

Poetry Series

Christopher Lavery

- poems -



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Christopher Lavery()

Christopher Lavery is a contemporary British poet, born 1977 in Cornwall, now living in Bristol. He is known for his classical verse, traditional narrative poems, and Cornish folklore tales.

He writes in a variety of forms such as ballads and sonnets, dealing with a range of themes including life, nature, people, and myths.

His writing falls under the categories of fantasy & speculative fiction, modern rhyming fairy tales, and folk horror poetry.

His poems and tales have been published in a variety of literary magazines:

Reach Poetry Magazine

Runcible Spoon

Scrittura Magazine

The Big Windows Review

The Society of Classical Poets

Lead Kindly Light

Litbreak Magazine

PoemHunter.com

In 2020 his debut volume was published — The Ballad of Lorianna, Ever Brush Away The Sleep, To Winter and Other Poems (Cyberwit.net) .

He has also published a chapbook of fantasy adventure narrative poetry, Three Tales (2023) . Drawing on immersive traditions, it explores themes like changing fortune, ancient curses, and forbidden knowledge.

The Chatelaine Of Castle William

'If a bird builds a nest
To lay its eggs in it
Then, it never flies away again
But stays in it
On the eggs in its nest
Even while strangled.'

- the chatelaine's vow.

The moment that I saw - that sombre day -
those stern, forbidding walls that lay ahead,
those lifeless towers that frowned in skies of grey,
those bare and narrow steps that to it led,
those brooding mountains that around it spread -
a mood of inexpressible gloominess -
a palpable, unsettling sense of dread
seemed to seize me - my every thought depress -
my very being - to its core - possess.

The grim, majestic silence of the castle
hung over darksome woods of pine and oak.
One felt the bygone days of alter, vassal
and valour - which the village streets evoke.
Halting - my horseman - not a word he'd spoke -
had left me near the entrance to its hill.
The featureless facade - where nothing broke
its grave austerity, had made it feel
a thing of fantasy - thing not quite real.

I sojourned then through Europe - in the wake
of revolution lately seen in France,
whose tumult made the ancient order shake
throughout the continent. I took the chance -
while near - to see this relic of romance -
of ages filled with ballads, tales and lore.
Drawn strangely to its bleakness at first glance,
I felt compelled to climb the steps - explore
this vacant pile - to peer beyond the door.

Forcing its blank and sturdy oak, I found
a hall - then inner courtyard. It felt good
to see this tranquil scene that stretched around.
By steep and narrow steps - as best I could -
I trod the winding walkways' creaking wood.
A library with dusty books was crammed;
in eerie stillness suits of armour stood.
The cellars seemed like dungeons of the damned,
another door mysteriously jammed.

Proceeding, labyrinthine passageways
I followed - ducking through doorways as I went.
And while through arrowslits came setting rays,
my curiosity was not content.
Within a chamber - given ornament
by rugs and tapestries - I found a book
that chronicled the castle's turbulent
and frightful history - this tome I took
with candles to the library to look.

It told of bitter, ancient rivalry -
and ghastly acts of vengeance that befell
this troubled house, that plagued its family -
deeds that the keeper of the gates of hell
would loath to look upon. The author well
those stories there relates - of which to hear
he'd sought the castle's chatelaine to tell -
approaching her when death was growing near -
to tell him what she'd seen - which I read here:

'Employed in buildings large and venerable,
a trusted resident - the chatelaine -
attends the kitchen, stable, keep and hall,
and wears her keys around a silver chain.
This household's longest-serving shall remain
unnamed. The feuding family she served -
their savage acts of cruelty - barely sane -
which this her testimony has preserved -
left her profoundly shaken and unnerved.

Within these walls the winds of enmity

would never cease. Two brothers for it fought -
whose sire himself it gained through treachery -
from one whose wife he stole. Wrathful he brought
a curse on his descendants - each who sought
the castle for themselves by evil deeds -
by horrors never known till then - which wrought
their marks upon the stone - which sowed the seeds
for gardens overgrown with snarling weeds.

These brothers - thirsting for each other's blood,
doomed generations since to lustful lives -
their names forever written in the mud -
to murder, incest, lies; to seething hives
of merciless stepmothers, vengeful wives
and jealous husbands - and to plots to win
this stronghold with concealed yet ready knives -
false reconciliations - with any sin
devised as thunder rolled with fearsome din.

One of the brothers took the house by force -
stealing the other's wife - casting him out
in woods to wonder. Pursuing a course
of retribution - caring not to flout
any morality - he set about
to kidnap, kill and cook his children - wait
until he came invited - ease his doubt
if any were - then serve them on a plate,
hiding in food their pieces - which he ate.

The new custodian's oath of duty sworn,
this chatelaine had started here to work.
One day outside, a servant came to warn
her of a door from which all seemed to shirk -
one underground - forgotten in the murk.
Found in a dingy wing, he only knew
that something seemed inside this room to lurk
so disconcerting them - that round it grew
much muttered rumour - not perhaps untrue.

She said: 'Though there was not the faintest trace
of warmth within his few and guarded words -
his stiff and formal air - his rigid face -

he not unfriendly seemed. Suddenly birds
gathered above our heads - and bleating herds
summoned him. Anxious, I was left alone.
At supper, by a fireplace hung with swords,
one evening - I heard a distant moan -
like someone calling in an anguished tone.

