

TRANSPARENT WORDS 16

Poems Selected From The Files Of
CAUGHT IN THE NET

<http://www.poetrykit.org/pkl/CITN/caughtin.htm>

Selected by

Lesley Burt - Alexander Fyfe - James Bell

CONTENTS

LESLEY BURT

- CITN 53 - NOEL CANIN The Accordion
CITN 77 - GILL McEVOY The Wayward Button
CITN 78 - KEN CHAMPION Afternoon Movie
CITN 79 - TRICIA DEARBORN For a man who loved brute force
CITN 82 – KILEEN GILROY One Hundred and Two Years Later

ALEXANDER FYFE

- CITN 60 – TOM GEORGE Walking home
CITN 62 – GABRIEL GRIFFIN Well, I Never Fell for that Story of the Americans
Landing \$\$\$\$\$\$\$
CITN 86 – HILDA SHEEHAN My Mother Spilt Herself
CITN 89 – JOHN MURDOCH IS A RED WHEELBARROW EVER EMPTY?
CITN 94 – DEE RIVAZ Rhydymwyn Valley Works

JAMES BELL

- CITN 71 – LYNN STRONGIN Which of these wild birds will alight
CITN 97 – HELEN THOMAS the culinary puffer fish as metaphor for my cutting words
CITN 98 – SHARON BLACK No Magician
CITN 99 – LOUIE CREW Fay
CITN 104 – KAREN KNIGHT Knitting for the Red Cross

LESLEY BURT



Biography

Lesley Burt lives in Christchurch, Dorset, UK. She retired from social work education in 2009. Her poetry has been published online, including the Poetry Kit website, and in magazines and anthologies, including: *Tears in the Fence*, *Poetry Nottingham*, *The Interpreter's House*, *Roundyhouse*, *Dorset Voices*, and the *Robin Hood Book*, (2012, editor Alan Morrison). Awards in competitions include the Bedford 2011, Christchurch Writers 2009 & 2010, Alan Sillitoe 2012, and Virginia Warbey 2012. She runs a small poetry group with the aim of promoting enjoyment poetry in her local community and wrote a chapter for: *Teaching Creative Writing* (2012, editor Elaine Walker).

Editorial

I reviewed issues: 45-54, 75-84 and 105-110. Since completing the task, I am surprised to notice that four of the five poems I selected are from the middle section.

This has been quite different from judging a competition: after all, these poems have already been deemed worthy of publication, sometimes more than once. For me, at any rate, this was never going to be about which might be regarded as 'the best of the best' but, rather, an unashamedly subjective process to find five poems whose images linger with me; poets' thoughts expressed in a manner that makes me think too.

In one sense, the selection process seemed like judging: I read and re-read, made long longlist, short longlist, long shortlist, short shortlist, etc. The further that poems travelled along the process with me, the harder it became to let any go. Many images and thoughts from those that I did not finally choose will stay with me.

I found this process highlighted the way a collection provides a context that influences the reading of each individual poem included, so that it became difficult to extricate one from its group; sometimes it felt as if I were separating a family of siblings! I decided to allow myself one poem per poet anyway, and that was especially tricky where a particular poet had written several of my favourites.

The five I have selected are as follows.

Noel Canin's 'The Accordion' (CITN 53) looks small on the page, but speaks about bigger things: the huge and diverse planet we share, a sense of time and generations, and the bonds between people, living and dead; all this expressed through the image of a man moving his arms to playing that instrument.

There is such straightforward, beautifully expressed, honesty in Gill McEvoy's 'The Wayward Button' (CITN 77), that I find the poem very moving indeed. And through several re-readings, I appreciate the way that little button tells so much, not only about the relationship between this mother and daughter, but more universally about how relationships change as parents age; and how much is contained in a garment they wear, especially a coat that is what the world sees of the person first; and then the symbolism of just one of its buttons.

The title of 'Afternoon Movie' by Ken Champion (CITN 78) sets up a particular atmosphere at once: that sense of going into darkness, entering the 'world' created by the film and later emerging into daylight and 'reality'. The poem has such a sense of longing at the same time as being aware of fantasy. I so admire the opening and closing lines – and everything between, of course.

