

# December Poems

A PK POETS PROJECT

## POEMS BY

JAMES BELL   JIM BENNETT   LESLEY BURT

NOEL CANIN   CATHERINE GRAHAM

MARTHA LANDMAN   D. MILNE   ERIC NICHOLSON

STUART NUNN   GRANT VAN WINGERDEN

# December Poems

A selection of poems written in December 2014 by the poets on the PK List

**JAMES BELL**

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**POEMS BY JAMES BELL**

## JAMES BELL – DECEMBER POEMS

### December one

notice the village now has Christmas lights  
hung between buildings  
on main street  
but switched off at noon

not many  
for there are few buildings opposite  
each other

notice each array is white  
against the grey sky  
dense with mist

both tell winter

### December two

we walk ankle deep in leaves  
that line a straight path  
now fully shed from young oaks  
bordering the Etang du Corlay  
lay natural browns below  
the ruined chateau  
where its fortified ramparts fly flags  
Breton  
French  
European  
so we both see and feel  
the cold easterly

## JAMES BELL – DECEMBER POEMS

### Decembre trios

all agree at the weekly market  
vraiment c'est Bretagne aujourd'hui  
avec le vent et la pluie

sit in the car to warm again

before me  
the dressed granite foundation stones  
of the old Huguenot chateau  
its lowest window with only rusted bars

nobody ever lived there  
or was imprisoned there  
but try to imagine life there

en decembre  
c'est normale avec  
le vent et la pluie

### December four

rain  
sparkles  
like continuous bead curtains  
colourless  
so I can see  
the oak  
almost bare now  
the only green its ivy

if I dressed in waterproofs  
and walked  
down the track  
there would be holly  
with berries too

## JAMES BELL – DECEMBER POEMS

### December five

framed between the gate posts  
a doe  
nibbles grass beside the track outside  
in a stillness  
and soft focus of mist  
moves on  
out of view  
as three others appear in line  
stop  
for a moment  
like targets at a fairground -  
these younger deer  
then reanimate  
become shy girls on an outing

all startle at a sound we do not hear indoors  
slip back to  
where the first appeared  
their wild beauty a memory

### December seven - cutting hazel

is not so bad as it seems  
when it is two year old  
ten foot branches  
cut by hand  
in case they snag a chain

sned the thicker ones  
into next year's bean poles  
or will be sawn down  
for kindling next winter season

as the temperature drops  
and light begins to fade  
briefly become face to face with  
the many others who did this  
long before me  
in this place

## JAMES BELL – DECEMBER POEMS

### December eight

split wood or freeze  
no contest  
but still freeze in  
work jeans  
warm fleece  
woollen sweater  
Breton cap  
and work gloves  
though splitting  
is by machine and  
makes me less connected  
than with axe work  
and other old traditions  
though rest and see  
patterns in the wood  
an oak river with dark flecks  
half a branch like a gun  
Rorschach in wood  
wonder what it says about me -  
hear a hunter shoot  
and his dogs bark  
the first snow falls in Scotland  
split wood or freeze - no contest

## JAMES BELL – DECEMBER POEMS

### December nine

the ruins nearby  
gradually fall  
and disappear under bramble  
ivy and self seeded willow  
that surrounds the old well  
topped for safety  
by a pallet I laid there  
earlier this year -  
it served a hamlet  
of thirty over fifty years ago  
when Michel and Yannick's  
grandmother lived in  
the long house now mostly  
submerged in thicket  
and only half a roof left -  
it is difficult to see  
the abandoned cider press  
behind it - Emile no longer  
has the *fête du pain* when  
bread was baked in an old oven  
just for fun within the ruin he owns -  
*je m'amuse* he said once -  
all this runs through my head  
as I drive past – though we still  
can say we once ate bread from there



## JAMES BELL – DECEMBER POEMS

### December ten

today was and still is  
sound  
as I listen to the Stones  
*Let It Bleed* album  
that contrasts  
with this afternoon's calm -  
its reinstatement  
of quiet where sound  
splits the stillness -  
hear Pierre hack at wood  
with hand tools  
the *pepinieres* further over  
chainsaws on his bocage -  
a large red tractor  
followed by a small  
red one - wonder if  
they are breeding -  
in the morning several cars  
too far apart for  
a mutual rendezvous  
for *un fête Noel* -  
a sound day in which  
some wood was also moved  
with appropriate moving sounds

## JAMES BELL – DECEMBER POEMS

### December eleven

reflect on reflections  
in the water  
a chiaroscuro of the sky  
continuous in greys and pinks  
whites and blues  
continuous as my path  
while we walk each footstep  
towards the end  
of another year when  
the path will not end  
as this one will

even then  
another will begin  
for us to walk along

the water moves  
in a wind to shatter  
the sky - makes me  
lift my head to check  
there is a path  
we have only paused along  
and still walk beneath the clouds

## JAMES BELL – DECEMBER POEMS

### December twelve

a newspaper reports says  
four hundred and twenty eight people  
have been poisoned this year  
by eating wild fungi in a bumper year  
it grows behind the garden shed  
in the compost heap  
under wood I stored on a pallet  
from a rotted tree trunk  
below the laurels  
beside the old well -  
people have been hungry  
so decided to have a taste  
cook up an omelette and so on -  
we are not hungry and resist  
the red tops with white spots  
that elves sit upon in cartoons  
and have no wish to shred others  
roll them and light up  
in order to hallucinate  
about elves sitting on toadstools -  
others have collected chestnuts  
and roasted them up -  
wonder if the four hundred and twenty eight  
have now done that instead  
of looking at cartoons of elves

