

Paul O'Prey

THE GRIEVING SAINT

This was deep harbour once,
before it silted up
and the Old Man took to drink.

Twice a week small ships
nosed their way between the rocks,
into the tiny dock.

He, the pilot, and the skipper,
were always first ashore,
first to the Anchor Bar.

They said you couldn't move on the quay
that night the lifeboat came back
with a dead Polish sailor.

The coxswain searched his pockets
and brandished a bent tin saint,
the carried child rubbed away to nothing –

Christopher's trust, lost to lonely watches
on a thrashing sea, the Atlantic night,
each dark wave an opening grave.

The priest knelt down and pressed
the grieving saint into the dead man's hand,
and sent them both on their way.

Paul O'Prey

THE NIGHT-COCKLERS

My father, his father, and the Old Man himself
– it took all three to shunt their yawl to this low ridge
and run her down the bank of plank and shingle.

Dead of night, bitter cold and always wind enough
to take them up beyond the Water Rocks,
lost to any call or help.

The kid was prone to sleep,
for which a faceful of Irish Sea
was the Old Man's cure.

They spilled their lines and waited
for the tug of cod, ling, bass, sole.
Mackerel they gave away, or bartered for a pint of mild.

In another century, I wander up the strand at night
to watch the village men go cockling,
far out on the low-tide mud.

Bowed, silent, hardly moving, moonlight on their backs
and the sea-line breaking white behind,
they could be bards or druids, pleading with the tide.

On the shore-road the gang-master looks me up and down,
slams the van door shut, and tells me to fuck-off.
Scared I'm from the social.

And it's easy to leave. A hired car, a smart hotel
up on the lough, the promise of good whiskey.
Enough of ghosts, and staring at vast waters.

Linda Morales Caballero

PAS DE DEUX

I cannot get over the image of your body
naked, sturdy, milk-coloured,
your hand reaching out to me from the frontier of the other
stretcher...

A glimpse of your solid forms in chiaroscuro,
the taste of your hand blindly crossing the stage...
are still a recollection, quiet, vivid,
of an improvised "pas de deux".

Those ghostly shadows that worked
a new, painful memory into my body
have not effaced the beauty of the moment,
the shared tenderness,
your portrayal, so lovingly recognized and desired.

Linda Morales Caballero

SO MUCH

We left our skin
in the whirlwind of each encounter,
in the perforated pores
of our bodies, at the very touch
of our wounding desires.
To risk our necks under these circumstances
calls for study
guilt and scruples,
moans scrutinized under a magnifying glass.

Your mouth fills with your blood
when you moonset in me,
and nothing again will ever be possible
now that you are a puddle of what you were,
the one drowned by your own acts.

I will no longer pull you out from the narrow creases
of spiderwebs, or from rivers or skyscrapers.
I will not, even, keep kicking you along the cliff edge!
How lonely we have become
from so much staring at each other!

Linda Morales Caballero

VISIT

To look at you today has been
like seeing you and seeing me
in a mirror.
Your ironed out forehead
of a modern Martian
has left me with serious doubts
about reality.
To receive your kiss on my hand
to kiss you back on the cheek
seemed anthropological rituals
of a species long extinct.
You swapped your landscape
for mine;
you offered me, in your intoxicating coffee,
the arrogant bacteria
of your laughter.
Everything by your side is magical,
unreal, playful,
even I, submerged in my black dress,
feel adhered
to your tongue
like a stamp.

– *Poems by Linda Morales Caballero translated from the Spanish
by the author and Lucia Graves.*

Sean O'Brien

FLYING THE FLAG

The pollarded Bramley appears
in a flourish of frost and fog
that will survive the morning
as the moon retires slowly, going,
gone in the blue of beyond,
and low-voiced old couples, out for the sun
with the grandbairns, in secret, stop
by the railings once more to consider
our half-filled bath, the cabbage-stumps
and desiccated artichokes, the kale-bed
cleared for planting. Should summer
come at last, there'll be enough to share.
Till then, the evermoreish smell
of someone's bonfire in a dustbin,
mitigated with a cowl, against the law
the gardeners wink at. Let it burn.
Let the allotment manifest
a green benevolent untidiness
where time runs quietly away.

When the Union Jack was run up
under cover of darkness
on New Year's Day, it seemed
a secret triumph had occurred,
and with it came the right to claim
this tiny pastoral republic
for a colony, because why not.
The patriot's a neighbour

I've been glad to share a pint with
on and off for thirty years.
He has his reasons, he declares,
yet cannot name them.

Raspberry canes, and the lines of rigging
runner beans will climb into the sun,
courgettes and spuds and pomodoro,
sweet peas in due season, green apples
to reclaim the butchered tree: all these
survive the poison, but the knowing
has no cure. And I am sick and tired now
of loud and sentimental people
who never know quite what to put,
who cannot tell *A* from a bull's left foot
but will put something anyway, any old how,
then afterwards can't understand
what all the fuss has been about, and think
it must be personal. It is.

Sean O'Brien

STAR OF BETHLEHEM

Your pilgrimage is halted here
beside the path, beneath the storm
that would uproot you:

far too few, and none to spare,
but times are evil: now the tiny
candour of your stars must be enough.

POETS IN THIS ISSUE:

Linda Morales Caballero's most recent books include *Simmering Karma / Karma a fuego lento* (DarkLight Poetry, 2021) and *El rumor de las cosas* (Nueva York Poetry Press, 2020). She is also a short story writer.

Ruth Fainlight's most recent collection *Somewhere Else Entirely* (2018) was published by Bloodaxe Books. *Alan Sillitoe: Selected Poems Chosen by Ruth Fainlight* (2020) was published by Dare-Gale Press.

Grevel Lindop's books include *Luna Park* (2015) and *Playing with Fire* (2006). He is also a critic, travel writer, biographer, and the author of *Charles Williams: The Third Inkling* (2015).

Michael Longley, CBE, is a former Ireland Professor of Poetry. Recent additions to his extensive bibliography include *Homer's Octopus* (2020) and *The Candle Light Master* (2020). In 2013, he compiled *Robert Graves: Selected Poems*.

Sean O'Brien's most recent book of poetry, *It Says Here*, was published by Picador in 2020. He is also a critic, playwright, novelist, and Fellow of the UK's Royal Society of Literature.

Paul O'Prey's most recent book of poems *Fleet* (Melos Press, 2021) traces the course of London's buried river. He is also an anthologist, translator and scholar. Other works include two anthologies of war poetry, two volumes of Robert Graves's *Selected Letters* (Hutchinson), his *Selected Poems* (Penguin), and his *Collected Writings on Poetry* (Carcenet).

Submissions:

The editors of *The Robert Graves Review* will consider scholarly articles on all aspects of the work and life of Robert Graves, as well as original poetry, and book reviews. Article lengths vary and should be appropriate to the topic. *The Review* will also publish short notes highlighting some area of interest at the sole discretion of the editor and are not peer reviewed. We will not consider work that is under submission elsewhere or that has been published previously. *The Robert Graves Review* uses a double-anonymous evaluation system: we will not share the identity of the author with the readers, nor the readers' identities with the author. The journal charges no fees for the authors. Please send completed essays by e-mail attachment in Microsoft Word or Rich Text Format to: Michael Joseph at mjoseph@rutgers.edu.

Requirements:

Articles submitted for publication should be a reasonable length. Articles and book reviews should conform to the Modern Humanities Research Association's *Style Guide: A Handbook for Authors and Editors*, available at <http://www.mhra.org.uk/style/>. Please consult current and past issues for guidance.

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