

Sunk Island in November – Sean O'Brien

She stares down the dead straight mile, at a walk,
While I stand by the lych-gate to let her
Arrive at this slow-motion replay of England.
Can I help you? asks the lady on the horse.
And I don't say: too late, unless your powers include
Self-abolition. Me? I'm waiting. I don't say:
Leave me be to read your graves, to stand and think,
To hear the water taking back the frozen fields.

It's not my place to tell you what I mean.
Perhaps I've come to use the weather up
And look too closely at your groves of oak and ash.
But we both know the fact I'm waiting here
Is cousin to a crime. We hold each other's gaze.
Who for? her bladed helmet asks. Her horse has turned
To steaming stone. I think I hear the sea far off,
Like evidence that each of us might call.

And why?- For the flood to accelerate over this ground,
For your helmet to circle and sink like a moral,
For a rag-and-bone man with his cargo of trash
To come rowing past slowly, his mind given over
To practical matters, the pearls of your eyes
Unforgiven and sold at Thieves' Market
For sixpence and never once thought of again.
You must be cold out here, she says. I think I must.

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