Venturing down below to where it came -
or seemed to - coming to a basement room
I'd noticed not before, I heard the same -
a moan which startled me there in the gloom,
moan that could wake the dead within their tomb.
It shook me to the depths - as so appalling
was its sound - then came a tremendous boom -
made by a footstep; noises like fingers scrawling
came next - and haunting cries of children calling.

Disorientated as I fled that scene -
lost in a subterranean dead end,
a single shaft of moonlight I could glean -
and found steps near - which starting to ascend
I saw my way out - and my servant friend.
Then suddenly there came into my mind
that oath - whose sense I did not comprehend
when made. The call of duty I could find
there now - of which it seemed me to remind.

'If a bird builds a nest
To lay its eggs in it
Then, it never flies away again
But stays in it
On the eggs in its nest
Even while strangled.'

Gathering up myself - back then I went,
finding its rusty key. With all my might
the stiff and stubborn handle soon I bent -
and saw there - in the dimness - saw a sight -
a spectral figure that amazed me quite.
Extremely frail he looked - chained on the bed -
hardly more than a skeleton; bone white
his flesh and hair - as if he seldom fed.

I asked him who he was - slowly he said:

'Though for me to speak I've hardly breath -
I'll speak; my name is Skelton, and this place
was mine once. Punishment more harsh than death -
your family's sire that stole it - to disgrace
me all the more - to gloat upon my face -
locked me in here alone. Mine was the curse -
mine the revenge - with which I could debase
his family - to drive to acts perverse -
unnatural - but grudges are as worse.'

I told what happened since their sire had died,
recounting all his children's acts of lust -
which to hear he bowed his head and sighed.
'This much appals me. Yet my chains of rust -
and rage - cause me my pain. To fade to dust
is now my sole escape and wish. To lift -
perhaps - this curse may bring it, and I must -
I made it, only I can heal the rift
and end this torment; so I'll do it swift.'

Since then I'm still the chatelaine of here,
troubled by little but the daily chores,
and things more commonplace that others fear.
Though sometimes I've a presence felt indoors -
sworn something's moved - imagined creaking floors -
my duty calls. The garden, room and lamb -
the dinner and the cellar me implores;
as after all I was - and always am -
the chatelaine of Castle William."

Christopher Lavery

Cloris And The Potion Of Life

I have a tale as strange as fantasy -
of deadly passions and possessive rage,
of gains in knowledge thrown in jeopardy -
set in Messina - in the dawning age
of voyages of bold discovery -
of muskets, cannons, and the printed page -
a small and charming city, yet a place
where wild events imperiled once our race.

Alexis was a keen, inquiring sort,
a bachelor that studied medicine -
and he it was, whom creatures - green and short -
were spying on, in hopes by theft to win
a potion that he worked on, which could thwart -
if drank - disease and death. Full was his bin
with failed, discarded formulas - and pale
his skin, from labours yet of no avail.

Another thing had turned his face this hue -
distracting him, depriving him of rest,
of appetite, of any joy he knew
until that day - that day his interest
was caught by her - by Cloris. Though it true
they'd not exchanged a word - it would arrest
his mind to recollect her - make it fraught
with vain hopes - burden every waking thought.

Burden it was to love with little hope,
to struggle with a passion true and pure -
of such a fierceness he could barely cope.
Seen at a service - modest and demure
in bearing, fair in feature - to elope
with her he'd dreamt of nightly - but a cure
he needed now - as soon his dreams were buried -
upon discovering that she was married.

Damon - distinguished in the cavalry,
was this her husband that he envied much.
At other Masses - since that day - he'd see

them stand together - yet her face was such
you would not think her happy. Carelessly
she seemed to glance at him - which brought a touch
of hope - but snatched soon was its gasping breath,
by tidings of her sudden puzzling death.

Plunged into bitter, inconsolable grief -
he shut himself indoors, and would not eat
nor sleep. Mortality - the callous thief
had torn all joy from him. Almost complete
was his formula now, with his belief -
revitalised - that death he soon could cheat -
death he could cheat. The very thought rekindled
his hope for her - whom nature from him swindled.

Galvanized he toiled all day and night,
unresting in his hurried quest to find
the secret to elixir - said to fight
all pains and maladies of humankind.
Patient those gnomes were watching - out of sight -
their eagerness unshakable and blind.
Finally - nearing midnight - he held up
the finished formula inside a cup.

Cloris was buried in her family tomb,
for hours she'd lain inside it undisturbed.
Found at the city's outskirts - it had room
for many occupants. Although perturbed
to think that he a body would exhume,
his apprehensiveness he quickly curbed,
and in the small hours of the next day
he came and through the graveyard made his way.

Her coffin found, slowly he opened it.
To see her - motionless there - made him pause,
made him - overwhelmed with feelings - sit.
Untouched by time, lovely in death she was -
as though she slept. Only his lantern lit
the solemn scene around. Removing the gauze
from off the vial he'd brought, he took the potion
and held it to her lips - but then saw motion.

He saw her move - before a drop she drank -
open her eyes - as death she seemingly shook -
and slowly rise. Startled - he quickly shrank.
Had sleep for death in error been mistook?
What spinner of our fates had he to thank
to see her breathe again? Again to look
on her - and feel his passion burn inside -
which rumour only recently denied.

