

Three Poems about Whales and Whaling

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A Story of Whaling

The old stone age: the whale ensemble
at Tito Bustillo cave has since
conjured up
marine mammals haunting
the artists' imagination.

For the first Galician
written record of whale
 hunting
we'll wait
until the thirteenth century

–a nation of whalers
for seven hundred more years.

Eubalaena was their game
from Azores to Iceland,
from Galicia to Ireland.
Tithing for the Church,
baleen framing human bodies,
oil lighting up new
thriving ports...
 until extinction.

Sven Foyn, a philanthropist,
resurrected whale
 hunting
with his exploding harpoon
– nineteenth-century modernity.

1924: Caneliñas factory
and Galician shores dotted
with sundry factory

ships in a frenzy until
the impasse of the Civil
War.

The chase
resumed in the nineteen fifties, our trains
anointed,
Asian delicacies
–two hundred whales
per year in Caneliñas.

On an April morning
of 1980, Sea Shepherd
sank two whaling ships,
staging the advent
of the nineteen eighty-six
redemption.

Hospitable bellies

after Sinéad Morrissey, Doireann Ní Ghríofa, Victoria Kennefick and Caitríona O'Reilly

A rotting stranded whale makes mother cry
–her own body deteriorating after so many pregnancies.

A crowd of hushed onlookers surveys the shore in puzzlement
while the young woman dreams of whales' hospitable bellies

where women come together, unleashing suppressed desire.
Elsewhere, a pod of fifty pilot whales strays into a lough

a spectacle for the spontaneous multitude. A second coming
gone unheeded. The whale, soon, encoded as alien cipher, recorded song,

a display of skulls, jaws, backbones, rib cages, ambergris, baleen,
harpoons, blubber hooks, mincing knives, chains, try-pots, wooden toggles...

The whale now converted into a camouflaged barge
its world no more than stale film decor.

Penelopes

after Luisa Castro and Ana Román

Ana's visionary travels transport us
to Wadi-al Hitan
where whale fossils
tell of the passage
from land to ocean.

Wanderlust.

A whale's voyage through time and
oceans, which ends
on a Galician shore,
on the esplanade of a whaling
factory.

A girl inspects
the dissection
of her own body as
piece by piece
the whale is dismembered.

Ana dreams of ferocious sailings
propelled by untamed
cetaceans.

Luisa, on her part, exacts
retribution
no more plundering
no more sailors' tales
of heroic adventure.
Her wounded
cetacean body
will be expecting them
when they anchor to
the masked island.