

The Magi, by WB Yeats

Now as at all times I can see in the mind's eye,
In their stiff, painted clothes, the pale unsatisfied ones
Appear and disappear in the blue depth of the sky
With all their ancient faces like rain-beaten stones,
And all their helmets of silver hovering side by side,
And all their eyes still fixed, hoping to find once more,
Being by Calvary's turbulence unsatisfied,
The uncontrollable mystery on the bestial floor.

This December Day

BY BRENDAN KENNELLY

Here in this room, this December day,
Listening to the year die out on the warfields
And in the voices of children
Who laugh in the indecisive light
At the throes that but rehearse their own
I take the mystery of giving in my hands
And pass it on to you,

I give thanks
To the giver of images,
The reticent God who goes about his work
Determined to hold on to nothing.
Embarrassed at the prospect of possession
He distributes leaves to the wind
And lets them pitch and leap like boys capering out of their skin.
Pictures are thrown behind hedges,
Poems skitter backwards over cliffs,
There is a loaf of bread on Derek's threshold
And we will never know who put it there.

For such things
And bearing in mind
The midnight hurt, the shot bride,
The famine in the heart,
The demented soldier, the terrified cities
Rising out of their own rubble,

I give thanks.

I listen to the sound of doors
Opening and closing in the street.
They are like the heartbeats of this creator
Who gives everything away.

I do not understand
Such constant evacuation of the heart,
Such striving toward emptiness,
Thinking, however, of the intrepid skeleton,
There feared definition,
I grasp a little of the giving
And hold it close as my own flesh,

It is this little
That I give to you,
And now I want to walk out and witness
The shadow of some ungraspable sweetness
Passing over the measureless squalor of man
Like a child's hand over my own face
Or the exodus of swallows across the land

And I know it does not matter
That I do not understand.

A Christmas Childhood
Patrick Kavanagh

One side of the potato-pits was white with frost -
How wonderful that was, how wonderful!
And when we put our ears to the paling-post
The music that came out was magical.

The light between the ricks of hay and straw
Was a hole in Heaven's gable. An apple tree
With its December-glinting fruit we saw -
O you, Eve, were the world that tempted me.

To eat the knowledge that grew in clay
And death the germ within it! Now and then
I can remember something of the gay
Garden that was childhood's. Again.

The tracks of cattle to a drinking-place,
A green stone lying sideways in a ditch,
Or any common sight, the transfigured face
Of a beauty that the world did not touch.

My father played the melodion
Outside at our gate;
There were stars in the morning east
And they danced to his music.

Across the wild bogs his melodion called
To Lennons and Callans.
As I pulled on my trousers in a hurry
I knew some strange thing had happened.

Outside in the cow-house my mother
Made the music of milking;
The light of her stable-lamp was a star

And the frost of Bethlehem made it twinkle.

A water-hen screeched in the bog,
Mass-going feet
Crunched the wafer-ice on the pot-holes,
Somebody wistfully twisted the bellows wheel.

My child poet picked out the letters
On the grey stone,
In silver the wonder of a Christmas townland,
The winking glitter of a frosty dawn.

Cassiopeia was over
Cassidy's hanging hill,
I looked and three whin bushes rode across
The horizon — the Three Wise Kings.

And old man passing said:
'Can't he make it talk -
The melodion.' I hid in the doorway
And tightened the belt of my box-pleated coat.

I nicked six nicks on the door-post
With my penknife's big blade -
there was a little one for cutting tobacco.
And I was six Christmases of age.

My father played the melodion,
My mother milked the cows,
And I had a prayer like a white rose pinned
On the Virgin Mary's blouse.

Christmas List for my Newborn Girl
By Jessamine O Connor

CHRISTMAS LIST FOR MY NEWBORN GIRL

Botox
Vajazzles
Spray-tan
Collagen

Foundation
Blusher, Shadow
Liner; Stick-on lashes
Anti-perspirant; Perfume
Body spray, Deodorant; Facelift
Tummy tuck, Magic knickers;
Padded bra, Corset
Silicone implants;
Waxed legs
Shaved armpits
Plucked eyebrows
A Brazilian; Detox, Diet
Diet, Diet; Teeth whitening
Anal bleaching, Liposuction;
Colonic irrigation, Pedicure
Manicure; Laser hair removal;
Cosmetic gynaecology

How long should
We leave it
Before telling her
She mustn't
Be perfect
After all?