Looking around the tomb she saw him there -
and her surprise increased when recognition
took hold. Frozen with fear the fated pair
exchanged some glances. Was he an apparition?
she thought, as round her shoulders fell her hair.
He saw no signs of slight decomposition
around her youthful, full and glowing features -
as all the while looked on those impish creatures.

They'd followed him unnoticed to her grave,
scheming to seize the mixture when they could.
These dwellers of the earth would such things crave
to benefit themselves - and little understood
what paths to sure destruction they might pave
for those that dare to dabble. Hushed they stood -
after they'd scurried through their native earth,
where guarding goldmines is their task from birth.

Unknown to him in secret she had felt
a passion for him equal to his own.
The serpent love within her daily dwelt,
and many times she gave a stifled groan
to see him, while her sighing heart would melt.
Gladdened to find herself with him alone -
she asked him who he was, and why he came;
he then began to speak - though half in shame:

'Alexis is my name. Madam, excuse
any presumption on my part - I meant
not to alarm you. I had heard sad news
of your untimely passing. Not content
to think your lovely features I might lose
forever - with this drink I came - intent

in testing it on you. I find you though -
alive - your hue unchanged; how is this so? '

'You may not know my husband' - then she said,
'My marriage was arranged to Damon. Him
my parents chose - unhappy I was wed.
A victim to his every mood and whim
I sought escape from misery - which led
to drinking herbs that freeze up every limb,
bringing a lifeless sleep. So dead I seemed.
Entombed - to live in happiness I dreamed.'

They held each other, giving much expression
to surging feelings long suppressed within.
Alexis soon forgot his deep depression
to think that his desire he seemed to win.
He lay the potion down. To take possession -
a gnome trod near - as soundless as a pin.
Suddenly footsteps came around the door -
and looking up - entwined - they Damon saw.

'What scene is this on which I make intrusion?
I come to pay my last respects, and yet -
find that the dead is living? An illusion
perhaps? And who is this? My friend - we've met
before, I think.', he said with grave expression.
'My wife you wish? Well - this you will regret.'
He drew his sword and struck him in the chest;
down fell Alexis, while his wound he pressed.

As Damon left them, Cloris held her lover -
bleeding and gasping, he could barely speak.
His mortal injury she tried to cover -
he pointed to the vial while growing weak.
She understood his sense - but going over
to bring this only cure - she gave a shriek.
Belonging to a gnome - a tiny hand
appeared, and snatched the mixture as it planned.

Pursuing hastily the gnome outside,
she wandered round the tranquil cemetery -
hearing the sound of giggles hushed and snide.

Searching its paths she saw a sturdy tree -
and there behind its trunk the creature spied -
where many more had gathered round to see
this healing drink. Upon a mound he held
the mixture high, and wild with rapture yelled:

'This medicine', he said, 'will give us life
eternal - with which we can build our empire -
expand our goldmines - ease our daily strife.
Its properties will mean we'll never tire,
never be injured by the axe or knife,
or accident of earthquake, flood or fire.'
Cloris - in overhearing this - with dread
was greatly filled, and interrupting said:

'I'm begging you - give me this liquid back;
my friend within is injured - only this
can save him from that unprovoked attack.'
He stood beside the hole to an abyss -
where lay their tunnels - of the blackest black -
and took a sip - with eyes that told of bliss.
Excited, all the gnomes watched on, as he
laughed with malevolent, unruly glee.

'Now I'm a god of gods, a king of kings',
he cried, while inching near the burrow's edge.
'Invincible, fearing naught, now I have wings -
I'm like a bird upon a window ledge.'
Not watching where he danced, looking at things
not there - he raised the vial as if to pledge
some oath to someone - as if under spell -
then lost his footing - dropped the glass - and fell.

Hearing his fading echo, Cloris saw
the vessel and retrieved it from the ground.
Some mixture it contained still. This she bore
back to the mausoleum, where she found
Alexis barely breathing. Trying to pour
some potion in his mouth, a coughing sound
she heard, then saw his still and bloodied lips
moving. He woke - and took some further sips.

Watching his wounds like magic disappear,
Alexis stood and held her. Cloris told
of what had happened then, of which to hear
he took the glass and said: 'It may bring gold
for some - but also dangers - which I fear.
And so - I must destroy this stuff I hold.
Come now, and while we can let's leave here fast.'
So saying went they, hand in hand at last.

Christopher Lavery

A Misadventure With Spriggans

I tell of fairies more ill-natured now,
from Kernow folktales - that I, Billy Puck,
heard in my family - this one's of how
a local robbed a tomb - but vengeance struck,
from those that guarded it - whose dreadful wrath
caused these bizarre events and aftermath.

It was a stormy night on Trencrom Hill;
a figure came beneath the downpour's lash -
Jack Bligh was he - alone with spade - his will
faltering in the howling wind and flash
of lightning. Thunder clouds blacked out the moor -
the fortress fragments loomed upon the tor.

He reached a structure made of standing stones,
on top them lay a slab. It was a tomb,
from days of spears and axes - ancient bones
rest undisturbed within. There in the gloom -
Jack halted shivering - then with map he strove -
bent to locate a rumoured treasure trove.