Tricia Dearborn has used very strong, contrasting images in 'For a man who loved brute force' (CITN 79). She has conveyed a personality and a relationship so well, without mentioning 'love' or 'fear', through vivid images of food preparation. The final four lines end the poem brilliantly, showing just what the title/first line set up at the start.

Kileen Gilroy's 'One Hundred and Two Years Later' (CITN 82), like Noel Canin's poem, tells of links between generations, time and a sense of life going on. This poem emphasizes a sense of fragility, though: the person alive now would not exist if an ancestor had been allowed to die. The 'little white flower' buds are a great image to show both the fragility and the force of life.

I am not surprised to see that my selection illustrates particular themes and preoccupations. As I said at the start, it was a subjective process, and I enjoyed it immensely.

THE POEMS – see [CITN](#) for the full features

CITN 53 - NOEL CANIN

The Accordion

Two veined brown hands
under two chafed black straps,
hands drawing out and pressing in,
parchment stretching to the
sounds of an alien childhood,
in his eyes the smile of his grandfather
watching his grandmother dance,
her black dress billowing in the
dry veld wind and her laugh
snatched to the grasses sighing,
If the hands did not choose

to slip beneath those straps,
open wide the muscular old arms,
no power on earth could
roll out that sound.

CITN 77 - GILL McEVOY

The Wayward Button

I burnt your coat in November,
Bonfire Night, when else?
God knows, that coat was you:
stubborn in the way it wouldn't burn,
awkward in the way it slumped on top the pile,
out of shape with everything,
the world, itself.

That coat was every morning
when I couldn't start the day on time:
you to wash and dress, kids to get to school,
and you, soiled again: three more lines
of washing, sheets, pyjamas, towels
to hang outside.

That coat was each Day Centre afternoon
when you refused to get in the car and I,
with murder in my heart - shopping to fetch,
washing to bring in before the rain,
dinner burning slowly on the stove -
would force you in, all sixteen stone,
then feel the scald of tears.

It played a last trick when it burned:
a button loosed by flame fell from the fire,
rolled to rest at my right foot. It lay there
like a small dog begging amnesty.
Next morning when I raked the ashes flat
I picked it up. Now it goes
everywhere with me.

CITN 78 - KEN CHAMPION

Afternoon Movie

You go in knowing it's already started;
there's a close-up of a girl staring across
a stretch of water, profile, tear on her cheek -

this time you don't look for the camera's
reflection - then the static shot, full face

looking sad as she drives along a road,
not even the upward, arcing angle of tree tops
to lessen the intensity, and you wonder what's
happened to her, a father dying, a crushed child,
and you know that soon the scene will end,

she'll get out, technicians take the camera
off the bonnet, unit director smile and pinch
her arse as the chief grip laughingly drives the
car away, she'll light a cigarette, yawn, tell
a stunt man jokingly to piss off; all the time

that first shot of her is flooding your mind,
and you want to be with her, just with her,
looking across the water.

CITN 79 - TRICIA DEARBORN

For a man who loved brute force

you had
a delicate way with food.
I watched you cook baked apples,
your blunt nail-bitten fingers
pressing brown sugar and spices
into the centre of each
cored green apple, large hands
gently lifting the ladle
to coat them in honey-butter sauce.

I learned from you the secret
to perfect cannelloni (the best
beef mince, the neatest way
to stuff the tubes). Took notes,
perched on the kitchen bench,
your necessary audience.
Poured your whisky, privileged
to have you to myself.
Like the time when I was five,

and Mum was away (perhaps having
one of the babies that did not live).
You brought home rump steak.
Showed it to me first: pure red
muscle on a plate.
Grilled it — you told me —

to perfection. I see
on a bread-and-butter plate
my own small portion. Tender.

CITN 82 – KILEEN GILROY

One Hundred and Two Years Later

Dedicated to Magdalena Swaja

Before we plant the Serviceberry tree to remind us
of my Polish great grandmother's hair,
I imagine what the heart might look like,
layers of rings within this wood
like that of the boat
she almost died on.