### December thirteen

you see tonight through the window  
a natural slide from  
day towards night

where colours fade then disappear  
as if no longer wanted  
for a few hours

where ideas of being alive bring  
some necessary changes  
for tomorrow

## JAMES BELL – DECEMBER POEMS

### December fourteen

today we light a fire  
as dusk falls  
that will last  
until just before dawn

will be lit again  
sometime during the morning  
when nothing  
rises from the ashes again

they are after all only ashes  
to be thrown  
on the compost heap

### December fifteen

rain sheets  
from west to east  
a single jay  
pecks for insects  
in the ground  
then lifts  
flies over the field  
in a wide curve  
east to west  
to match  
wind direction  
from west to east  
rain still sheets  
as it does all day  
see no other birds  
or people

## JAMES BELL – DECEMBER POEMS

### December sixteen

dark  
short day  
illusion  
of heat  
so  
a short  
dark  
and cold  
poem

### December seventeen

the fire died  
while we were out  
first selecting books  
from the English library  
for reading over Fête Noel  
and after  
talked books there  
looked at the prospect  
of reading stories in French  
then translating them into English  
in a group  
this all done before  
the whole place closed  
for two weeks  
then off to the psychiatric hospital  
to visit  
and wait locked in  
the visitors room  
long enough to see  
the fifteen foot unclimbable fence  
inverted at the top outside  
then hugs and laughs  
and comic photos taken on my mobile phone  
a distance away from  
discussion on Anne Tyler  
and Alice Munro  
and no Christmas decorations

## JAMES BELL – DECEMBER POEMS

### December twenty two

shortest day  
so  
shortest poem  
of  
the year

### December twenty three

everything is still green  
except the trees  
sit bare  
expectant  
like those other trees  
I call sentinels  
this time of year  
up on the ridge  
lined up like the closer ones  
await some kind of command  
something yet to happen  
that will move winter on  
everything still being green  
was never part of the deal

### 25<sup>th</sup> December 1914

by now they knew the war  
would not be ending soon -  
then carols being sung in German trenches  
instead of the rhythm of guns  
with much lower notes or  
the powdered patter of much faster machine guns  
all silent because of Christmas day -  
white flags then *come on over Tommy*  
so Fritz and Tommy walk the killing ground  
to shake hands and share cigarettes  
a little schnapps or whisky  
in exchanges of more ordinary kinds  
with time to question why they fought -  
*Stille Nacht... Heilige Nacht... Alles schläft...*

## JAMES BELL – DECEMBER POEM

### December twenty six

watch jays beak force tufts of grass  
from the ground  
in search of insects beneath

a pair  
where she is more delicate  
and both are alert  
even in the open

these tree lovers  
ground feeders  
gawdiness against green

watch in silence  
their silence  
our day continues like that too

## JAMES BELL – DECEMBER POEM

### December twenty nine - on rising

open the window shutters  
on sun and heavy frost

dwell on mist  
in the middle distance

a piece of the orient  
displayed before me

then a whiff of wood smoke  
on a chilled breeze

our neighbour is up already  
and lit a fire

time to get cracking

### December thirty

later in the cafeteria  
of the psychiatric hospital  
we drink coffee and  
chocolat chaud  
are told about the  
Christmas celebration  
when there was a singer  
singing badly  
*By the Rivers of Babylon*  
while patients danced  
slowly together -  
briefly watch Tom and Jerry  
on the cafeteria TV -  
we all walk back to  
the unit in the cold  
of returning frost where  
all go home  
except one.



## JAMES BELL – DECEMBER POEMS

### Hogmany shuffle

remember the furst pint  
an the first wee nippy sweetie  
an the that wee riff goin aroon the heid  
about yer beginning being in yer end or summat  
like that ken  
the Dutch courage kicked in wi the second pint  
an a double nippy sweetie  
tagged along wi a crowd  
dinnae ken thum bit they wirnae bothered  
went birlin in an oot boozers early doors  
aw happy an aw that galimuffery  
dinnae remember when the legs startit  
tae go rubbery  
in that first pint an the nippy sweetie wiz the beginning  
ae the end  
sayed tae sumbody aa wantit tae talk tae a thistle  
because aa wiz drunk  
wantit tae stop wearin a vest  
an hae maa main meal at night  
they aa vanishered whoof intae the Edinburgh night  
left me tae nurse a pint then heard thru the fug  
it wiz nearly time fir the Tron  
wiz in the Grassmarket so it wiz goin tae be a climb  
some folk gaed me up Candlemaker Row  
then vanishered good Samaritans  
doon Chambers Street aw bleak hoose that tima ae night  
intil Nicholson Street when it got goin again  
sobered up a wee bit so better oan the pins  
doon tae the Tron fir the midnight bongs  
bigcrowdfloodlightstelecamerasmusic  
big bong  
awaaay haeey shake hands cuddles wi complete strangers  
waaay haeey  
kiss this girl and we sway a bit then laugh  
maybe do this again next year aa manage tae elucidate  
ay why not she says  
an that wee riff goes roun the heid as she disnae vanishered  
in wan endin is anither beginning  
or in beginin thirs a chance ae reachin the middle  
an decide ye dinnae need an end fir next year  
go dancin  
then fir a walk in the Meadows  
ignorin the snaw