Finding the spot among the crumbled boulders,
he took a deep breath and, after a pause,
began to dig. At times, over his shoulders -
he looked - though lone and desolate it was.
He felt like there was something in the dim -
and peered with an expression fixed and grim.

But not a soul he saw, and - with a shrug -
he shovelled through the soil. His lantern shone
upon his rustic features as he dug -
and dug. Though aching, still he carried on -
but still found nothing. Cursing his bad luck,
he planted down the spade. It something struck.

Scraping the earth away from it revealed
a gilded wooden chest. Jack lifted up
its lid - and gasped. Within, for ages sealed,
were many shiny things - a shield, a cup,

gold coins and weapons - what more could he seek?
Plus bracelets, brooches, rings - he gave a shriek.

Placed in his sack, he covered up the ground,
then gathered up his tools and turned to go.
Hearing - he thought - a horrid hissing sound,
he sought his bearings with his lantern's glow -
when from behind the rocks emerged a swarm
of creatures - with a dwarfish human form.

Waist high, with shrivelled, gnarly features - thin,
though disproportionally large its head,
with shoulders puny - evil was its grin -
they hissed and spat at Jack, who froze in dread.
He thought - then from his sack produced a sword;
they shrank - he brandished it and fled the horde.

Fast taking to his heels, homeward he ran -
far to his cottage in the countryside.
The night was lifting and as day began
faint stirrings of the birds he heard. He cried
triumphantly when home - Rosen, his wife,
awoke to promise of a better life.

Over the gleaming valuables they pored,
early that morning as they breakfast ate -
both animated. Nearby soundly snored
their baby Jowan in his cot - how great
their pride. Jack slept that night content and snugly -
though haunted by those creatures vile and ugly.

He saw them hissing, spitting - then he woke
suddenly - shuddering - from a troubled dream.
That morning Jack chopped wood outside to stoke
the fire - when out of nowhere came a scream -
Rosen it was - he went - and more distraught
he'd never seen a soul - he had no thought

what it might be. She stood - pointing to where
Jowan slept. Jack approached - moving their cat
away that hissed at it. Something was there -
child still - though a large-headed, ugly brat -

and not their beautiful, endearing boy -
Jowan was nowhere seen - gone was their joy.

All day they searched each nearby path and field,
each hill and vale, each forest, glade and nook,
but found no trace at all - no clue revealed
the infant's whereabouts. Ceasing to look,
they went back home to where that wretched child
instead there lay, whose wails them further riled.

Next morning, Rosen left a plate of food
and bowl of cream out - as she always did -
for local fairies. One had watched her brood
most heavily - and though they mostly hid -
this curious and lively thumb-high chap
appeared - in breeches, buckles, shirt and cap.

'What ails you madam, that you look so lost -
so spiritless, who once was full of cheer? '
Rosen was startled. 'Nothing would it cost
to let me help you.', he continued, 'Here
I've always supped with pleasure.'. Rosen sighed,
composed herself, then to reply she tried:

'Our baby's gone - gone - found not anywhere;
there's something else inside his cradle - while
our child has somehow vanished into air.'
She tightened up a holy water vial.
'Ah - changelings they are called, ' - the Piskie said.
'Let me enquire - some light on this I'll shed.'

For hours she waited anxiously - then late
that afternoon, the flitting form returned.
Halting with urgency, he came out straight
with what he knew. 'Good fortune be - I've learned
your infant's whereabouts. A friendly bird
says Spriggans were at work - and worse I've heard.

They left a suckling of their own - and stole
your child. Nearby - this midnight - on the Gump -
where they will revel, feast and dance the whole
night long - up where fantastic things go bump

in the dark - there they plan to sacrifice
your babe - make haste and go there in a trice.'

The evening sky was clear when they arrived -
the downs were shining with a frost, the moon
was full and bright. Their dwindled hope revived,
they'd come prepared. Silent it was, but soon -
in lines the fiendish Spriggans dancing came,
carousing merrily with feast and game.

Silence was later called. All gathered round,
and strange, unearthly music softly played.
An alter was erected on the mound -
upon it were a cloth and candles laid.
A weird procession came - one held a child -
the rest behind it chanted as they filed.

Armed with the sword and shield he lately stole,
Jack crept across the grass and took his chance.
A Spriggan laid down Jowan - from a scroll
another read a prayer. Jack caught its glance -
it raised its hand and something cast his way -
Jack tried to move but somehow trapped he lay.

In giant cobwebs he had found himself -
in magic silken threads entangled. Stuck
he was, beyond the wit of scheming elf -
no sword could cut it, he was out of luck.
In horror Rosen watched - with little clue
what she - alone, unarmed - could possibly do.

'I, Vigus -', cried it, 'offer up this life -'.
She had on her the vial of holy water,
and nearer crept - then, as it raised a knife -
some on the creature threw. Halting the slaughter -
it shrieked with pain - the others shrank with dread -
the web spell broke, they grabbed the babe and fled.

Returning home they noticed something wrong -
the house was burgled while the Blighs were out,
they looked and found the stolen treasures gone.
Jack shrugged: 'The treasures care I not about.'

We have once more the one I most adore -
our precious little boy, worth so much more.'

