

Our Lady of the Fence Post

J. H. Crone

J. H. Crone's poetry has been previously published in *Southerly*, *Hermes* and *A Sudden Presence: Poetry from the inaugural ACU Literature Prize*. J. H. Crone is currently a post graduate researcher at the University of Sydney where she is studying the poetry of Louise Glück and is a recipient of the John Bell Prize for Shakespeare Studies. J. H. Crone came to poetry following a successful career making documentaries for Australian and British television. Her most recent documentary 'Divorce: Aussie Islamic Way' was nominated for a Walkely Award. J. H. Crone was also a Commissioning Editor at SBS Television.

Praise for J. H. Crone

'In a poignant, generous, ethically subtle and sometime humorous verse narrative ranging across a series of carefully conjured personalities and scenes, Crone allegorically renders the Australian social imaginary and its sometimes gravely consequential histories and conundrums. This is the work of a talented, perceptive and spirited author.'

PETER MINTER

J H Crone
Our Lady of
the Fence Post



First published in 2016 by
UWA Publishing
Crawley, Western Australia 6009
www.uwap.uwa.edu.au

UWAP is an imprint of UWA Publishing
a division of The University of Western Australia



'Elegy to Giants' was first published in *Southerly* Vol. 74, No. 2 *Australian Dreams 1*, 2014. The translation from Canto 20 of Dante's *Paradiso* is copyright Robin Kirkpatrick, used by permission. The quotations from H.D. (Hilda Doolittle) are from 'Tribute to the Angels' from *TRILOGY*, copyright ©1944 by Oxford University Press, renewed 1973 by Norman Holmes Pearson. Reprinted by permission of New Directions Publishing Corp and Carcanet Press.

This book is copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study, research, criticism or review, as permitted under the *Copyright Act 1968*, no part may be reproduced by any process without written permission.
Enquiries should be made to the publisher.

Copyright © J H Crone 2016
The moral right of the author has been asserted.

National Library of Australia
Cataloguing-in-Publication entry:
Crone, J. H., author.
Our Lady of the fence post / Jennifer Crone.
ISBN: 9781742589121 (paperback)
Australian poetry.
A821.4

Designed by Becky Chilcott, Chil3
Typeset in Lyon Text by Lasertype
Printed by Lightning Source

To my mother and father

Introduction

Our Lady of the Fence Post is an imaginative response to news reports of the appearance of a Marian apparition at Coogee, Sydney, in January 2003, on the construction site for a memorial for victims of the Bali bombing. A year after the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre and Pentagon on 9/11 2001 had triggered the current crisis of religious fundamentalism and the ‘War on Terror’, terrorists bombed Paddy’s Irish Pub and the Sari Club in Kuta, Bali, killing 202 people. Many of the 88 Australians who died were football players and their families celebrating the end of the football season. Within days of the news report of the apparition huge crowds started visiting the site.

Contents

Introduction 7	Elegy to Giants 32
Prelude 12	Chaos 36
Dough 14	Meat Pies and Mary Photos 38
An Odd Looking Sight 15	Joe Races the Sunrise 39
Expect More to Distress You 16	Private Party at the Pleasure Palace 42
Mari's Memento 17	The Universal Bum Puppet Show 44
The Silly Season Story 18	Something Is Lost 46
Mae's Report 22	Joe's Thought Bubble 47
Heaven Is Like Yeast 23	Mae's Fall 48
A Mystery 25	The Mary Medal 50
Graffiti Triptych 26	Mae Interviews a Jesuit 53
How to Make the Terrorists Pay 28	

Mae's Crucifixion	58	Resurrection	81
The Sea Is Boiling With Fish	59	Hate Poem	84
Ironman	60	Jacob's Ladder	92
Fear of Knowledge	61	Bishop Jozo	94
Mari's Song	63	Resurrection	95
Joe's Heart	64	Ballad of Anzac Day	96
Fairy Tale	65	Mae's Blossoming	99
Mari's Cosmology	70	Mari's Riches	102
The Inquisition	72	Postscript	104
Prayer	78		
Seeds	80		

Our Lady of the Fence Post

a word most bitter, *marah*,
a word bitterer still, *mar*

sea, brine, breaker, seducer,
giver of life, giver of tears ...

mer, mere, mère, mater, Maia, Mary

H.D.

Io venni in luogo d'ogni luce muto
(I came to a place where light is mute)

Dante

Prelude

On the cliff edge above the ocean baths,
Joe squints in the midday sun. He slaps
white gloss on the ironbark fence—and the job's done.

Mourners will stare beyond the fence to the blue
expanse of Sunshine Bay, where endless surf
tosses foam on Milkshake Rock, so bright

the eyes hurt. The headland shows signs
of their shock: a grainy sore gouged in the turf
marks where they will memorialize

the terrorist bomb that shattered paradise. Joe drank
with the Sunshine Bay footballers who died
on their end-of-season break, six of twenty

blithe local revellers lost to kin among
the Aussie tens, four months ago in Bali's raging hellfire.
Blasting the tourist scene and smiley Hindu ease

Islamists re-crafted fear. Even here
Joe feels vulnerable to their hard-to-fathom evil.
When at intervals passenger jets scream

overhead on descent to Sydney airport,
he senses peril from faceless beasts and wants
to flatten against the white post fence.

With the rest of the nation, he's haunted by images
of rescuers daunted by flare-ups in the twisted debris,
the hysterical wounded, the disjointed dead.

Buzzing through his mind, menace is like a blowfly
in the house. As a way of letting it out at last,
he steals the paint. Dread zips into the haze.

Dough

Mari steps out of the headland's glare into
her bakery, where the mixing blades eddy
dough. It's cool and dark, as if she's sunk through
the surf in a submarine. The engines die.