**POEMS BY JIM BENNETT**

# JIM BENNETT- DECEMBER POEMS

**1**

**1<sup>st</sup> December 2014**

I lie in bed  
listen to the traffic  
pass along the road outside

the morning post pushed  
through the letter box  
falls on the floor

somewhere overhead a plane  
flies on its invisible roadway i  
its engines vibrate through the bed

there are noises everywhere  
the day is started and I am late  
but I wait just a few more minutes

eyes closed I listen for sounds  
I really want to hear  
movements and warmth

a casual arm laid across me  
instead a lorry pulls up outside  
and starts to unload

## JIM BENNETT- DECEMBER POEMS

**2**

**aria**

birdsong  
mother's song  
drunk song  
pop song

Country song  
western song  
30's song  
swing song

folk song  
jazz song  
blues song  
rock song

Beatle song  
Kink song  
Dylan song  
punk song

your song  
my song  
our song  
silence

## JIM BENNETT- DECEMBER POEMS

3

### Christmas at the library (1)

he has a wild face and eyes  
and yes his hair is wild  
his clothes scruffy  
but there is a piece of tinsel  
wrapped round his neck  
like a scarf

he sits legs splayed  
across the pavement  
outside the library  
as he plays a violin  
with a string missing  
its case propped open  
between his legs

the violin produces  
some sort of freeform sound  
and when people edge past  
he kicks at his case  
and stares at them  
some give in and drop a coin  
or two

*Merry Christmas* he says  
his face twitches  
looks wilder than ever  
his teeth broken and brown  
displayed in a snarl

## JIM BENNETT- DECEMBER POEMS

4

### Christmas at the library (2)

the library is quiet today  
some writers are coming  
but not here yet

I sit at the table between shelves  
of thrillers and science fiction  
reading seldom borrowed poetry

beside the photocopier  
sit two people in their 50's  
staring at each other

they are saying nothing  
doing nothing there is a book shape  
in his pocket perhaps a passport

to leave his wife for a new life  
in South America with his girlfriend  
and they meet up here

maybe they are married  
she has found her daughter is pregnant  
their son taking drugs

they don't now where to start  
secrets and lies  
are ripping them apart

he lost his job six months ago  
and hasn't told her yet  
she has cancer

they are strangers just met  
and already their lives  
have changed

they get up and come over to me  
want to know if I will  
read their poetry

I say no I don't want to spoil  
a happy relationship  
we've only just met

and anyway it is nearly Christmas

## JIM BENNETT- DECEMBER POEMS

5

### frost

it is cold this morning  
last night was the first frost  
and before I went to bed  
I put some of the delicate pot plants  
in the garden shed

I brought them out again  
into the early sunlight  
I will have to do this now each night  
until the spring  
unless I buy a cold frame

so cold and warming hands  
around a cup of tea  
I read the emails join with friends  
send a snapshot of the frost  
let them feel the cold

6

### dressed for Christmas

wrapped around the tree trunks  
stretched across the branches

the coloured wool knitted  
into cobwebs and quilts

tree jumper snail spiral  
bark crawler wood cover

trees dressed up for Christmas  
in coloured woollen jackets

wool graffiti yarnbomber  
crocheted squares and knitted scarves

## JIM BENNETT- DECEMBER POEMS

7

### the visit

the policeman knocked at the door  
at one o'clock in the morning  
I only opened it because  
I thought it might be carol singers  
or very late trick or treat people  
I didn't invite him in  
or make a cup of tea  
didn't ask him to sit down  
chat for a while  
or suggest I make him a sandwich  
I thought about offering  
to read him a poem  
or lend him a book  
tell him about the problem  
with the busker  
or the endless rows over parking  
and the queues outside Marks  
I didn't even listen to what he was saying  
because there were lots of lights  
and police cars outside  
then I wondered if he had called  
because of you know what  
but I didn't think TV licence  
out of date by three days  
was a police matter  
Bob from two houses away  
was out on the road looking around  
*well did you* the policeman asked  
*I will get it tomorrow* I said  
and just for luck added  
*I thought the plant was a Yucca*  
for a moment he had arresting eyes  
then thought better of it  
and walked away tutting  
while I had got away with it again  
but tomorrow I will get the licence  
then lets see what he can do about it  
and I might give the plant to Bob  
as a Christmas present  
it will serve him right



## JIM BENNETT- DECEMBER POEMS

8

### a poembomb for Christmas

for example I can say  
that when I started writing  
the sun was shining

as I reached the word *friends*  
it started to rain  
and now it is hailstones

you needed to know that  
or maybe you didn't  
but you do anyway

perhaps it alters the way I write  
perhaps it alters the rhythm  
perhaps it is a weather dance

perhaps I write about things  
that are yet to happen  
or never will

yes it is December  
and in a way peculiar  
to me I celebrate it

I bomb my friends  
with poems one each day  
to capture something of life

## JIM BENNETT- DECEMBER POEMS

9

### December

there is a a ritual to the dates  
five days before a December birthday  
the Christmas cards are written  
so they can be sent together

each day a milepost for the month  
the day I get the tree  
the day I get the decorations out  
the day I shop for this or that

everything is listed on the calendar  
that way nothing is forgotten  
it is perfect and delivers  
a Christmas appropriately on time

I recall past years by disasters  
the year the car broke down  
the post office closed by fire  
the tsunami the boat disaster

even more remote events in a year  
caused changes the twin towers  
made post to the US difficult  
and powder was an issue

so on the way to Christmas  
you have marked in some special days  
to do the things I couldn't do before  
the things I may forget

perhaps because I really could not  
think about them  
things we used to do  
that now I have to do alone

