

Review of *Crazy Jane, Poems* by Pat Falk

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Pat Falk's poems implicitly ask, how does one find center, stability, sanity and love? The urgency behind the processing of one's personal autonomy ironically means addressing the "Crazy Janes" within, the voices one has been conditioned into sensing as one's own, voices of hungers, "twisted instincts," hurts, frustrations, unrealized abilities, and narcissistic voices seeking cameras to assuage the suffering: "am I so much the child/that I believe whatever blazes, dazzles,/is so utterly my own—that I deny my own/perception..?" How does one "admit into...consciousness only what [one] would take with...joy," yet not turn away from the horrific, like that of the Trade Towers terrorism, "the unimagined pain" of war, the student who finds his mother in bed with another man, she asks.

Her answer is, in accessing the words, we are deepened and free: "Those who say/there are no words deny the spirit, taunt the soul./Words live within the flesh--/...Do not bury words like bodies under rubble." Her rhythms and levels of language are rich and varied as they capture subtle moods and voices, the "rhythm of detail,/syncopation in a field report," the street idiom of "Sugar Daddy Blues," the prose rhythms of a journal, staccato rhythms of lives broken apart by war, lyricism of longing, sorrow, hope.

And "flowing/outward from a solid center: self: deeper self: connected," Falk "find[s] comfort" as her empathy stretches "the pronoun *I* to *We*, as she reifies historic and recent "looming violences," as the assaulted comfort women of war, as an

anonymous boy shot dead in the street, and Falk's personal becomes political. "I must love what's mortal,/hold it to my bones then let it go" she writes.

Her consciousness of acceptance, of going with the flow, has been nurtured by nature, by the wild aquatic birds of a nearby river—the swan's persistence in caring for its eggs despite the giant turtle that keeps taking the cygnets down: the swan's "twisted instinct keeps her going/giving, always giving, complicit in a crazy chain of silently accepting/the way things are"; the ducks that "merely float on the current in the night" ;"the river is a fine old teacher, brown god, sightless,/formed by impulse, shifting boundary." Beside its banks where her daughter has grown and is flowing away into her own dream, where Falk is "sometimes lonely, that [she] fears the ache of rupture," she has come to accept the "need to let her go" as she sees the rich beauty and vulnerability in all living things here: "everything/is crystal," and she finds peaceful acquiescence, "everything is still."

Falk's lyricism reaches back to the inherent "Crazy Jane," in the brutalizing force of her mother's frustrated creativity. Like "two canaries, separate/caged on either side" by rigid conventions "neither liked nor understood," Falk write of herself and her mother: "My mother knew my pain/so much her own she pulled me to the floor/and dragged me by my braided hair/to the confines of my room." A primal wellspring of Falk's poetry flows from her mother's sorrows and terrifying violences, and as she lyrically braids her fears and hopes of freedom from this inner oppression, there is a spiritual healing, integrative wholeness, there is music: "it is said that poetry resides/here, its crystals/can be seen reflected/in the sun—it must be so—for no sooner do I drink/than I am filled with

song.” There is solemn oath to her most authentic self: I can be/my mother’s daughter—
I swear/I never will.”

Falk’s is a poetry of seeing, saying, and ultimately of freeing oneself from the debilitating “Crazy Jane[s] within. It is a poetry of a lifelong struggle to heal: “For too long I have carried/you inside me, color and substance/of lead, burden of darkness and dawn,” ...I thrust/my hand into my heart and demand/your blessing.” Her stirring poems move from darkness and cruelty to the light of personal deliverance: “my language is my body I am/very much alive.”