Christopher Lavery

Misled By Piskies

How sore my legs - but brings this fire much cheer,
come gather round, I'm pleased in meeting you -
Billy Puck am I, and hail from near -
droll teller, balladeer, and singer too.
But pays it not - I tell my tales instead
in hopes of earning here a meal and bed.

Old Kernow then the setting is - a place
where many a forgotten myth has grown
of crashing giant, of furtive fairy race,
of singing mermaid, of ancient standing stone.
But now I turn to moorlands for this one,
where walked a farmer home once - on and on:

Tom Mawker was he called - a local fellow,
who lived upon a farm on Fowey Moor.
Fond of simple things, his nature mellow,
filled were his days with toil and little more.
His humdrum life, with Elowen his wife,
was rarely free from drudgery and strife.

The upland there is rugged and remote,
with scattered granite circles, cairns and rows.
The only sounds the bleating sheep or goat -
the bleak wind or the brook the gently flows.
Now once walked Tom his usual homeward way,
late from the market where he'd spent that day.

The narrow road he took was solitary,
and clothed in golden leaves. He heard the trill
of feathered creatures - as, unhurriedly,
he wandered through a forest. All was still -
as twilight filled the air. It was November,
and glad he was his coat he did remember.

He felt he had been walking for some while,
and wondered if he'd taken a wrong turn.
As well as this he hadn't reached the stile
he always climbed. He could not quite discern

his path - not unfamiliar did it seem -
and had no light except the moon's faint gleam.

With brisker pace he went - and with relief
he found a spot he knew. He tried and tried
each path from there - and yet - in disbelief -
they all led back to this same place. He sighed,
as late and lost he was. He heard - he thought -
laughter - and sight of fleeting shadows caught.

Still anxious to get home he carried on -
but went in circles still. At last he sat -
with head in hands - his will was slowly gone.
A figure he glimpsed - tiny - smart - red hat -
green coat - he looked - it vanished round a tree -
but on its bark this writing he could see:

Look near - I am about,
to ease the cold and rain;
now turn me inside out
and find your way again.

'I ease the cold and rain - what's this? ' - he mused.
'A fire perhaps? A fire would ease the cold -
but not the rain. Look near? '. Tom did - confused.
'A shelter then? '. But he was not consoled.
He saw no shelter though he looked about -
and wondered how you'd turn one inside out.

Puzzled - once more he sat - sunk in despair
that this predicament would never end.
He wrapped his coat around him tight - the air
cooled - rain fell - then - then did he comprehend.
'What's near, and eases cold and rain? A coat.
Can be turned inside out as well? A coat.'

Tom turned it inside out - he felt quite silly,
but saw no other hope. He walked again -
and progress made this time - mysteriously
he now found paths he recognized. The rain
soon stopped - he saw at last his farm that night -
and never felt so happy at the sight.

His strange adventure to his wife he told;
not disbelieving was she. 'Piskies are they',
said Elowen to Tom, 'from time of old.' -
and Tom was Piskie-led - as some still say.
It's harmless mischief - but - so they don't scheme -
and bring good luck - leave out for them some cream.

Christopher Lavery

An Encounter With The Knockers

It happened all so quickly down in there -
there in the mine - working away was I -
all of a sudden - gave me such a scare -
rocks were falling - I had no time to try
escaping - or in helping other men -
no warning was there - not a thing - when -

the tunnel caved in. All in a sprawl
others were lying about - everything broke -
the mine all dust and clutter. That is all
honestly I can remember - till I woke.
My heart then sank - I'd hoped it wasn't true -
hoped that I'd dreamt - but true it was - and you -

the rest you'll not believe - I dare say. Still,
what happened next I'll try my best to tell.
I - Cubbie am I - woke - and damp and chill
it was - and pitch dark. Where the ceilings fell
was deep inside. All over I was sore,
and felt dazed like I'd never felt before.

No way out could I feel. For hours and hours
I saw nothing and heard nothing, wishing
I could just see my wife - and boys of ours -
and that instead I'd made my bread by fishing.
I groped but blindly with no candle glow,
and felt forgotten trapped so far below.

Then in the distance - faintly came a voice -
murmurs that nearer grew - bringing a hope.
A few more joined it - how I did rejoice -
that even in this darkest place I'd cope.
I cried out loudly - surely they would hear.
Alas - I heard those voices disappear.

Later behind those fallen beams and rocks -
I'm sure I heard it though my mind was blurred -
there came mysterious and ghostly knocks -
that echoed through the tunnels. These I've heard

some rumours of - some say they are a sign -
and often warn of a collapsing mine.

Then to my disbelief I saw a hand -
disembodied, floating through the air -
holding a candle. Finding strength to stand
I followed it. Drifting, it led me where
a small but passable crevice was. I squeezed
myself through, and my heart was somewhat eased.

Through many winding tunnels I was led -
until we reached an opening I knew.
Then saw I something - something strange ahead -
knee high - with tools - some figures - strange but true -
large noses - dressed like miners they appear -
long skinny limbs - mouths stretched from ear to ear.

Benign they seemed, then silent went their way.
I'd heard of them - the Knockers they are called,
the spirits of dead Kernow miners - they
warn of cave ins. For long I stood enthralled -
then looked up - where - relieved - my sight was caught
by shafts of light, this cheered my every thought.