## JIM BENNETT- DECEMBER POEMS

**10**

**ten**

it is important to see what day ten  
of the advent calendar holds  
it was a gift from my friend  
a poet who challenges me to write  
each day and not waste a moment

last night I watched tv  
and Mick, Keith and Charlie  
were rocking at 71 71 and 72  
and the young new guy  
Ronnie in his late 60's

so now after 62 Christmases  
I have to learn a way  
to do it differently again  
like Mick and the guys  
I might do it disgracefully

I write to make each day new  
like the advent calendar  
I mark the days to Christmas  
preparing for a feast  
different but probably not

## JIM BENNETT- DECEMBER POEMS

11

for Lesley

is there some special way  
to acknowledge a milestone  
so far from home  
that the scenery changes

the clothes the shops  
even the language  
and the songs sound different  
time travel does that

even if it is into the future  
one second at a time  
and when you collect  
enough of them

there it is the future  
laid out before you  
but never as you imagined  
it to be

I hope you had a pleasant trip  
happy birthday

## JIM BENNETT- DECEMBER POEMS

12

14 days to go

the living room is filling up  
with bin bags full of presents  
labeled for the various days  
when family will arrive  
different groups  
at different times

so order is imposed  
by labels and organisation  
there is even a bag of gifts  
in case someone comes  
who is not expected  
usually wine or port

with cheese and cracker selection  
some children's games  
suitable for a broad age range  
and several small gifts just in case  
the policeman calls again  
or a traffic warden

## JIM BENNETT- DECEMBER POEMS

13

### butterflies

around each lamppost  
someone has twisted a strand of lights  
last year we had a twelve year old  
Christmas light display

butterfly wings spread  
ready for flight  
but people had complained  
when the lights began to fail

and when before Christmas  
only a few of the bulbs still worked  
and no one came to replace them  
we were told it was the deficit crisis

there was nothing on the lampposts  
when I went off to the library today  
but when I got home  
every one had its string of lights

a last forever rope of lights  
that will never need maintenance  
just turning on each Christmas  
personally I preferred the butterflies

## JIM BENNETT- DECEMBER POEMS

14

### mistletoe

this is a place for dog walkers  
and joggers and a short cut  
to Tesco but today for me  
I hope to find mistletoe

alongside the sidings  
the workshops and buildings  
the grade shown by an arrow  
nailed to a post

it points down the track  
to an abandoned signal box  
where the rails are rusted  
overgrown with grass

at the side of the railway  
is the footpath where I walk  
listening for the bird song  
and the passing ghosts of trains

## JIM BENNETT- DECEMBER POEMS

15

### a Christmas story

are you sitting comfortably then I will begin as all good stories do once upon a time there was a scientist who lived in a chateaux on a mountain somewhere in Wales on Sunday he was supposed to write a poem for Christmas instead he decided to call a press conference and show his great invention to the world no typewriters were damaged while writing this story although some choose not to believe that

*this is a bio reader* the scientist who lived on a hill in Wales said as he swung his short arm theatrically it was only normal length but his other arm was much longer after a laboratory accident the machine was like any other computer so there was little by way of response *what does it do you are asking* no one had but he pressed on *well I asked you to come so you can see that it takes a piece of bio material*

*and is able to reproduce some of the important events of that biomass's "life" its memories are recorded in its biological data* he turned on the machine and took a piece of steak pushed two wires into it the screen wavered for a few moments and then showed a field full of grass the view didn't alter but the grass from a cows point of view looked delicious *does it work with biomass of any animal*

one of the journalists asked *err human for example* the scientist was overjoyed with the question *yes of course* he took the wires from the steak attached a thirty centimetre spilke on the end of each and holding one in each hand drove them forward into the stomach of the journalist who had asked the question he soon bled to death and after a short time stopped twitching

the screen wavered for a few moments and then showed a field full of grass the view didn't alter but the grass looked delicious *does it only show grass* a journalist asked *so far yes* the scientist replied *but I need to test more subjects to be sure would you like to...* the journalist had backed away *very kind but Christmas families presents to get etc and anyway* he gestured at his colleagues the other mans grass is always greener



## JIM BENNETT- DECEMBER POEMS

16

Christmas decorations put up I went to bed  
I turned off my bedroom light  
it was there not the face of God  
but the next best thing light  
spilled into the room over the curtain top  
and the shadow it make on the ceiling  
was the skyline of Liverpool  
I saw it all recognised the buildings  
the silhouettes of towers cathedrals  
and waterfront  
when I listened I could hear the people  
and cars moving round the city streets  
I opened the curtains saw  
I had left the Christmas lights on  
so I closed the curtain sat down on my bed  
to enjoy the scene again but it was gone  
replaced by a Manchester skyline  
so I turned off the lights  
after all there is nothing magical about that

17

### learning to fear

my father taught me to fear  
the coming of a mushroom cloud  
listening tight lipped to the news

somewhere called Cuba  
someone called Kennedy  
something about ships

cold wars are wars fought  
in someone else's backyard  
and when I went out into mine

I searched the sky watched  
for the sight of bombers  
or the breath of wind

that would wipe away my street  
on Sunday the church was full  
people I had never seen before

praying to see another Christmas  
and now over 50 years later  
doing it again for different reasons

## JIM BENNETT- DECEMBER POEMS

18

### the groove

I change the stylus on the turntable  
take the black disc out of the sleeve  
hold it by fingertips on the edges  
make sure not to touch the grooves  
inspect it for dust or scratches  
then place it on the turntable  
set the speed to seventy eight  
move the arm carefully

sit down in the chair positioned  
in the rooms sweet spot  
press *play* on the remote control  
the arm lowers into place  
brushes and a tiny laser scour  
ahead and behind the stylus  
that follows the undulating track  
translates each movement into sound

