

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.