They warn of rockfalls with their knocks - if left
some food like crusts and treated with respect.
Ignore or mock them and you'll suffer theft
of tools or lunch - or other tricks expect.
So that's what happened - now to bed is best;
however dazed I am, I need some rest.

Christopher Lavery

The Misfortune Of Reynold The Knight

From a story by Boccaccio

O fortune - how she is a fickle child;
our trusty chronicles show all too well
how she would bless the souls on whom she smiled -
then throw them to the wild with wolves to dwell.
Yet sometimes all ends well, and I can tell
if you've an ear - a tale - set in our land -
of fortune springing from misfortune's hand.

It was the age of knights and ladies, passion
and fealty - honourable death and shame -
monastic reveries and courtly fashion.
One knight there was - throughout the land his fame
was greatly spoke of - Reynold was his name.
One evening he homewards rode - past inns -
past countryside - and here our tale begins.

Now cold it was, all day it had been snowing;
the sky was crisp, the stars were sharp, the moon
hung low and clear. Steadily he was going
as gallant Reynold rode all afternoon.
One serving-man accompanied him - but soon
he fell in with a passing company,
conversing with the folk unwarily.

He thought them merchants - well attired and coined,
and warmly ordering themselves to him,
but these in truth were robbers he had joined.
They spoke like humble men of toil and hymn,
and sought to gain his trust as it grew dim;
they, judging him a moneyed fellow, waited -
until they spied a woodlands isolated.

They fell to talk of orisons they make -
one of the highwaymen then asked our friend:
'Which say you on your journeys, when you wake? '
'I am a simple man', said he, 'and tend
to live old-fashioned; nevertheless, I'll send

St Julian a Pater and an Ave -
to grant in perils somewhere safe to stay'.

'I hope it stands you in good stead', then thought
the highwayman that asked. 'This orison',
said he, 'I've heard of but was never taught -
and always found I lodgings after Sun.
No, De Profundiis is for me the one,
the prayer that my grandmother deemed the best -
and later we shall see who'll find good rest.'

Discoursing of these matters on their way,
while waiting for a quiet place and time,
they came across a river - late that day,
beyond which distant spires stood sublime,
and here the robbers carried out their crime.
Stealing his money, clothes and horse, they departed,
saying - while turning back with laughs wholehearted -

'We hope St Julian for you will find
good lodgings for tonight, even as ours.'
Passing the river, they left him behind,
stood only in his shirt at those late hours,
far from the church's gleaming gothic towers -
while Reynold's knavish servant, turning his horse -
abandoned him - and townwards steered his course.

Poor Reynold - trembling with his teeth - he turned
and looked about for shelter from the frost;
but war had been there in those parts, and burned
was everything. Instead, the stream he crossed,
and sought the town, while fearing getting lost.
But curfew fell and he arrived so late,
he found they'd raised the bridge and shut the gate.

There, shivering and disconsolate he stood -
as it began once more that day to snow;
he spied an outhouse building made of wood
projecting from the wall. The warming glow
of fires within he saw from down below.
Once there, the door was locked - although he found
a bed of straw, and lay there on the ground.

He sighed - and to St Julian made plaint -
saying that this was not what he was fain
to know of faith; however, soon the saint
provided him with lodgings once again.
Within a widow lived, upon whose chain
was kept the keys to every gate and door;
her husband perished lately in the war.

She'd had her maid prepare a bath and meal -
most sumptuous - for her expected lover;
but fortune had been turning back her wheel,
and through a serving-man she did discover
that he'd been called away to some place other -
on urgent business. She resolved instead
to take the bath herself, then go to bed.

The bath she entered in was near the door,
behind which Reynold lay beside the wall -
and soon she heard his weeping full and sore.
Concerned, her maid she summoned from the hall,
and said, when she had answered to her call:
'Kindly see who is at the postern-foot,
while I prepare the supper that was put.'

The maid went - finding Reynold in his shirt -
and barefoot - in the clear air trembling much,
lying there wretched in the straw and dirt.
She asked him who he was - he told her such -
and of his troubles - which her heart did touch.
Her lady, once informed, was likewise piteous,
and of this handsome stranger curious.

The maid - commending her for her compassion -
let Reynold in; 'Quick - take the bath that's there',
she said, seeing his face from coldness ashen;
while he obeyed, they found him clothes to wear.
Reviving in the warmth, he said a prayer -
thanking St Julian and God for this,
as all around him seemed a scene of bliss.

Within the dining hall was lit a fire,

where sat the lady; soon her maid there came -
and of this stranger's state she did enquire.
'Madam - he's clad himself; he's of good name,
and handsome, with a well-proportioned frame.'
The lady, hearing this, wished him to meet,
and said: 'Go dear - invite him here to eat.'

Accordingly, Reynold entered the hall, and saw
the lady, thanking her for kindness done;
she asked how he had come beside the door -
a spirited narration he begun -
how he was robbed beneath the setting sun.
She'd seen his serving-man that day - so true
she thought it, telling Reynold what she knew.

Afterwards, Reynold sat with her to sup.
Her lover gone that night, many a time
she glanced at him while drinking from her cup -
as he was comely, pleasant - in his prime;
her passions roused, she thought them not a crime.
She found her maid in order to confer
if she should use what fortune sent to her.