Billy Holiday is singing Body and Soul  
there are some hisses and clicks  
but she is here in the room with me  
singing blues that makes me ache  
I have the same recording on a CD  
I play it sometimes  
but the cleaned up hi-fi version  
just isn't as good as this

## JIM BENNETT- DECEMBER POEMS

19

### the consequence of Christmas shopping

I am left with nothing more  
a succession of images  
that become current  
when some object recalls them

it doesn't have to be the whole thing  
some aspect a shape a face a colour  
and as these images were from life  
even a favourite perfume brings her back

like today buying the final forgotten  
Christmas cards I heard something  
familiar and immediately  
thought she was speaking to me

although the tangible things are gone  
music always will be associated  
with events places a song  
will play memories return

in this way my senses betray me  
I want to forget her  
but she comes unbidden called back  
by a past I cannot leave behind

## JIM BENNETT- DECEMBER POEMS

20

**“Sleigh bells ring, are you listening...”**

the street outside  
is full of songs that  
boom out of Santa’s Sleigh  
sat on the back of a lorry

Santa is up there  
waves and laughs  
while elves run along  
pavements with buckets

collect for the Rotary Club  
this year some things  
have been tired imitations  
of what they used to be

the Christmas lights  
decorations at the library  
but today the distorted songs  
sound as bad as ever

## JIM BENNETT- DECEMBER POEMS

21

### the carol singers

there is a choir  
freezing out in the carpark  
at Tesco

a few days ago it was  
the Salvation Army band  
less frozen in uniform

looking like they meant  
business like they could play  
until the last trump

and people stopped to listen  
but not today  
this choir means well

but they are out of tune  
and mostly it is a group  
of would be soloists

they are in uniform though  
every one of them  
has a red Christmas hat

## JIM BENNETT- DECEMBER POEMS

**22**

### **the longest night**

it was the longest night  
sometime in the 70's  
and we were high above  
the Soho streets

flat roofs and picnic blankets  
guitars and banjos  
an Indian Harmonium  
and wine bottles lined up

we sang Christmas carols  
and Beatles songs  
while we watched for UFO's  
and waited for contact

then slept until morning  
woke cold and hung over  
planned to do it again soon  
but never did

**23**

### **the Christmas tree**

the bat fell to the mat  
dead among pine needles  
and was mauled by the cat

after that the tree was not to be  
and two days before Christmas  
complete with decorations

it lay outside next to the bins  
and a artificial tree with branches  
like old toilet brushes

stands indoors in its place  
a strand of tinsel twisted  
around its spindly shape

## JIM BENNETT- DECEMBER POEMS

24

### **a phone call from my sister**

it is Christmas Eve and tradition says  
we phone and make promises to meet  
in the New Year we won't we know that  
but it is true when we say it only time  
turns it into a lie

so I am standing here near midnight  
phone call done promises made  
waiting to pick up Keara in an hour  
and looking down the length  
of Telegraph Road

like the railway lines that took her away  
the telephone wires appear to join up  
and at least that can bring her back  
for some moments while her voice  
hangs in my ear

25-1

### **after midnight**

it is the other side of midnight  
Christmas Day and the road is quiet  
the sky clear no sign of a flying  
reindeer or sleigh  
but I can see a few illuminated  
Father Christmases on rooftops  
clinging to chimney pots  
being battered in the wind

## JIM BENNETT- DECEMBER POEMS

**25-2**

**presents**

the wrapped presents  
brought down from the loft  
and while I went off to get Tom

they were spread in neat piles  
arranged in two stacks and sacks  
at one time there had been six

but as each child grew and went off  
their presents went with them  
toys became gifts for grandchildren

now we sit one last time in the moments  
before opening toast and tea ready  
carols playing wondering who will start

**26**

**smile it is Christmas**

you become aware of the room  
the darkness the day it is  
lie still a moment make squint eyes  
and that face make sure it is time

to be up open eyes wide  
push back the sheets  
get out of the right side of the bed

make way to toilet shave and shower  
stand for a while letting water  
run over you wipe away the dreams  
that might hang on

convince yourself you love porridge  
make breakfast plan the day  
who you will visit what to say

practise the smile that is the job  
you took on let your children see  
you smile so they believe in Santa  
so they believe that everything is alright



## JIM BENNETT- DECEMBER POEMS

**27**

**snow**

the snow falls  
deap and thick on the wall  
a white curtain across the grass  
in the bean of the garden light  
like in a cinema  
when the credits roll

**28**

**spoiler**

you accused me of spoiling  
films for you  
of saying who did what  
or how it would end  
but sometimes I was wrong  
missed the final twist  
or sucked in by a red herring

sometimes an ending  
can be different  
to what I thought it would be  
like Christmas and that fall of snow  
all gone within hours

## JIM BENNETT- DECEMBER POEMS

29

### notes

people are singing in the bar by the station  
the lights of the windblown Christmas tree  
on the veranda hang like broken strings  
no longer looped over the imitation branches

outside people stand on the pavement  
shiver in the frost as they smoke  
some wrap their arms around themselves  
stamp their feet some wait for a train

in an alleyway two people try to make love  
a girl bent over her hands on a wall  
a man pressed up behind her  
trousers down to his thighs

a womans voice *hurry up I'm freezing*  
a man's voice *keep still then*  
two others stand at the opening to hide  
them and stare out at me

