

CHRISTMAS SUPPLEMENT

Poems and paintings from England, Ireland, America, India, Bangladesh



Francois Gavassi: Winter Landscape

Greenlane Gallery, Holy Ground, Dingle, Kerry, Ireland

www.greenlanegallery.com

Greg Delanty

Xmas in America

*'A voice was heard in Ramah,
Wailing and loud lamentation'*
Matthew 2:18

We sit under the conspiratorial winking lights of the tree;
the gifts strewn open, chosen toys already
abandoned by the children running
amid the plenitude, the computer games, transformers,
super heros save the world, the knights
wield their swords, the jigsaw
of a fire brigade rush to an explosion.
The grown-ups lounge, stuffed as the basted bird,
bushed from so much bounty and the kids' questions, even
as we know the children light up the house. A regular scene
on this holiday celebrating our childhood's infant god,
the god we sought to emulate, the god we believed in
as our children believe in Santa, while in truth
all we are certain of now
is that, even as we speak, our legions
are off again slaughtering the innocents,
the innocents who were good this year also.
The angels harp on above the snow.

Brendan Kennelly

Gratitude

She's grateful now
and shares her gratitude with trees
glittering after rain.

The real world is waiting.
She's ready to face it
whatever the joy
or the pain.

The trees are grateful too, letting fall
small drops like whispered words of love
on her dark hair
as she prepares

for God alone knows who
and what and how and when and where.

No matter. This gift of gratitude

makes her ready to dare.

Patricia McCarthy

The Terrible Hush

Debussy's voice to Camille, 'l'artiste du silence'.

'Leur pas dans la neige. Une dernière fois. Quelques petites notes désaccordées'
Anne Delbée, *Une Femme*

The terrible hush
of snow falling
is the hush of you gone.

The steps are white
piano notes stuck
in C Major, no sharps
or flats to be worked upon.

The terrible hush
of snow falling
is the hush of my soul

which lost its virginity
in meeting yours
and, without a touch from
our bodies, became whole.

The terrible hush
of snow falling
is the hush of you gone.

White manuscripts
for claw, foot, paw and hoof
bind themselves into annuals
for unsung orisons.

Derek Stanford

On the Eve

That year we'd not procured a tree.
Then, on the eve, through murky melting snow
(just as the local shops were shutting up)
wearing your humorous happy-urchin look –
making light work of those reluctant stairs
ascending to a cool third-storey flat:
that eyrie where we plied the muse's trade –
clad in your poet's coat of Afghan fur,
you entered, radiant, trailing in your wake
a spruce fir sapling somebody'd abandoned.
'Freeman's,' you cried as one who's got the loot
after a paradisaal smash-and-grab
and, fittingly gives thanks to Mercury.

Ah transient, deft, light-fingered days,
gone with those Christmas snows, those Christmas roses;
and yet, as in a precious guarded icon,
seraphically intact, your image glows.



Keith Richardson: Spray

Greenlane Gallery, Holy Ground, Dingle, Kerry, Ireland

Louis de Paor

Uachtar Ard, Nollaig 2000

Ní cárta poist go baileach
ach teileagram ó mhol thuaidh
na samhlaíochta nár éirigh le Scott
ná le Shackleton a threascairt
is bratach thrídhathach na heolaíochta
a ropadh ina chroí ceansa sneachtaí.

Tá na laethanta a d'imigh
tar éis filleadh arís
i gcomhair na Nollag;
leanaimid rian a mbróg
ó dhoras go doras
i gcomharsanacht an tsíscéil.

Chualathas carúil á gcanadh
i bhfothrach na seaneaglaise
is dlúmh deataigh aníos
as sinné nach ann
os cionn na tine a chuaigh as
i gcliabh an tsagairt pharóiste fadó.

Is an leanbh a fuair bás de neamhaird
i gcroí gach duine in Éirinn,
saolaíodh arís inár measc
le frasa sneachta a thit
gan choinne in Uachtar Ard aréir.

