

## 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](http://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