

In the first edition of the *Poetry Portal* we made our offering and in the second, we entered the dreamtime of renewal. Now we emerge from that darkened place, and although some of you may still be lingering at Sandover River, or lulled in winter's dream, we must continue in our mythological journey through the *Portal*.

For this edition of the *Poetry Portal*, I have chosen the image *Blessing the Boats* by Mary Ann Reilly for the next **Invite to Write**.

This image is subtle and ethereal and we are left only to imagine the boats in the title, *Blessing the Boats*. The image shows a woman on the shore – perhaps she is left behind? Perhaps she has blessed the boats in the way that the following lines bless our journey. They are taken from a poem with the same name by Lucille Clifton, a most celebrated poet:

*"...may you kiss
the wind then turn from it
certain that it will
love your back may you
open your eyes to water
water waving forever..."*

I invite you to read more of Lucille Clifton's most beloved verse as a tribute to her life and work - her memorial was held in February. May her words and this image take us forward and as we sail new waters, may we be embraced with these blessings. I hope you are inspired by this image and I encourage you to submit your poem to the *Portal*.

Here are some of the submissions from our third *Invite to Write* inspired by the following image by Mary Ann Reilly:



Blessing the Boats, by Mary Ann Reilly

NO VANISHING POINT

The ocean inlet, in morning fog was bound,
Sun wriggled not through the opaque
air that lay like pasty sky around
the tiny bay--itself, vanishing lake,
Clanging the buoy, ripples I couldn't see
reached out and past the eyes' wake,
How far go they before totally free
Or even then did they continue, break?
I heard the unsuspecting silence pause,
All knew I was but a trace,
faint expanse in which in rev'rie to ease,
Beyond that now: answerless extensions of space
on which the circle of infinite time floated,
might have there, always been,
Lapping ocean now that note muted--
the timeless interval I knew to begin, and end.

- David Romy

The sailors sweat in the autumn chill
while loading their cargo stacked on creaking docks.
She stands behind the sentry, straining to watch the crew load crates, gear and barrels
for battle with an unknown foe looming like the fog on the blackened sea,
and nibbles bits of the bread in her pocket, stamping her boots and tightening her shawl
to stem the icy tide of encroaching grief.
Then, the loading done, the dock cleared of the goods fed into the belly of the boats,

they pull away into the twilight of her deep, October dream
and she feels her life being drawn out and away as though stolen by darkness, the way
they say

a black cat can steal the breath of a slumbering child.
She lingers with the dwindling sight of the lanterns flickering from the decks,
and summoning the will to dash from the pier to the promontory, she catches the last
faint light vanishing
into time's endless sea of her waiting, watching, of her ceaseless uttering the hallowed,
haunting, hungry prayer,
Come back...come back to me.

- Jennifer R. Molton

**The imminent journey toward an unknown land: Mary Ann Reilly's
*Blessing the Boats***

- for Gisela

1

Ah, yes! I remember that day, that picture:

the night before we'd rollicked and frolicked
dining and dancing to herald
the imminent journey toward an unknown land
the mighty ocean the means of getting there
and a terrible barrier

that night none of us doubted they would prevail
our disquiet tremulous beneath a veneer of jollity
but calmed by the knowledge that next morning
the priest would invoke the Almighty's blessing
and mercy on the boats before they cast off

2

I overslept waking to grey mist and a distant cheering
I ran through the trees

along the shingle
round the headland
to the harbour

my flowing clothes dragging against the wind

despite the squalls and voracious grey-white waves
the boats had already set sail; I was too late to see
him standing, as others told me later, at the stern
looking for me but waving anyway

the boats had been blessed I consoled myself
they were safe in the Almighty's care
despite their wind-bloated sails and the mist
they vanished into

How will you see where you're going? I asked
There's nothing to see but sea
until we get to the other side he laughed

I strove not to imagine the other side
perhaps I was afraid of the terrors that might await them

would they master the ocean's wicked waters
or were they risking some sort of *nekyia*
that night sea journey to the Kingdom of the Dead
could the stories we'd heard be true
of kraken surging volcanic from the watery abyss
of barbaric tribes lying in wait on the ocean's other side

I worried after him

3

now after all these years
there is no need for me to run to the harbour
anxious to know if boats have been sighted
nor for me to wait believing
they might emerge from another time and place
out of the mist to berth alongside the empty quay

sometimes hobbling along the shoreline
I hear vast choirs of the drowned
chanting beneath the infinite dome of night
with its tides and fog *Dies Irae*
his voice among them

why does the Almighty curse me with dreams
of running through the trees
 along the shingle
 round the headland
 never arriving at the harbour
always utterly lost?