When they went to throw her body overboard
on the way to New York,
a young Czechoslovakian voice stretched across
thick fog and the ship's sturdy beams--
She's not dead yet I will take care of her.

If it weren't for that woman
to have heard her utter a single breath
and nurse her back to health with beer,

I wouldn't be here
to plant the roots
and touch the little white
flowers budding from the branches.

ALEXANDER FYFE



Biography

Alexander Fyfe has been writing poems since the age of five. He's attended the odd creative writing class including the odd Arvon course or two. He lives and works in Reading where he teaches literacy and provides study support to students with learning difficulties. He goes along to the local Poet's Cafe to read his own poems, or read "cover versions". Favourite poets include Lord Byron, Charles Bukowski, Philip Larkin and John Burnside.

Editorial

The brief was to choose five outstanding poems from twenty five issues of Caught in the Net. 'Outstanding' in this context is slightly ambiguous – does it mean 'The best poems,' or 'The most different?' Imagine Wordsworth's multitude of daffodils dancing to the elements' tune - each one perfect in its being; and each one shining in the sun. Now, imagine a red tulip sitting amongst them and joining in the merry dance. Is the tulip 'outstanding' because it is more perfect than the daffodils or because it is different to the countless yellow flowers encircling it?. In the end, I think the process of selection came down to a combination of the two. It started with a long list of twenty five poems, which was then reduced to ten and then the process of final selection. This took the most amount of time and was the most challenging task. In the end it came down having a range of poems which represented both the diversity and quality of poetry found in Caught in the Net.

I chose **Walking Home** by Tom George because I liked its simplicity, imagery and its depiction of urban life.

Well, I Never Fell for that Story of the Americans Landing \$\$\$\$\$\$ by Gabriel Griffin has a sense of fun. The use of symbols also shows how language is changing. Whilst many bemoan the use of "text speech" and "social media" in most forms writing, it may offer poetry new forms of expression.

My Mother Spilt Herself by Hilda Sheehan. This portrait is a strong portrait of a woman. It just jumped out as a strong and distinctive poem.

IS A RED WHEELBARROW EVER EMPTY? by John Murdoch. A poem with a sense of fun and at the same time has themes of mortality and the struggle of trying to find a meaning. Sometimes questions can be more meaningful than answers.

Rhydymwyn Valley Works by Dee Rivaz. A nature poem where the post industrial landscape is reverting back to nature, but there is still a tension between its industrial past and the present. The past is not fully known or understood which stimulates the imagination.

THE POEMS – see [CITN](#) for the full features

CITN 60 – TOM GEORGE

Walking home

Staggering homeward in Lucozade lamplight
A portion of greasy chips carried at mouth height
Stabbing and loading, stabbing and loading
Stabbing and stumbling, wandering, mumbling
Moving forward in short, stupid steps

A chain of night hens, elbow-linked
Screech and totter, provocatively prone
Off into the night
Asked for a light
There's been a fight
A guy's on the ground - "Is he alright?"

Further up the road, I stand transfixed
By a party's thump and thud
Blank curtains divulge a tantalising glow

Students, probably
Close friends only
Am I really that lonely?

Steam clouds rise from a river of piss
And I'm off walking home
As pizza bikes drone

CITN 62 – GABRIEL GRIFFIN

Well, I Never Fell for that Story of the Americans Landing \$\$\$\$\$\$

she said the MOON) in TURKEY
is more how do you say ? ? ? BEAUTIFUL...
we asked but
SURELY !
it's just the SAME = as = HERE
she smiled : -) & the next day
brought a TURKISH moon (

& hung it on the wall
it GLOWED (GLEAMED (GLARED (
we stared enchanted °° °° °°
and we got quite HOOKED
on its dancing horns)()()(

CITN 86 – HILDA SHEEHAN

My Mother Spilt Herself

all over the kitchen floor. Like blood
she filled each crack and crevice;
a flood of herself, a flood of flesh and crying.
Her dress dripped of herself, dripped into pots and pans,
scraped to one side by knives and forks;
the walls moved in, peered over the mess
to get a closer look.

