

- 5 Virkkunen M, Rawlings R, Tokola R, Poland RE, Guidotti A, Nemeroff C, et al. CSF biochemistries, glucose metabolism, and diurnal activity rhythms in alcoholic, violent offenders, fire setters, and healthy volunteers. *Arch Gen Psychiatry* 1994; **51**: 20–7.
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Poems  
by  
doctors

## The Last Vision of Angus McKay

Tom Pow

Angus McKay, Queen Victoria's piper, went insane 'over study of music'. He was admitted to the Crichton Royal from Bedlam in 1856 when he was 43 years old. 'His most prominent delusion is that Her Majesty is his wife and that Prince Albert has defrauded him of his rights.' (Crichton case notes)

Let it be noted (in copperplate), Angus McKay  
is a gentleman to watch. The stoutest furniture  
is firewood to him; a mattress, within a day,  
he'll disembowel. He has been known  
to drink his own urine; to spit, shriek, howl  
and hoot like an owl:

though this last  
does not appear  
in his case notes from Bedlam –  
"hooting and howling" in southern parts  
being thought not  
abnormal for a Scot.

Nevertheless, there is enough on his native ground  
to amaze and perplex his keepers.

Fuck it! Angus McKay has done with them all.

He eases himself into the rivercold waters of the Nith  
across which lies Kirkconnell Wood  
and his freedom. At that moment

(to which the record is blind,  
no body being found, never mind  
testament forthcoming)

something catches his eye – a sudden flurry and a bird  
with two necks intertwined; one black, the other –  
bodiless – a shimmering Islay malt brown.

Angus McKay watches, mesmerised

as the cormorant lifts its white-cheeked head  
till its brassy twin – the eel – lifting with it,  
unwinds like a flailing clef and falls, bit by bit,  
into perfect darkness.

This, thinks Angus McKay, is how  
the bagpipe has devoured my life.

He lies on his back, drifting downstream,  
shadowing the black bag of a bird through flanges of light,  
past two gracefully disinterested swans. The eel rages still –

the cormorant's neck rising and falling  
in a helpless hiccup. Up ahead, the bird will calm,  
its neck settle again on its shoulders –

but there, the quicksand waits to welcome Angus McKay,  
sipping him, limb by limb, into its dark and clammy hold.

That evening, owls will keen – in Gaelic –  
from Kirkconnell Wood, where Angus McKay  
perches, pale and dripping.

Will a soul never find peace? he asks.  
Oh, where has my plump little lover gone –  
and what's become of that shit, Prince Albert?

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Chosen by Femi Oyeode.