I stop to write in my notebook  
I don't have Charlie as an excuse  
so I gaze at a train in the station as I write  
pretend to be a train spotter

## JIM BENNETT- DECEMBER POEMS

**30**

**dust**

a new neighbour I don't know  
invites me for drinks  
full of smiles and good wishes  
I thank him say *no thanks*  
he shrugs walks off  
mutters something

he is the first person  
I spoke to this week  
probably the last this year  
I am ready to tell everyone  
I have things to do I am busy  
but no one asks or phones

even the new neighbour  
didn't really ask me in  
he just looked like he would  
so I shut the door before  
he could come over and ask  
people are to damn friendly

the decorations are still up  
but everything looks shabby  
ready to be dusted put away  
next year I may move to a new place  
somewhere no one knows me  
where I never put them up again

**31**

**afterwords**

the decorations in the shops  
replaced by sale signs  
*special offers* and *big reductions*  
crowds search for bargains  
December melts away

**POEMS BY LESLEY BURT**

# LESLEY BURT - DECEMBER POEMS

1

## In the shopping precinct next to the Criterion Arcade

A man stands on his head  
to play guitar and sing; shoppers  
pause to look, don't stay

to hear the whole song;  
it sounds unremarkable;  
*I mean, someone says, Hendrix*

*played in all kinds of  
crazy angles, but he was  
kind of electric anyway.*

He plays on, looking awkward,  
with a rolled-up sweater  
between hair and paving slab.

Later I pass him outside M & S,  
upside-down again, still only  
a few pence in the hat.

## LESLEY BURT - DECEMBER POEMS

2

### Oughts

Perhaps I should write about Christmas cards;  
write in Christmas cards; read for an assignment,  
take this banana skin out to the bin.

Instead, I stare at my screen; my desk  
with an Ipad resting on *Language in Literature* (Toolan),  
a diary, an unopened *Mslexia*;

a more-than-half-read *Literary Theory* (Culler),  
half-concealing a fabric-covered  
notebook of scribbles about these books

and others, including a Wilde essay;  
digital radio (switched off so I can focus on noises  
of our cul-de-sac bins being emptied);

stacked in-trays; a *Really Useful Box*  
of manicure equipment, placed right here  
to remind me to file my fingernails;

and an almost-finished black coffee; on the mug  
a picture of a robin one side, robin's egg the other,  
in honour of this season and the next.

## LESLEY BURT - DECEMBER POEMS

3

### Visiting Santa in the Garden Centre

Garden furniture and barbecues have been  
moved out; rooms twinkle with trees,  
singing snowmen, displays of Alpine villages.

Thomas the Tank Engine circles elves;  
aisles are lined with rows and rows  
of colour-coordinated bells and baubles.

Real reindeer munch hay, trot over to press  
damp nostrils against sides of the enclosure.  
Children emerge, wide-eyed, from the Grotto.

We drink coffee; watch from the cafe area  
still decorated with blown-up photos  
of crocuses, lilies, cow parsley.

4

### Leaving the Maternity Unit

Last sighting is monochrome,  
silent CCTV movie: her, purposeful,  
hurrying out of automatic doors  
wearing T-shirt and hospital slippers,

clutching her days-old baby,  
headed towards the Clifton Bridge;  
oblivious before the boyfriend  
and mother made televised pleas.

## LESLEY BURT - DECEMBER POEMS

### 5

#### **Pilates Class**

The room, empty but for boxes  
of exercise mats, shelves of foam blocks,  
an instructor in joggers.

I have a first-day-of-school feeling;  
a return of the watch-the-others, don't-  
make-a-fool-of-yourself impulse.

Then disparity between what I envisage  
my arms, legs, shoulders are doing,  
and what others can see.

At the end, reflecting on the value  
of personal exercise:  
body, psychology, images of self.

### 6

#### **Unfamiliar Ritual**

I hang tree decorations, remembering  
those from long ago: my parents'  
post-war glass fruit and icicles;

'60s silver six decorated with snowflakes,  
bought in Paderborn Toc H while my son,  
aged three-and-a quarter, sang

*Good King Wences Last Looked Out.*  
This year, he is off to Oz for our  
first-ever separate Christmas dinner.



## LESLEY BURT - DECEMBER POEMS

7

### **Last night we dressed the tree**

this morning click festive switches  
into twinkle mode think  
*let there be light*  
then raise the blinds

the sun preparing to rise casts orange  
on the underbellies of clouds  
that hover a while  
as if to catch its warmth

8

### **Apartments to Let**

Estate agents' signs line up,  
like United Nations flags, showing  
their colours along the street.

Meanwhile, Big Issue vendors  
take up their frosty pitches,  
breathe steam, stamp feet.

9

### **A short summary of things *Womans Own* tried to teach me**

If you can't be blonde, add a colour:  
brown hair is for house-mice;

pretty means lipstick and eye-liner:  
paint before your husband comes home;

a perfect wife must combine roles  
of mother, chef, cleaner and tart;

interest yourself in your man's hobbies;  
do not expect him to look at your knitting.

Above all, never let him know if you are  
cleverer or stronger; allow him all the ideas.

I paid attention only to Agony Aunts:  
marriage turned out to be a disaster.

## LESLEY BURT - DECEMBER POEMS

10

### Women Picking Olives

There are those who see  
beyond seasons' quiet rhythms:  
changing sky, rain on fields,  
the heat and chatter of the harvest,

to nuances of green: leaves,  
olives; the way earth rolls inside -  
not underneath - a swirling sky.

