

Three poems | Ciaran O'Rourke

Martín Chambi

In far Peru, where
the fish-metallic rivers
steam

and ten
thousand children

dig the golden earth
in force, for food,

in freedom's name,
a life-wave's crash

away, Martín,
you found your feet

at just fourteen,
and learnt to see.

Impelled by light,
your daughter said,

you set your studio
in reach

of the Incan heights
and peasant skies

you first took breath
beneath, and let them
sing.

A dirt-forgotten people
lived within your lens –

and carried on,
with the sun–

beat women
smiling, hauling hay,

the not-quite-quiet
shining

from the Andean giant's
gentle gaze,

or the barefoot organist,
his long-boned feet

a slow caress
on pedals made of wood,

his air of luminous
resolve

matched, among
your portraits, only

by the grace of one
red-shawled Miguel,

whose voice, I know,
was heard

in every mud-rich
village of the land,

and whose limbs
were later snapped

and slung
in the rising sewerage-
streets of Lima,

though you glanced his
bright perfection here:

returned
from the famished ridges,

alert to what
the light unfolds,

his tilted face awash,
he grips

between his finger-tops
two trade-forbidden
cocoa leaves,

and sits, hunger-firm,
but strong enough

to still, for now,
the baring instruments,

and lift
the sunken heart.

In memory of Gerda Taro, 1910-1937

The bursting bullets flung
by two-chinned Franco's smiling men

to pin the heads of children
squatting in the square,

says Langston Hughes, who loved
the rising river-flow

of freedom (jazz) above the rest,
were, up to then, reserved

for the sun-dark beasts
of Africa alone, so fully

did they shake the nerves
and disembowel the flesh:

murder made to mutilate,
the mark of modern times –

a calculation caught and held
in eye-grey revelation

by your blinking fingers, Gerda,
as on the streaming

patchwork floor of the morgue,
or first on the front

in a singeing wind, you stilled
the curling fist and mouth

of innocence itself: a photograph
to document and damn

this rehearsal-round of Hitler's,
Mussolini's morning game...

a death-hung tipping-point
you windowed in Brunete,

witnessing the world of now
(today) and then, until

the smoking fires
fell again – to blot

the gaze of your body,
and rip

the flinchless camera
from your hands.

The Raid

Next to a clean, shopped shot
of Jeff Bezos's grinning head –

'top', once more, of the earth's
so-called list

of fish-faced, smiling rich –
wedged below

a line in bold, that
beacons the long

longed for arrival
of this *boy who dreamed*

of colonising space,
news flaps in also

from dark-aged Sweden,
where fifteen

hundred summers past
a nameless

massacre occurred –
was schemed, that is,

and swung to gleeful,
throbbing motion –

in an island haven, walled
houses looking out

on the northern seas'
easy crash of light,

with, perhaps, the usual
fart-filled bustle

and settled ache of peace
we take for

ordinary living:
here, I learn,

some as yet unrealised
phantom gang

came slinking
with the tide

one day, and before
pickpocketing

the stock of bartered
jewels and laces, Roman coins,

along with every
shining thing, up-

turned their homely cup
of havoc

on the heads
of the island-folk,

whose now re-
surfaced bones

show signs of blunt
and subtle traumas, both:

the old man's axe-
opened skull, for instance,

dumped and singed
in the blazing hearth,

or the gentle, goof-limbed
body of a boy

who was stunned
and gnawed by sharpened clubs,

or a shapeless other, belted
clear out of time

to a mud-shattering death,
into whose

stopped mouth, after,
were shoved the teeth

of a ravenous bull.