Christmas List for my Newborn Girl

Botox
Vajazzles

WINTERING
BY PAUL PERRY

That was my last year in Florida,
illegal and thinking of marriage
as one way to stay. Sleepless nights
of argument and indecision. And

to keep us going I worked a cash job
at an orchid farm. Long hours in
the sun, poor in paradise, the heat
on my back, drilling for a living.

I worked with a Mexican man.
My man Victor, the orchid keeper
called him. Friendly and amused
at the affluent couples who came

to purchase the rich, ornate dreams.
We buried a dead owl together.
I remember that. And my body aching
in the sun. Floating home to argue.

What we were doing I was told
was wintering. Getting ready for
the cold, its indiscretion, its disregard.
Nailing sheets of plastic onto a wooden
frame, hammering, drilling, and sweating

to protect the fragile flowers
and their steel interiors, their
engineered hearts and worth.

That is already a long time ago.
Its contradictions apparent.
Wintering in sunshine. The past
still growing towards the light.

I think of them now as some sort
of emblem of that past, ghostly
orchids shedding their gracious
petals, as we winter here ourselves,

batten down the hatches and wait
for whatever storm is coming, whatever
calamity the cold has to offer us
in the same way the orchids do,

I suppose, waiting through winter
to emerge with budding, fantastical
and colourful insistence to wake and
remind us to be nothing less than amazed.

Blusher, Shadow

Liner, Stick-on lashes

Anti-perspirant, Perfume

Body spray, Deodorant, Facelift

Tummy tuck, Magic knickers;

Padded bra

Winter-petals

BY Eibhlís Carcione

You promised
to bring me to Aghabullogue
although snow was forecast.

It started as we drove east,
winter-petals
fluttering from an open envelope of sky.

We got lost as darkness fell on white,
ripped moonlight
scattering from a page of words.
You had no choice but
to stop and ask for directions
at a rundown-pink house in Macroom,
with a step down to the door,
where a gap-toothed woman in an apron
sheltered from the bitter squalls,

and a man with a frizzy beard
and quartz-cold eyes,
tapped my window with his stick
and called you back.

We continued the elastic-band bends
to the farm, crossing the frozen field
to the outhouse, the wind blowing hard.

I lifted the puppy
from the straw,
tasting its wet blackberry-snout.

We returned the twisty roads
past Céim an Fhia,
the wind howling
and blowing the car
around the valleys,
Snowflakes like changeling-
hands on the windscreen
willing us homeward.

STIRRINGS

BY MÁIRE MALONE

Mid December and the stirrings of excitement
Hang lightly on the air
Trees pirouetting towards a grey-white sky
Strings of multicoloured lights that rainbow streets
Flash spirits back to childhood Christmas Eves
When front room windows shimmered in the faith
Of those who still believed in Santa Claus and God

Mid November, and the pantry groaned
With raisins, sultanas, currants
Our eyes as big as cherries glowed on baking day
Mum fluffed the marge and sugar into quiffs
When she turned to check the recipe
We'd finger scoop the mixture to our mouths
Relishing the rich buttery grit.

Then a spoon of treacle
Coiling down into a thin snake
A lemon rind that sprayed its summer on the air
And almonds slithering out of their skins like fish
Mesmerised we watched the sifting snow
The perfect yolks meandering out of shape
Witches of the caudon we stirred our wishes in

Then Mum would grease and line the base
Sheets of brown paper stood as barricades
Against the threat of too much heat
Placing her offering on the centre oven shelf

She'd bless herself and say
If a cake as rich as that should ever flop
We could never afford to have it replaced.

[Eimear Quinn WINTER SOLSTICE](#)