Van Gogh, Women Picking Olives (1889) The Metropolitan Museum Of Art, New York  
<http://www.metmuseum.org/collection/the-collection-online/search/436536>

11

### The Coast at Midnight

Ocean puckers beneath  
a moon-cast trail that fades  
to some out-of-sight place

where the earth evaporates;  
where dragons – once mere  
candle-flame – torch forests.

One thin pine threads  
black field to navy sky;  
its needles prickle stars.

12

### Aspects of this Morning

Halo of a street lamp  
transformed by double-glazing into  
orange-sherbet spines;

heaps of leaves on the doormat,  
blown into the porch by the high  
north-westerly of a long rainy night.

Half-moon, hidden by clouds,  
shining still where this wind blew earlier,  
and where sunrise will come later.

## LESLEY BURT - DECEMBER POEMS

13

### Story Time

*Well*, she said. Everyone stopped  
texting, playing Candy Crush Saga,  
shuffling feet, looking at crumbs  
under the table, or outside at passers-by.

Cups clattered down onto saucers.  
They all gazed at her. *This*  
*is what really happened*. You'd think  
she had said, *Once Upon a Time*.

14

### The Green Man on the 14th

A week before winter solstice  
he blots out sunlight  
with dark billows,

showers windscreens,  
the holly and ivy, wipes frost  
away; waits for the shortest day.

15

### Missing at Christmas

That job-lot of wrapping paper  
the family bought in bulk,  
so all pillow-cases Santa filled,  
for six years or so, had  
a special scent, more exciting  
than cinnamon-and-ginger;

my mother's annual comment  
about how quiet we all were  
when dinner was on our plates;  
and this year our son, off to  
warmer constellations; but still  
under the same old moon.

## LESLEY BURT - DECEMBER POEMS

**16**

### **One day too late for the Christmas market**

All mulled wine poured and swallowed,  
holly-wreaths, silver-craft, and carvings sold,  
cinnamon-and-ginger pot pourri packed away:  
shuttered sheds, silent as winter beach huts.

**17**

### **In the B&B**

Rain hammered the window all night  
so roads swish under wheels  
getting people to work;  
the Abbey Tower's rim rises,  
floodlit above dark wet roofs;  
radiators clunk into heat, reminding me  
it's time to shower before breakfast,  
relieved that flight BI 53 from Brunei  
landed safely in Melbourne.

**18**

### **A Dozen Dead Communards**

Models who can't fidget, slouch  
in two ranks of open coffins; ragged,  
without embalment; all numbered  
out of sequence, with two labelled: 4.

8 seems to return the lens's gaze  
with defiance; in refusal to accept  
the enduring image of indignity  
imposed by Disderi's camera.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Communards#mediaviewer/File:Communards\\_in\\_their\\_Coffins.jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Communards#mediaviewer/File:Communards_in_their_Coffins.jpg)

## LESLEY BURT - DECEMBER POEMS

19

### **Making Do with an Artificial Tree**

It isn't the uniformity of branches,  
neatness of shape, or metal stand;  
it's because there are no mysterious  
spaces close to its trunk  
with hidden twigs to hold another  
glass icicle, string of lametta;  
it's not that you miss sticky sap,  
a mess of needles spiking the carpet,  
hissing up the Hoover, then hauling  
the whole thing out to the bin  
for twelfth night. It's that scent of pine  
that should be in the room.

20

### **The owners must really love it**

An old cabin cruiser painted white,  
built before fibreglass moulding;  
you'd have been well off to own a boat  
in those days when most families  
travelled to work and school on buses  
bikes and shoe leather. A crane  
must have hoisted it into this bungalow's  
tiny front garden. There it rests,  
on its keel, prow touching one fence,  
stern the other; stained, peeling,  
blocking light from all the windows.

21

### **As evening settles around the Needles**

Seaweed dries on pebbles,  
makes a threadbare green carpet  
where boats sprawl, helpless, shackled.  
In the next car along, a family  
eat chips from cartons, lick fingers;  
two gulls settle on the sea wall,  
look across the Solent, quiet  
as old chaps with grey stubble.

## LESLEY BURT - DECEMBER POEMS

22

### In the Stroke Unit

They read, side by side on the bed,  
from *Poems on the Underground*:  
*Tyger, Tyger, Will You, Won't You*,  
something by McGough;  
chuckle quietly now and again.

Another daughter arrives  
with nail clippers, emery boards  
and bowl of water; begins  
a manicure. Her mother winces,  
grips the book in her other hand.

23

### Sonny's Fourth Christmas

He can't wait to scramble  
out of his car seat; runs indoors  
to check the gold stars, reindeer  
are still on the tree, lights  
still twinkling; notices that  
the pile of presents has grown  
since last week. He gazes  
a while; turns to say, *I see  
you are still getting ready.  
What shall I have to eat?*

24

### Well Wrapped

The best present In the stocking  
when I was ten was *Little Women*;  
best, aside from the story: the paper,  
patterned with Rudolph and Santa,  
folded round the cover  
as an extra book jacket that lasted  
through the first half-dozen readings.

## LESLEY BURT - DECEMBER POEMS

25

### Midwinter

Always, after the solstice,  
darkness deepens its attraction;  
I refuse to notice sounds  
of traffic, radiators clicking  
into daily routine; to look  
towards dawn encroaching  
through a thin space  
under the blackout blind.

