

The Poetry of Chris Crittenden

<http://owlwholaughs.blogspot.com>

God Explains War

i sought god
while glory waited for soldiers
to laugh on the battlefield,

discard their shiny vests and rise,
console mothers and tin clouds,
explain it was all an idiot's joke;

but i found myself sick with a curse,
contagious red that wouldn't peel off,
wouldn't depart my dove-skinned shoulders--
that seeped through pockets and seams,
through flesh,
replacing the drama of prayer
with lukewarm gelatin.

and god i found on a barstool,
foam on his whiskers, chin steeped in beer.
he butchered me with a killer's grin,
said Midas at least had a daughter,
could stroke her aureate brow,

and yet he, God,
Lord of All Flesh, had corpses
for an entourage: sterile angels,
sexless virgins, parapets so cold
they didn't need ice to be cruel.

what reigned in heaven, he said, but death?
death eager for a gown of blood,
death in colorful windows,
singing from steeple bells, sacrificing itself.
death the only lover he could touch
that wouldn't die.

Hiroshima Shadow

i am what i not am,
inconsequential
as an ant that ate
the last seed.

before i could make good,
i looked up at the sky.
it was the first
and last thing my lack-of-body
would ever do.

i am not known
to have a name, but it
will be said in the future
that i was prophesied,
one of the first burnt.

no one

has any idea what my mother
looked like, or whether
by some fluke she
smiled during my fast birth,
or even had bones.

for my mother
sat exactly where i
am sitting and turned
her body just so,
in the very same way;

and then there was no
flesh to beget flesh,
no heart to love
or give happiness to
a lack-of-child:

i just was.

Love Your Enemies

nothing hurts more
than the ache in the lack:
to ignore the blood
on shard-sprinkled streets.
or people dressed like you,
taking slugs in the crossfire,
expressions like yours,
the one in the mirror,
asking the same question:
why am i down going down why going why down going down why this?
they die near your tan boots
as you watch like murder,
wanting to have warm eyes.
to cry.
but also to be killed,
to be shot as you shoot.
yes. you yearn for this.
and yet you feel nothing,
not even your own sick game:
how you laugh
while exposing your head.
the only thing that hurts
is the absence of any pain,

an immunity to tears.
fear the only force that gets through,
but it comes like a lost child.

war disfigures everyone.
and when you shoot
you kill those your mother
taught you to love.
you aren't you anymore.
you have shot so often
the trigger can't resist,
though it knows
what you are doing is wrong.

when you have shot away
all the enemies in the mirror,
those pieces of yourself,
those neighbors
you were told to love by God,
it will be good.

Soldier Turns Atheist

this embolism
blocking his will to pray,

it holds so much blood
that he can see villages of red,
mounds of coagulation.

did God lie to him
or was it the President who said
this was the will of God?

did Freedom really sanction

this?

all this pooling messy pain,
disgusting with shrieks.

not like children on halloween,
not like a movie.

no.

a real child
ripped apart, slaughtered
into chunks by a bomb.

pieces of little girl
raining down everywhere,

splattling to stick.

a wild crucifixion.

one eyeball mashed,
the other ten feet away,
looking up at the sky like a pollywog,
where peace should dwell,

and asking,
"is littered meat allowed in heaven"?

Weapon Possessed

bitten by his rifle,
the trigger a sting
swelling into his finger,

he can't retreat, only shoot,
wherever he goes they
tell him to shoot,

and his gun agrees,
poisons his kindness,
owns him like a scorpion
that whips across culture,

between the eyes.

he can't accept
this werewolf life
of murder and being a scared father,

of serving peace but cradling
a metal demon-baby instead--

knowing it wants
to jump in and fight,
to kick angry in his arms,

get hot, snarl, rage.

and when it is done vomiting death
it goes back to its coffin
in a metal locker,

near the picture of his wife
and child.

Hit

what was was fragile.
a shard of scream to the jugular.
he had no could not compensate.
to come back was not to couldn't be a new start:
only trench itch and a mouth of cotton,
friends blown to fleshy scripts,
sheaves of them in sheets.

there was no did no had no
felt no saw no meant no god.
bodies left by the bulldozer
in mud that turns red where
even a worm is great. five worms
almost tender, like a girl's hand.
there would no couldn't kiss a girl again.
less fireflies than stars
under the battlefield moon.

such secrets in breath!
strange that ever would surprise him,
or that legs weren't sticks.
bird lying wings cracked back broke by canon roar.
sad chirp stomped boot-flattened,
last thing couldn't but must
he had to see.

After A Battle

gunpowdery hands
stab up a cliff, hoist
a wretched soldier
to the top;

and he cries out
as if granite
cut his soul,
made him shriek--

hating god or light
or whatever mother
birthed the miracle
allowing this torture--

to see but not to know,
to feel but not to answer
questions riddled
with bombs and screams.

depravity and pus.

why, you sick Originator,
slaughter toddlers
for bankers' gain?

why encourage hate
while arsenals rage to employ
steelworkers?

why, bloody Gabriel,
perch blue-green hope
atop the bayonet of war?

Vet Pain

flashbacks come
curt as lightning,
a cat-o'-nine across his chest,
unseen brands worse than scars.
the pain writes an epitaph,
compels his heart to read
when it lurches up.

the fear frequent,
every day a mission and he the sarge,
too responsible to stay calm.
his worry concealed in mumbles,
babble like a sculptor's tools
never quite forming
distant corpses.

bones rise during thrashed sleep
to drum in his head,
vibrating like gunshots.
they know what was done,
yet cannot express--

no one sees the gag
war customized for him;
and if they did
it would be too guilt-ridden,
too horror-knotted,
to unmake.

The Real

it hurt it hurt it hurt
the lack of heaven
in the slow dance of the sky.

the blurbs fairytales peddled and
politicians proclaimed,
and an entire culture lapped up and thought,

never

even entered the outer
perimeter of Truth,
or bore witness to the manufactured evil
in the pits between its spires.

if there was a god
who didn't on the chains of souls fascinate,
she was chastised, marginal,

a swift flimsy icon
saddled with an impossible task:

to make the good strong
and nurture trust
by sharing her breasts of bread.

real gods had knives--in their mean tongues,
in the cut precision
of the fat on their diamonds.

they slashed without law,
gutting the quests of the young,
swilling the scarlet of war.

the coinage and smear
of beauty and city spoke to the truth:
violence was the real Jesus.