joanne Crawford & Marie “Cookie” Ford

Cover text, treatments, and pumpkin bread: Mark Stetsko

About the Author



Photo by Joanne Crawford

William Crawford has authored one other collection of poems entitled, *Fire in the Marrow (NeoPoiesis Press)*. His writing has been twice nominated for the Pushcart Prize. His work has been published globally in numerous magazines and anthologies. Currently, his poetry is being translated into Polish. William abides in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and is an animal rights activist.