

10 Questions for Roger Craik

Roger Craik was born in Leicester and has worked in universities in Turkey, Romania, Bulgaria and America. He has written four full-length books of poetry, of which the latest is *Down Stranger Roads* (BlazeVOX, 2014). He lives in Ashtabula, Ohio.

Geoffrey Gatz: Tell me about your recent poetry projects. Do you have a new manuscript in the works?

Roger Craik: I'm writing all the time, with varying degrees of "progress," and sending out efforts to journals and competitions, but yes, there is a manuscript that's ready. It's called "In Other Days," (which is from Walter de la Mare), and is to an extent autobiographical.

GG: What influenced this book? And how does the current pandemic inform your editing process?

RC: Always hard to say what influences one's writing, don't you think? I mean, all that one's read, or heard, or even sensed, comes into it at some level or another. Or half-heard or misheard, even. I suppose that the pandemic gives me more time to edit, but then again, one can over-edit. A rock journalist called David Hepworth says "the first thought is usually the best thought," and I think there's a good deal to that.

GG: Have you attended any Zoom literary readings or online events?



RC: Hell no. Have you? I'm scared stupid, or stupider, of Zoom because it might louse up my computer. I heard that some Ph.D. candidate was carrying out his dissertation defense, and there appeared on everyone's screen what Philip Larkin memorably calls "a tuberous cock and balls." Can't have that.

GG: When did you realize you were a poet?

RC: I never think of myself as "a poet" because that sounds very pretentious, don't you think? When Philip Larkin was asked his occupation, he replied "Librarian." But I do think of myself as someone who tries to write poetry, and enjoys the trying. When I was living in New Haven, immediately after leaving Turkey (where I worked for four and a half often perplexing years), I found myself writing some sub-Eliot stuff, and from then on, and gradually, I realized that I preferred writing my own things rather than writing about others' things, which was what was required to attain academic tenure. Not sure what the university thought of that.

GG: Tell us about your process: Pen and Paper, computer, notebooks ... how do you write?

RC: Of course. Blue paper, plain. Soft graphite lead, broadwise, to take off the glare, and then carving away with coloured crayons, fat triangular ones called Koh-I-Noor. (I've got them right here, in a mug.) Always using the left hand (I am right-handed) in order to limber up, in an almost childlike manner: otherwise one is drawing, and the brain is involved. Then fountain pen, Lamy Safari, which is cheap and good, and has some style and a lot of funkiness and swagger to it. Yes, notebooks while travelling. And of course things have to be typed up. I confess that the typing up can be helpful in terms of line breaks and experimentation. I say "confess" because I am reluctant to admit that computers are helpful in writing, or helpful at all, come to that. I'm English, or was, once. As schoolboys, we wrote Latin exams in fountain pen.

GG: Which writer would you most like to have a drink with, and why?

RC: I can't think of any one writer. May I say that I'd like a beer with Sly Stone (I so enjoy the fearlessness of his music), or the British painter Frank Auerbach, whose art and whose writings on art I find inspired? And David Knopfler, formerly of Dire Straits. He sounds like a very pleasant and interesting man. And I mean David, not Mark. He left the band when they were just getting famous, and went his own, and best, way. I think that's great. And, now I think of it, Peter Green, the founder of Fleetwood Mac. I did meet him, if you could call it meeting, when I was a schoolboy, and he was working in a cemetery a stone's throw from my grandparents' house in Kingston-Upon-Thames, in south west London. He died this year, and it's a great sadness, a tremendous loss, that he did. I think (this answer's getting too long) that the song "Man of the

World” is the best song I’ve ever heard. I heard it when I was thirteen, on someone’s transistor radio, in a bus shelter in Aberdeen, in Scotland, and thought that it spoke to all my life before I had lived any of it. But this doesn’t really answer your question, Geoffrey.

GG: What's the biggest mistake you've made as a writer?

RC: Listening to too many other people is one. I think another is to hurry with things rather than allowing them to take their own time. It’s not a race.

GG: What's the worst advice you hear authors give writers?

RC: I don’t know, because I don’t read or hear much along those lines. But I think one bad piece of advice, if it is indeed given, is to share one’s work with lots of others, and then be thrown into indecision, and present one person’s view to another person — and oneself become lost in the process, if you see what I mean.

GG: Who are you reading now?

RC: Geoffrey Gatza’s questions in this interview! That apart, David Hepworth’s “Never a Dull Moment: 1971, The Year that Rock Exploded.” He’s a superb writer, full of intelligence, and very funny without showing off. Also Kenneth Clark’s “Animals and Men in Art.” Van Gogh’s letters to his brother Theo.

GG: What is your favorite TV show at the moment?

RC: I’m not a TV watcher. Just “The Situation Room” on CNN with Wolf Blitzer.