She stretches some paste into a porthole
between her fingers. Blank as her mind, it shows
that the flour is well-mixed, but not how
to quell her rancour, which might spoil the dough.

Moist air dampens her face with a gush
from the box where the loaves have their final prove.
The risen dough springs back from her finger-push.
Mari wishes she could as easily forgive.

Her evening was a bit of a damp squib.
Joe gave her the briny taste of a fat lip.

An Odd Looking Sight

Jesus (short for Maria de Jesus) bursts
into the bakery. She's too full of grief to notice the tawdry,
mauve-rose bruise on Mari's lip.

'The Virgin's on the cliff top?' Jesus is Portuguese,
a strong Catholic. Her son died in the Bali bombing. Mari guesses
her friend craves a miracle. Out on the pavement,

Mari squints towards the newly-painted post, where Jesus has spotted
Mary's apparition. Mari's not religious, but she concedes
you can't mistake it. In front of the indigo sea,

the post looks like a sunlit veil hiding a face. Below the neck,
instead of wood, there seems to be the folds
of a white dress. Mari broods, 'It's an illusion!' To prove it,

she marches over. Before Joe got on the booze
he was as stolid and sinewy as this bright, rough-hewn
ironbark post. Her eyes swill with blinding light.

She blinks at the horizon, sees it is dissected by the mast
of a yacht, anchored, with its sails furled. She's on the brink.
'Nothin' here,' she calls, touching the post.

'You're standing in it!' Jesus shouts, all hectic.
Once again at Jesus's side, Mari ogles—Say a prayer!
Whatever it is, it is still there.

Expect More to Distress You

‘You will be killed just as you kill,’
Joe is warned by the bar’s bright tv.
‘You ignored this and your blood was spilled:
You will be killed just as you kill.’
In a voice message to all US allies
from the chief terrorist, purportedly,
‘You will be killed just as you kill,’
Joe is warned by the bar’s bright tv.

Mari's Memento

All I did was wonder if you could capture the apparition
in a photo. My mate, a wedding photographer, took a snap: Mary
was in the picture. That was a bit scary—

it was more than a flare of light! I showed it to editor of the local rag.
She showed the picture round the newsroom, then
called me: 'Who put that statue of Mary

on the cliff as a joke?' I told her, 'Come this afternoon, something'll
be there.' At two o'clock, the Editor was staring at the post.
All the hairs on her arms were standing up.

On Wednesday it came out in
the *Courier*, Friday it hit *The Herald*.
At the bakery, people who had lost loved ones

in the Bali bombing were lining up:
'Oh shit! What've I done? They want something—
but I've got nothin' to give.'

I called my shooter mate: 'I want copies of that photo.'
'How many?' 'I don't know, just keep printing 'em. I'll tell you when to
stop.'
We probably handed out a thousand

or two, and all we did was charge
three bucks to cover the costs of printing
the bloody things. Had I done it

for the money, I would've had
coffee mugs and Christ knows what all ready to go,
but it isn't about money.

The Silly Season Story

Mae's television smile belies
the rage racketing around her mind
like a rubber ball in a squash court.
Though she's the senior reporter,

Mae's been sent to Sunshine Bay
chasing a silly season story,
to lighten up the War on Terror
for jumpy summer holidaymakers,

while the troops departing for war
against the rogue Saddam Hussein
farewelling the Prime Minister
were assigned to the graduate dick.

She knows its because she's a chick.
Scattering shrieking Indian mynas
Mae reaches the fence, and hears 'Ahhs'
rising from the religious freaks

on the sand—types she normally
sees only in the city's
inland furnace, on sticky bitumen
streets, when reporting arson,

drug busts, murders, shoot and runs:
matrons in shoes and Sunday black,
toughie boys draped in fat gold chains,
heads shaved, baseball caps on backwards.

* * *

Youssef's Mum brung him with his sistas
to learn the Virgin's holy message.
He prays she don't click the fuzz is
laughin'-coz they know who he is.

His Torana twin-turbo V8
is sick on the curves of Bay Parade,
drag racing with the guys on Fridays.
Then—flashing lights on his dyno.

The fuzz book 'em—'Yah defected.
Yah modified intake is suspect'.
Even—'No fluid in washer bottle'.
Youssef just wants to park, no hassle.

Girlfriends make it a nice atmosphere
sharing a picnic on folding chairs.
The fish and chip shop is off-limits:
a white chick in there once hissed—'rapist'.

* * *

Seeing double—having downed so
many schooners—deepens Joe's
fuddle. Squinters, towel-heads, even,
crawling over Sunshine's clean sand,

looking to a post to save us.
He's not racist, but who can say
they're not terrorists? Wogs should have
never been let in this country.

* * *

The man's stare makes Maryam feel naked
inside her hijab.
Australians don't know Muslims, too, are
people of the Book. Isa,
Jesus, is *al-Masih*, the Messiah,
born under a date palm.
In the *Sura* called *Maryam*,
peace be upon her, Mary is the only woman
in the Koran with a name—
'May she stop the Americans
from invading
my country, killing my Auntie,
Insha'Allah.'

* * *

Men's beards crinkle like seaweed.
Nuns catch veils flapping with seabirds.
Jozo, a dirt-encrusted
man in an ancient brown worsted

suit, slowly rolls his shopping trolley
down the boat ramp. The sea ruffles
at his feet like a cool silk dress.
He stares at the cliff with longing.

Zooming to the end of his lens,
the cameraman crushes
fence shadows into Mary's likeness.
It's time. Mae steps into the hush.

(A fairy wren trills
on the fence post. As it hops along
the fairy wren trills.
Too quick for the eye to follow only
its perse tail notates its song. Mae's
thoughts grow fearless, as long
as the fairy wren trills.)