

Poetry Series

# Christopher Lavery

## - poems -



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# Christopher Lavery()

Christopher Lavery is a Cornish poet born in 1977 in Penzance. He has worked as a teacher and his hobbies include reading, music, films, walking and travelling.

He has been published in Reach Poetry Magazine, Runcible Spoon, Scrittura Magazine, The Big Windows Review, The Society of Classical Poets, Lead Kindly Light and Litbreak Magazine.

He has had one volume of poetry published - 'The Ballad of Lorianna, Ever Brush Away The Sleep, To Winter and Other Poems', and has also published a volume of narrative poems - 'Three Tales'.

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# 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 poured,  
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

# 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



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# 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.

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# Old Tales I Have Turned

Old tales of knights and honour I have turned:  
sat at baronial tables, seen a hall -  
through plots I've overheard - now rise, now fall -  
spied cloistered sighs, felt pangs of lovers spurned;  
breathed thin-high epic airs - watched cities burned,  
while noble foes charged to the trumpet's call -  
yet there's a volume I most prize of all,  
within whose breathing leaves much more I've learned.  
Though when it speaks I wonder what is meant -  
a guileless language in its eyes I see -  
wherein I trace the passions' firmament;  
she is my class - her face is nature's key  
to learning other volumes but augment -  
she is this book - the heart's academy.

Christopher Lavery



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# 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



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# 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