

## Review by Moira Richards, *Poets' Quarterly*, Issue 4 - Winter 2011

I first encountered *Crazy Jane* in Pat Falk's memoir/treatise on poetics, *It Happens As We Speak*, in which she reveals that she shares the middle name, Jane, and a certain amount of history with a young woman who died an horrific and bloody abortion-related death. She writes there too, that

Jane has been the identity I've denied, the spirit buried, the vision and power distrusted.

And later,

As a woman-poet, com-posing, or putting together words, sounds, music, language, perceptions, I need to be able to imagine wholeness, to feel empowered, to live without threat. I need to reclaim my imagination, to find that voice that so clearly and with such authority said...

So, opening *Crazy Jane*, I felt with some anticipation that I might learn to know this elusive, buried, woman a whole lot better. The poems in the collection are grouped into four untitled sections; the first comprises twenty explorations of loss and horror and suffering and opens with a scene of child birth:

she won't stop screaming  
the air she breathes is red  
the air she breathes is  
blue  
- "Lifeline"

It teases at the edges of the tragedy of that other Jane...

a blast, the shattering of lives,  
a shattering distinctly etched  
but only a reminder:  
I never saw the real thing  
but see it now on everything that's real.  
Difficult to focus, to feel.  
To piece metallic shards into a whole.  
To feel beyond a fragmentary fear

"On the Beach"

... and stares down her haunting of the narrator's psyche:

For too long I have carried  
you inside me, color and substance  
of lead, burden of darkness and dawn.

- “Crazy Jane”

The second section’s poetry seems to write a rebellion, a wanting to be free of the sorrows, the baggage of the first:

from bondage into breath—  
I need to learn to love and lose  
the smallest  
grain of sand,  
of marrow, root and bone,  
an opening, a home.

- “Hidden Lake”

And the poems hint at the possibility that the narrator can indeed re-invent herself, begin to imagine her own wholeness:

the warm wind passes through me like  
another language  
stunned I begin the work of life

- “Heat”

But, as in any good novel, things get worse before they get better and the nine-part “Edenic Sequence” is cold, chilling and suggests the narrator might just empower, protect herself, by retreating – and by swapping vulnerability for a ‘feeling-less’ type of strength.

And there is a certain allure to this kind of cold, implacable powerfulness which the poet conveys starkly and seductively:

something harder than cocoon  
has grown around me  
thicker than an egg-shell  
...  
today is a day of ice—brilliant,  
sure and strong  
...  
this could also be a river this  
could also be a heart closed long enough  
to know the beauty of winter  
and stillness and ice

- “Edenic Sequence”

Now the book has become a page-turner! Will crazy Jane become the Ice Queen –

authoritative, free of threat... frozen... no music, no sounds, no imagination? No... the words of the last short section of the book are crafted into poetry of hope, optimism and joy in living:

A searing rod or root keeps re-entering  
my flesh *my language is my body I am*  
*very much alive.*

- "What She Knows"

And, I think, Jane ultimately exorcises her Crazy Jane. Or perhaps the two Janes are reconciled in some way? Perhaps merged into one now-complete, now-harmonious whole?

... I am  
taken to a place  
where walls and time my fear of love  
my fear of you are crushed  
in the tearing wind.

- "Blue Night"