Mairfidh sé agus sí
agus sibh agus sinn
go brách na breithe
is go deo na ndeor,
nó go mbrisfidh a racht
uaignis ar aingil Neimhe
is go dtitfidh ina bháisteach nimhe
an t-uisce goirt a thabharfaidh ár mbás.

Uachtar Ard, Nollaig 2000

Not exactly a postcard,
more a telegram from the North Pole
of the imagination that Scott
or Shackleton never mastered,
plunging the tricolour of knowledge
into its gently snowy heart.

The days that went away
have come home again
for Christmas;
we follow their footprints
from door to door
in the suburbs of storytime.

Christmas carols have been heard
in the ruins of the old church
where smoke rises
from a chimney that isn't there
above the fire that went out
a long time ago
in the heart of the parish priest.

And the child that died of neglect
in the heart of every man
and woman in Ireland
was born again and dwelt among us
in drifts of snow that fell unexpectedly
from the heavens in Oughterard today.

He and she and we and they
will live forever and ever
till the angels above
are overcome by loneliness
and their salt tears
rain down on us here
destroying every living thing.

W S Milne

Telegraph Hill

He stopped to breathe in peace:
The Douglas firs dressed in frost,
The fields sleeping under snow,
The sky's blue emptiness.
It was as if
There was a secret flute in those woods
Reducing all to stillness,
Clarity, and peace,
Memories forgotten and destroyed,
The winter sun hurrying to its repose.
All was tenderness, silence, release.

SUDEEP SEN

WINTER

Couched on crimson cushions,
pink bleeds gold

and red spills into one's heart.
Broad leather keeps time,

calibrating different hours
in different zones

unaware of the grammar
that makes sense.

Only random woofs and snores
of two distant dogs

on a very cold night
clears fog that is unresolved.

New plants wait for new heat —
to grow, to mature.

An old cane recliner contains
poetry for peace — woven

text keeping comfort in place.
But it is the impatience of want

that keeps equations unsolved.
Heavy, translucent, vaporous,

split red by mother tongues —
winter's breath is pink.

Martin Jones

Christmas Present

Twelve lords a-leaping
would, I suspect, soon pall,
so, no, I choose them not.

Eight maids a-milking
would, I suspect, pall equally,
so, no, I choose them neither.

A partridge in a pear-tree:
that is my choice for you
in a parcel on Christmas Day.

Maybe we all of us would enjoy
eating roasted partridge
with dumplings and cranberry sauce?

Oh, what does my darling crave
except the ripe pear-fruit,
juice spilling from her lips?

Supposing you give the word,
the tree will grace your garden
blossoming in future years.

Supposing you turn your face,
your suffering need merely last
till next collecting day;

then lay it on the pavement
along with the Christmas trees
both up and down the road.

Patricia McCarthy

A Dacca Christmas

Bangladesh

Morning star, do you mistake this
for Bethlehem because day after day
man, virgin and donkey reveal
the old legend in a different way?

Here each date marks a birthday,
each inn a crib short of room
that nevertheless welcomes a saviour
squeezing from woman back into a womb.

Look at the tiny parcels of dust
stacked in the air by a heathen sun –
to be unwrapped later by rains
and, after a final creed, wise men

opening their arms into trees
of life or of Saint Paul, glittering
with sweat's strange tinsel.
Can the night sky be a leaf turning

into revelation from the Koran –
while Kings, mounted on their feet,
heave some monstrous sin
on carts through the buckling heat,

regal still in rags? Star –
you're too far east. In such scenes
shepherds have no sheep, just bodies
for staffs that crows pick clean.

Under a burquah of despair
they huddle – the single whiteness
in their winter tale on the soles
of feet and palms. Given access

to any one of your five points –
those born on crosses could deliver
themselves anew under organ lofts.
But only the streets have deep litter

through which hosts of bats skitter
with perverted tidings. And wishes
for miracles clog the open sewers
with non-existent loaves and fishes.



Francois Gavassi: Winter Sunset
Greenlane Gallery, Dingle, Ireland