What if she'd spilt me too?
My broken up, clotted baby self
stained into scratch marks made through
pushing me out in pain;
cells dropped and spattered on the world:
such a giant cluster of girl!

CITN 89 – JOHN MURDOCH

IS A RED WHEELBARROW EVER EMPTY?

My doctor said I
needed to
breathe and drink lots of water.

Actually she
never said
anything about water.

My wife nags me to
drink water,
seven glasses every day.

My doctor says I
can't just breathe.
I have to pay attention.

Breathing in itself
means nothing;
I'm not to look for meaning.

I did hear the sounds
of silence
and I think one hand clapping

and a tree fall in
the forest
but I don't have the words to
explain them.

CITN 94 – DEE RIVAZ

Rhydymwyn Valley Works

Nothing exploded here but
in this valley of once toxic acres,
a drip crash-lands on a concrete floor,
loud as a bomb in the derelict space.
Ghosts insist this is still a place for secrets,
even now: no paper, no loose talk.

Sycamores joke with the wind, shake
fists of keys: nothing new to unlock.
An anxious pheasant tensions her legs
once, twice; uncertain, bungles take-off
in a fluster of khaki shades and shadows
of stories haunting these paths.

Autumn flames, tossed by the late sun
set a fuse the length of the valley; race
from white-gold leaf to scarlet berry,
White-letter Hairstreak, lizard, jay;
flash through broadleaf-trees and helleborine;
redeem, bless and cauterise the past.

JAMES BELL



Biography

James Bell - lives in Brittany, France. Now retired he has had a number of careers that include: mime artist, musician, technical rep, bar man, van driver and latterly adviser to disaffected youth. To date he has published a chapbook *the just vanished place* (2008) and *fishing for beginners* (2010) both from tall-lighthouse. He has also produced a limited edition CD of poetry and original guitar music entitled *O'Grady and Mount Fuji* (2002). For twelve years he was co-presenter on the *Uncut Poets* series at the Exeter Phoenix Arts Centre. Publication in online and terrestrial publications continues with recent and forthcoming appearances in: *Shearsman, Tears In The Fence, Upstairs at Du Roc, Elbow Room, Message in a Bottle, The Journal and Fire* amongst others. He is due to appear in several anthologies: *Underground, Ekphrastia Gone Wild* and *Dialect Poetry*. He also writes articles for an English language journal in Brittany.

Editorial

My review was of CITN issues 65-74, 95-104 and 116-120. I immediately noticed that these issues included a high proportion of woman poets, which delighted me, as I often feel women are under-represented in poetry circles in many ways. The gender balance has been reflected in my choice of poets to make up the final five poems; four by women and one by a man.

I wasn't sure what I was looking for here. Along with Alex and Lesley I agreed that poems and poets jumped out at you. For me this had something to do with reading poetry onscreen and online, to come over they had to have an immediacy, yet a depth that hit the eye and the mind; qualities I find that are teased out differently on a physical page. Poetry has a breathing space online that it does not on the page, you scroll rather than turn, lines can be very long; so they exist in almost another dimension that you look inside rather than hold solidly in the hand. This, I am sure, affected choice. It also broke down some prejudices I have developed over the years towards performance poetry and poetry with issues. The former tend not to come over on the page and the latter rarely being done well. I had a phrase in my head as I let poems jump and grab me: *muscular anarchy*. Like a poem it seemed to appear from nowhere yet seemed to fit what I was ultimately looking for.

The process was simply to read and ignore reputations etc. Then I took a break of several days after noting a series of poets and poems that drew me in for one reason or another, often I was choosing more than one poem from the same poet, which meant they would be looked

at again closer. After a week I went back to the final fifteen or so poems and then made the hard decisions.