The maid, who clearly saw her lady's drift,
encouraged her to go, as she could best,
and take advantage of this earthly gift.
Returning to the fireside, where sat her guest,
she gazed on him, filled with romantic zest,
and said: 'Why look you lost and melancholy?
Your stolen things can be requited wholly.'

Come now - be comfortable and of good cheer;
take ease, and treat this house as your own place.
I'll tell you something more - to see you here -
a hundred times I've wished you to embrace,
but feared that you would find this a disgrace.
Had I not thought that you might be displeased,
the opportunity I would have seized.'

Reynold advanced on her with open arms,
saying: 'Madam, considering I owe
so much to you, not to enjoy your charms

a great unmanliness in me would show.
Your persuasion is not needed though;
to look upon your face I am content -
there I can see the winning argument.'

No more was said. The lady, full of longing,
straight threw herself at him; many a caress
and kiss each gave - with inner passions thronging -
while now his troubles he could only bless
that brought such moments of expansiveness.
When daylight trickled round the room he rose,
and went to find his servant with his clothes.

The sun was bright, the city gates unlocked,
and searching round his serving-man he found;
he praised St Julian, whom they had mocked,
when next a miracle would him astound.
Those highwaymen appeared, in shackles bound,
arrested by the watchmen for some deed
that same night done - all ended well indeed.

The men confessed - returned his items too;
climbing his horse, he soon forgot his plight,
and homewards rode. To her he bid adieu;
the memories would fill him with delight.
And now so ends my tale of this good knight,
my homely tale of unexpected things -
of how misfortune sometimes fortune brings.

Christopher Lavery

To A Plant

The bee-loved foxgloves could not charm the mead -
geraniums their full-lipped petals fend
against first frosts - bright roses not ascend
the cottage arbours - if they did not feed;
the peonies' brief buddings won't succeed,
nor irises, round the borders, with them blend -
yet there are plants I have not need to tend,
and you - my friend - are such a one indeed.
Whether the soil is damp or parched from drought -
like spring you're always fresh - my kindred fellow;
if no sun's near, your stems won't seek it out;
your leaves shall never wilt, grow sere or yellow,
but ever crown the garden - standing stout
through all four seasons - leaves no autumns mellow.

Christopher Lavery



PoemHunter.com

Spirited Upon Your Wings

Spirited upon your wings,
reveries bring boundless things;
with a pinch the sprightly fairy
blithely lures me while unwary,
guiding me with tuneful flute
round your orchards hung with fruit.

Vintages from caverns cool
brim in crystal goblets full -
sooth the spirit's inner strife,
nature's binding blood of life:
sun-soaked clusters bring the south -
rich with pulp indulge the mouth;
crushed in pressings lush and pure,
cast their rosy-woven blur.
Comes the scent of nearby seas -
cornfields yielding to the breeze,
pipes I hear upon the mountains -
soon unlock the Muses' fountains,
then the hush, the moon, and me
make a goodly company,
joined by hoots and trickling brooks
mixed with music, thought and books.
Spicy malts bring woods and farms,
scenes unfold with rustic charms:
minstrels singing homely lays,
shepherds whistling on their ways;
next a tournament with lances,
then to evening country dances -
later gather round the fire,
hush-toned ghost tales 'til we tire.
Glint-eyed creatures cause affright
playing tricks to pass the night,
in enchanted forests lost
gleaming with a midnight frost;
sprites and goblins stray unseen
round the fresh-trimmed bowling green,
after village curfew knells -
local myths the parson quells.

Ursula - soothsayer old -
reads what yet the stars may hold,
from her mossy cave sees most,
tracing heaven's wakeful host.

Spirited upon your wings,
reveries bring boundless things;
guiding me with tuneful flute
round your orchards hung with fruit.

Christopher Lavery

On Seeing An Open Casket

Disturb her not - she is not far;
she hears our voices - have no doubt.
Death does not her beauty mar -
not blow her candle wholly out.

Her features almost break in movement -
her cheeks still hold their hues of pink;
her lids might open any moment -
her spirit hovers round the brink.

She's gone not to some far-off land -
this room itself rests her from strife;
disturb her not then - as we stand
not by a sight of death, but life.

Christopher Lavery



PoemHunter.com

Bird Of Destiny

Cold is the air - still are the trees -
the clouds are streaked with red;
hushed are the birds as dusk descends
and here you lay your head.

A whirling bird above is shrieking -
the bird of destiny;
of midnight born, with plume as black -
unearthly thing to see.

A pawn you were in unseen quarrels
of vying deities;
this bird tells of what has been spoken -
the voice of their decrees.

Your shield is shattered - in your side
a spear has slaked its thirst;
though life is slipping rest is here
now fate has done its worst.

These rivers were your cradle sought -
this chosen land your bride;
a rightful heir had come but you
were blinded by your pride.

Like bulls whose horns are locked in battle
you fought with armour crashing;
the plains resounded with the echo
of armies blindly clashing.

These fields were red, were filled with cries -
the rivers ran with blood;
this bird descended, soon you fell,
with dull and sickening thud.

O bird of destiny - oft seen
when skies are rumbling;
on tombstones perched in weather foul
and rooftops crumbling.

It knows no song of harmony
to charm the glades and dells;
its shrieking is the melody
that destiny foretells.

