

CAIN

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ALSO BY LUKE KENNARD

POETRY

The Solex Brothers (Stride, 2005)

The Harbour Beyond the Movie (Salt Publishing, 2007)

The Migraine Hotel (Salt Publishing, 2009)

Planet-Shaped Horse (Nine Arches Press, 2011)

The Necropolis Boat (Holdfire, 2011)

A Lost Expression (Salt Publishing, 2012)

FICTION

Holophin (Penned in the Margins, 2012)

Cain

Luke Kennard

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I.M. John Cashin

Cain

Like Cain, we are condemned, o wretched soul, for we have
offered to the Creator of all only our defiled actions, a polluted
sacrifice and a useless life.

THE CANON OF ST ANDREW OF CRETE

LUCIFER: Poor clay! / And thou pretendest to be wretched!
Thou!

BYRON, *CAIN*

Try persuading the world not to cut its own throat for half a
decade or more, like me, under one name or another, and it'll
begin to dawn on you that even *your* behaviour's part of its
plan.

MALCOLM LOWRY, *UNDER THE VOLCANO*

BOOK I

GRAVEL PIT

Cain's Prologue

That you were *marked* all scholars can agree
but where, how, why and if it worked presents
the reader some perplexity. A mark
for humiliation or protection?
For you or others? Their first untouchable.
So Philo has as *immortality*
what others thought a tremor or a shake.
St Ambrose has death postponed in mercy
to fashion you infinite time to repent;
St Jerome as punishment to have you
witness generations of hardship.
Artists gave you the curse of beardlessness,
c.f. Judas Iscariot, the smooth,
the bare-faced liar, the androgynous
enchanter. But artists also gave you hair
beyond hair, a hirsute, shaggy brute such that
Lamech, the short-sighted hunter, might
have taken you for a beast:
*I have slain a man to my wounding and
a young man to my hurt* — he won't say who.
For others you are still around today,
eternal wanderer somewhere in Tennessee,
a vampire so bored he seeks death.
Tutelary spirit of the fugitive and
heavenly advocate for fan fiction:
Targum, Pseudo-Jonathan, Midrashim.

I prefer your stammer, your constant nod
many mistake for compliance
(an embarrassingly literal scholar's
interpretation of The Land of Nod).
A dowsing-rod shake to your arms
or a single horn, or horn-like lump.
In an uncanonical Armenian Adambook
the horn can speak. A single horn
screaming: *Here comes Cain, the murderer!*
(How a horn speaks I don't know —
maybe like a beak?) Tent-dwelling pastoralist
or the city-builder whose every house
collapses on his head. Lyre and pipe-player,
patron saint of oases and mirages,
eponymous ancestor of the Kenites,
a nomadic tribe of smiths who marked
themselves with their own tools:
the first tattoo. Our Lady of Hidden Agendas,
Oh Father of Human Resources,
Tertullian has you as another fallen angel,
but give us the comfort of intentional distortions,
doulos, slave, unintended consequences,
the first godfather, the first dogwalker,
the first cussed, first touched,
the successful, happy killer God does not punish;
gun runner, human trafficker, the sun
shines upon you, the sun shines upon you,
may the sun shine upon you.

A Stranger's Disaster

When I lost my faith and my marriage in the same week my friends said: that's ok, we never believed in the construct of romantic love, the redundant institution of marriage and the state-sponsored mental self-abuse of religion anyway. Welcome to the 21st century, asshole.

So I sought comfort in wine-strength wheat beers which tasted of childhood medicine. I bought an Amiga 600 on eBay and player-managed Luton Town to the top of the Premiership in Sensible World of Soccer, the grunt and whirl of the 3.5" save-disk, the matte of its torn fuzzy label sticker on my fingertips, the smell of dust cooked on the hot beige plastic transformer.

I Tweeted things like: 'Kids, you think TV is pretty great, but let me tell you about TV and alcohol! You got so much to look forward to!'

I grew an unconvincing beard.

I took two weeks' compassionate leave then switched to Laphroaig in my coffee and gave lectures about Imagism and the Beats where my voice was like a distant siren rushing to a stranger's disaster; I sympathised with Extenuating Circumstances and between seminars I cried in a small disused classroom on the 5th floor because I missed my children.

Someone had started making these humiliating video collages of me which bothered me more than it ought to have done in the circumstances.

At night I imagined I was a drone pilot flying over his own shack,
a finger hovering above the A button. Under my direction
Luton Town won the European Championship.
I became something not-human. A bad headache or some ideology.
None of this means anything. Let's do all we can to prolong
it. Some municipal flotsam persisting in the villages.

No Wait Come Back I Want to Tell You About

this DDoS attack on my heart
this giant gravel bag
this constant, gentle renunciation of love
this rain on the cliff face
this roll of the eyes
this instant decaf
this dead pigeon

This DDoS Attack on My Heart

one common method of attack involves saturating the target mechanism with external communications requests so much so that it cannot respond to legitimate traffic or responds so slowly as to be rendered essentially unavailable.

Enter Cain

Doorbell sounds its overeager quiz.
An actual size, inflatable Frankenstein's monster
is propped on my doorstep.
I have a pin in my hand. I stick it in.
Blam. Behind it stands Cain,
his beard blocking out the sun.
'How did you know I'd have a pin?'
'I thought you'd either be hovering
over a world map or taking up the hem
of your trousers,' says Cain. 'Which?'
'I was removing a photo of my ex-wife
from the kitchen noticeboard.'
'Ah,' says Cain. 'The trouble is you
have to live with every decision you make.'
He presents his papers. *This is Cain.*
Everyone is very concerned about you.
We have sent him to make sure you don't do
anything stupud. 'Stupud?' 'Probably a typo,'
Cain says. 'It's probably meant to say stupid.'