These are the five:

Given a different brief would have chosen all of Lynn Strongin's poems (CITN 71) and *which of these wild birds will alight* is only the beginning of what is an ongoing interior monologue. Her writing reminded me very much of Emily Dickinson, for she writes from an enclosed perspective that explodes into a universal view. The anarchy is here in bundles, for visually (very different from Dickinson), titles blend into the body of a poem and some lines go on seemingly forever.

Helen Thomas (CITN97), broke my prejudice against performance work and her poem *the culinary puffer fish as a metaphor for my cutting words* made it maybe for the longest title, but also for a stark originality that combines playful short tongue twisting stanzas that spit in their angry metaphorical intent that is summed up aptly in the title. Interestingly this poem had original publication online.

Sharon Black (CITN98) in her poem *No Magician* has an elegant tension that is far beyond the average run of domestic based poems. It shows beautifully the final stand-off in an argument with a partner I assumed, which in the final stanza breaks down into tears after being so controlled and reasoning in the previous three. At least that was my interpretation gained from the verbal and visual impact of this poem.

Louie Crew (CITN99) the only male poet, got me worried as I had chosen poets and poems from three successive issues of CITN. His poem *Fay* was the final choice of a series of poems that come from his being a gay man, topical in a period when politicians are debating gay marriage. I decided *Fay* was not a person's name but the dictionary definition of "fairy". How people respond to his wearing an ear ring on the right ear-lob had more life influencing actions than the one I used to wear on my left.

Karen Knight (CITN 104) with *Knitting for the Red Cross* did a lot from the visual idea of a badly knitted garment in the poem shape to the absurdity of war exemplified by the boredom of the activity and the rules surrounding it. Original, anarchic and muscular in execution.

THE POEMS – see [CITN](#) for the full features

CITN 71 – LYNN STRONGIN

Which of these wild birds will alight

On the tenants roof at night once I am gone?
Telling stories not about the opera not from the Bible
Will they live deep down as I have done?
I find it hard to be harsh with Prue, said the older Irishwoman:
I sit out the bathroom & we speak back & forth while she is bathing.
Which wild birds. . .
Who will organize the printer's ball?

Costumeville I lived in, designing new costumes for this, that pain
who may bellow yes, Will sing sea-chants, or earth hymns?
Polished praises or raw psalms?
I will never see them, look into their eyes
what will their heritage, their faith be?
Will they wear round the neck crucifix or Star of David
I any emblem. Will they hold la miniature horse by the rein if they are blind? Will they have
a little Moll trailing after them if they are denied, the live alone, alone at heart kind?
What will be their good, their low times of day
as if they breathed with one heart, a family.
Will they be like their canary
a bird in a cage free only from time-to-time momentarily
barred again
their feathers not all of one satin
like a bridal gown.
They will not come forth n that case to take their vows all in one
moment but will gradually acquire them like moss a rolling stone.

CITN 97 – HELEN THOMAS

the culinary **puffer fish as metaphor** **for my cutting words**

The Japanese word
'sushi' means 'it is sour'
sometimes it's lethal

blowfish or puffer
by another name fugu
often is fatal

prepare for repast
take out prandial peril
tetrodotxin

deadly delicious
clean cuts render edible
go gall bladder, guts

bile free and spineless
sound bites edited; souped up
vitriol punctured

unsayable truths
filleted for consumption
in palatable portions

At times it has made otherwise sane folks
dangle from dormitory windows to giggle,
"Where's your husband?"
Worn with a cap and gown, it wards off
any threat of Respectability.
In class, it assures that students question
what I say and not vainly agree
because of who said it.
In church, it has made stranger priests
spill me a double portion of the Mass....
When I take it off, people take me
for any other mortal.

CITN 104 – KAREN KNIGHT

Knitting for the Red Cross

During WWI, all knitted items went through a quality check. If the piece was deemed poorly made or did not meet the required specifications, it was returned.

I don't know
how to turn
the heel
of this knitted
sock. It grows
to the length
of the room
and doubles back
onto my feet
and over my body
cocooning
me in khaki
and olive drab
tradition.
I should unstitch
myself and go
to the room
of clicking needles
and dark military
patterns where women
sing
through the drone
of a Zeppelin
cloud.