The Possibility of Grace

*Cracked Skull Cinema*, David Briggs (62pp, £9.99, Salt)

Briggs’ epigraph for this book is a quote from the singer-songwriter Leonard Cohen:

 There is a crack in everything;
 That’s how the light gets in

which nicely summarizes and flags up the over-riding themes here: a sense of brokenness but also of some sort of redemption, be that illumination or something more spiritual, and how damage and the possibility of grace are held in balance.

So this is a collection full of ‘[s]treets claggy with mud and wet leafmeal’, where ‘the rains came hard as heart attacks’, ‘a world perfectly calibrated for efficient production / of nothing but dyspeptic white men’. But it is also where

 We’re standing in a moment
 That’s going to unfurl
 In a great fathomless skein through our lives.

These moments are the result of Briggs paying attention to where he is, what he’s doing and what’s happening around him. There are few ‘big’ themes here, mostly considerations of the mundane, and a search for detail and possibility. Be it drinking a poor airline wine, walking to the cornershop, or simply closing his eyes, Briggs can ‘[i]magine the clarity / of minds’, bringing a focus and clarity to the everyday.

Being focussed and aware is not without pain, suffering and sacrifice for the narrator of these poems. The final poem ‘Lullaby’ concludes ‘we understood the cost of what eluded us.’ These poems are full of careful, taut observations and considerations, all within ‘the eager crosshairs of truth’s opportune rifle.’ If at times I longed for some linguistic carnage to shake things up, this is nonetheless a sure-footed, agile and wise group of poems.

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