The final sleep is creeping near,
the scene is growing dim;
its noise a dull and distant blur -
your only passing hymn.

You see a dank enfolding fog -
hear chains that dimly clink;
a murky river to be crossed,
forgetfulness to drink.

Cold are your hands, still are your eyes,
vanished is your voice;
your bride is lost - the fitful gods
have made their final choice.

Christopher Lavery

The Valley Of Melancholia

The sky is charged; a veil of frozen dew
enshrouds the earth; the distant hilltops wear
the evening's pall of sullen, sable hue.
Still is the wind. With cries that fill the air,
the haunted voices of the valley share
their secrets awful and enthralling,
of nameless sins and tales appalling,
at which the trees would shudder, the mountains tremble -
with madness laughing is the moon,
conspiring stars bestrew the noon;
something of eeriness pervades
the raw and rugged rocks, the groves and glades.

Who wonders through this valley desolate?
Who, straying late, did Sorrow once accost,
and lead them here? Who came to contemplate
life's mysteries, whose searching hearts had crossed
into this land of doubt - but the path lost?
Up to the heavens they gaze - the vast
and lightless void, that us has cast
on inhospitable seas - they gaze with restless wonder -
but to their burning questions why -
it only echoes in reply;
for them no dogma bears a gleam
of truth that eases life's unquiet dream.

What spirits tread here, delicate and keen?
Spirits that beauty sought with eager eye -
who, finding it furled around a passing scene -
felt ecstasy - twined with a wistful sigh -
as naught the ebbing tides of time defy.
What piper there - whose plaintive sound
the valley echoes far around,
pipes of passing life and love and innocence?
What rhymer in the meadow sings,
sings of the passing of all things,
notes sad as solitary winter bird,
that through the velvet twilight drift unheard?

I knew a soul, on simple pleasures grown,
who of the springs of nature asked not how,
nor why, but trusted all he saw; unknown
lay tangled woods of knowledge near - his brow
unclouded still in youth's long dawn. But now
that unrefined and artless faith
has vanished like a fleeting wraith;
exiled from innocence, now sibling of the shadows,
his soul seemed like a hollow shell
where oceans deep with anguish swell;
in suffering's solitude he read
departed minds, and moved among the dead.

A yawning, overflowing emptiness
sighed through the valley's narrow, winding ways.
Phantasmal howlings pierced the wilderness -
and beating wings of birds unseen would daze
his weary senses, shattering the haze.
Sometimes despondency became
half-pleasing - soft as candle flame -
at other times it cold and comfortless would grow,
and gleamed as hard and real as bars,
while hope lay distant as the stars;
sometimes stampeding herds of thunder
with sudden roll would cleave his mind asunder.

When nightfall in the valley would arrive,
he rested deep within its forests dim;
sleepless he saw its shadows come alive -
the puppets of the night stood tall and grim,
whose mocking voices would encircle him -
yet though this blackness round him crept,
still hope a tireless vigil kept.
One day he climbed the valley's tenebrous crags and steeps,
and saw a rainbow subtly spun,
caught momentarily by the Sun,
within a mist clothed waterfall,
dispersing colours myriad on all.

Since straying in valley long ago,
two voices call him - voices worlds apart;
one from the rainbow - hope's eternal glow,

the other - deep despair's untruthful dart.
Both equal reign within his tender heart,
as how the mind contains such scope
for misery - yet equal hope;
and though the voices of the valley call no more -
and though, when downcast, he can find
that rainbow gleaming in his mind -
still, he can sometimes dimly hear
the frantic beating wings of madness growing near.

Christopher Lavery

To Solitude

Away with Loneness - he whose winter bites,
who haunts the wasted wilderness and shores,
born in thunder on the misty moors;
who, bred by wolves, with howling fills the nights.
But bring his smooth-browed sister Solitude,
decked with autumnal charms and plenitude,
with contemplation's brimming horn of flowers,
and baskets graced with fruit to fill the hours.
Often you'll keep the company of dawn
whose veils of innocence the woods adorn,
and sometimes there, with still and listening ear,
we might the secret songs of nature hear,
or by a fountain sit, whose trickling sound
is where forgetful music may be found.
With closed eyes we'll feel it chase away
the phantoms of the mind that haunt the day.
And while the birds' soft choir the morning greets,
we'll walk along the cool and silent streets
that slumber in the mist with shutters down,
until the traffic will the quietness drown.
Or else we'll walk the idle hours at night
beneath the naked sky - the only light
the lamps that blink beneath the smog and clouds;
and night is human - thoughts arise in crowds
in minds astir like beehives, while hearts swell
like glow-worms' tails. There eager creatures dwell
by graveyard, cricket green, and timbered inn,
whose chants arise to sooth the daily din.
We'll watch the botanical garden's calm cascades
dance by the moonlit paths and palisades;
hear murmurings of exotic plants and trees
stirred in the tingling darkness by the breeze;
smell scents of herbs - of rosemary, sage and thyme,
that make the air tell of a distant clime.
But now I hear the mournful sounding train
rousing night, and sigh of passing plane,
as Solitude - to wintry chill you grow.
I feel its sharp breath through my window blow,
and round my door; the hand of Loneness cold -

an anguish of the body - takes iron hold.
And so the spring of company I yearn,
but will to sister Solitude return.

Christopher Lavery