

*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.

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### 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.