- Tony Ullyatt

In nomine....

This creature
that must negotiate
wind
wave
land
sky
and yes,
talk to Leviathan.
Let blessing penetrate
the handmade fastenings

that elements
may seek to undo.
Let this vessel hold
now
that the journey
has called.

- Judith Capurso

BENEDICTION

The dreams came night after night
The fright of their eyes wide
In the thunder clap
Just before drowning

The icy shroud of sea
Engulfing flailing limbs and that terrible
Small cry—hardly more than a kitten's plea
Cry of the youngest boy
Face-to-face with a thing surely intended
For older men's gazes

The sea's water frothing with human alarm
Its waves beating on splintering boards
Of what had once been
Two small fishing craft

Lost in a storm
She woke knowing they were not
Fishermen in those boats
But pilgrims searching

For safe harbor for themselves

And families back home in a dangerous country
Sleeping in uneasy hope of a future
She herself knew

The terror of dark moving waters
The awful aloneness that even the presence
Of others in the same boat
Cannot dilute

Times when all that matters
The only hope of calm is
Some sign, some proof
Some inkling that the universe beneath
The terrible mysteries is benign

And so it was at 2 a.m.
In the stark wonder of night she ran
Like a blind madwoman
Out on the jagged beach

She screamed her benediction
Toward each specific one drowned
She screamed as if she believed her fervent blessing
Peace be yours forever, my children, my brothers, my kin!

She shook free of the scarf
That bound her hair
She ran barefoot
On the sharp edges of earth's planes
The wind whipped her raw
Into tears, into howls beyond knowing
Until she snapped like a bough

Broke into release
Into joy, into dance
Insane with the drink
Of unfathomable faith insisting
It is never too late to bless the unblessed

Christening us all she ran
In her foot-bloodied vigil
Her shipwrecked sacrament
—There on the beach
Where she was found the next morning by gulls.

- Jane Zich

THE HOPE

Moving in the fog, flying into it,
Is there a land over this vast water surface?
It is not seen, not visible now,
but probably,
I assume,
the water has its end
as every land has its shore.

They often meet in The Fog,
uncertain, mysterious state,
when things are not sharply seen
but are uncertain,
creating fears, expectations, hopes,
creating real shapes.

The Shore in the Fog,
the divine place,
where spirit and matter dance,
and talk
not so clearly
as in the full Sun
not so darkly
as in the moonless Night.

- Marta Szczukiewicz

Blessing the Boats

after an image by Mary Ann Reilly

I.

It is my job
every spring, all these many years, one after
another,

to find the right branch

among a scrubby patch of white cedars
from that secret spot

in my forest, where there's an outcrop of rock
in the weirdest shape – a gull's wing

(cedars are scarce here)

II.

And as my mother, and hers,
all did before me

– for the sake of the fleet, docked nearby

and every May, leaving
like a flock –

pass it to the one who dips the thin leaves, flat

like feathers, into the sea, slaps them
against each oak gunnel,

because my own feet have never left this shore,
this island.

III.

No, I have never have put out on one of those boats.

And I carefully keep my old cat
locked
away

always in my cabin, but where is she?
– her name

is Orca – with such a fine white bib
patterned like the whale

or the sheet of a sail flapping against
the black of a storm.

That East wind's picked up – it's mean
and cold. Night's fallen

like death – and O! still, I can't find her.

- E.E. Nobbs

Blessing The Boats

The boats were not visible she didn't care
Joy in her soul
She kept blessings the boats
She ran in the morning fog she didn't care
She felt she was not touching the ground
With the blue star sapphire ring on her finger
Her book on her chest pounding
She ran and felt the newness reaching the land
As she kept blessing the boats
Not knowing how many
Felt their spirit from afar
No communication except in the heart
Feeling the one on the starboard
She waited all winter for the goodness of giving
Manifest

- Lera Welch

Entangled Blessing

Caught in the fog
Of an entangled blessing,
She paused on tiptoe
With one raised knee,
Like the Tarot Fool
Vaulting into unknown territory.

Does calm water seek her?
Or will wild air
Find and cradle
Her fierce, determined path?

Will some beckoning boat collect her?
Or will she leap like a blackbird
Flapping into flight
With carmine-splashed wings?

Filling her dark cipher
With the thick breath
Of softened light,
She gathers the shreds of herself
Into a vital stillness.
Who will bless the one that
penetrates the insistent, perpetual Now?

- Karen D. Benson