26

### Selection Box Day

I offer you these:  
cards, carols, candy – open,  
shut them, line them up;  
Quality-Street, Thorntons –  
suck, share, melt on fingers;  
paper, bows, labels: wrap,  
rip, crumple, chuck in bins;  
tenor, bass, soprano: sing  
unison, solo, harmonies.  
My words, your stories.

27

### Dregs

Coffee cups and crumbs  
decorate tables and floor;  
mince pies under glass tempt  
the queue of customers  
on a break from shopping;  
a woman folds into tears  
as she tells people at the next table  
that, after Christmas lunch,  
her father died, just suddenly,  
and all her friends are away.

## LESLEY BURT - DECEMBER POEMS

28

### In Frost

Beside a couple on the quay,  
who squint towards mid-morning sun  
across clusters of ducks  
paddling through reflections  
of moored dinghies: a gull,  
who mimics their hunched shoulders.

30

### Selling Shirts to Europeans

It's hotel changeover day, when newcomers arrive,  
pasty-white, captivated by exotic knickknacks,  
colours, palm trees and white sand; not yet irritated  
by traders' regular interruptions: *Hello Ma'am, Sir.*

So Raj is surprised when a tanned tourist calls him;  
he steps away from the other traders holding up saris  
that flutter like bunting; lays out his range of shirts:  
electric blue, emerald, fuchsia pink and amethyst silk.

The Englishman chooses six; hasn't brought cash  
to the beach so Raj hands them over, agrees to meet here,  
before the airport coach leaves. Raj waits, watches,  
until fishing boats are in and the sun slides into the sea.

31

### Last New Year's Eve

I reviewed the year;  
found it felt as though  
I travel backwards,  
as if on an express train,  
looking at images  
of holidays that were  
over as soon started,  
my grandson growing,  
hilarious parties,  
poetry written and read.  
This year I tried  
to look, instead,  
in the direction I am going.  
I can't see even a blur.



**POEMS BY NOEL CANIN**

## NOEL CANIN - DECEMBER POEMS

2

### **Cricket at Christmas**

Summer brings Christmas to Durban.  
Our parents give us a cricket bat, wickets,  
and a proper cricket ball.  
In the early morning sun we stake out  
the pitch in the back yard.  
Bat in hand, my mother runs,  
while my brother roars and the  
little one scrabbles for the ball  
among the pineapples in the rockery.  
My father smiles from the veranda,  
not only because her breasts lift and fall so eagerly  
under an old cotton pyjama top, but because  
everyone is smiling, the hour is kind,  
and it's Christmas Day.

2

### **Lazy Afternoon**

**For P.D. James and Jim Bennett**

Turning over,  
making space  
for silence,  
shedding leaves,  
cocks crowing.  
The slow shushing wind  
and the spin of the washing machine.

Small actions of the day,  
books by the bed.  
P.D. James and Adam Dalgliesh –  
naturally.

## NOEL CANIN - DECEMBER POEMS

3

### Between Heaven and Earth

When my children heard about Christmas  
their eyes opened, their mouths made  
little dark caves of wonder – presents, lots of  
presents under a tree inside the living room.  
You do things backwards, observed my son,  
trees aren't for inside.

I decided not to break the news of a fat old man  
who comes down the chimney with a bag of gifts  
on his back, while a bunch of reindeer hang out  
above the roof suspending a sleigh between  
heaven and earth.

So we talked about giving and receiving  
and my daughter leaned against me and  
said you like giving us presents just  
because it's Tuesday and they fell about  
laughing at this odd mother of theirs  
who speaks Hebrew with a different  
accent and likes trees inside the house.

4

### Christmas in Israel

Russian and Christian stores  
sell Christmas lights, tinsel,  
cards with Peter Pan masquerading  
as Father Christmas - I swear those two  
are brothers, or at least first cousins.  
There are green plastic trees,  
decorations that hold the tree to gravity,  
and Bethlehem fills with all nations,  
languages, and dress. At midnight,  
when Silent Night comes pacing the air  
my heart lifts, stretching back  
to a home no longer there.

## NOEL CANIN - DECEMBER POEMS

7

### **Abundance**

There was no money  
for presents that year.  
But we took a stand. So  
our parents took us window  
shopping on Sunday night.  
All the shops were lit with  
red, green and gold. And stars  
hung in loops with reindeer in  
the distance.  
You each have ten rand, said my  
mother, and my father gave us  
monopoly money. My brother  
said don't lose it, the little one  
nodded, pressing his nose to the glass.  
We pointed, consulted, added up for each other.  
Within an hour, absorbed and triumphant,  
we had our carefully written gifts. All the way  
home, the back seat was wreathed in grins  
wider than the Drakensberg Mountains.  
And on Christmas morning, under  
proudly lettered gifts in red and  
gold, we each found a shilling and a pencil.

## NOEL CANIN - DECEMBER POEMS

9

### Larks

Christmas, weddings, and funerals  
are a recipe for trouble,  
my mother always said.  
So I thought I'd skip the wedding  
and get divorced,  
prepare my own funeral  
ahead of time,  
and wish everyone Christmas  
with people we really love  
in a home radiant with  
home-made bread,  
mulled wine, gifts  
truly chosen from the heart,  
no leaks, electricity failure,  
floods or rejections from the  
love of your life – Oh  
and may there be peace on earth  
and goodwill to women

9

### Invisible

When he returned at midnight  
the living room was decked with  
bright rippings of wrapping paper,  
dregs of mulled wine and  
plates of gingerbread crumbs.  
They had opened gifts without him.

10

### Christmas during Apartheid

Black brown and white children  
press their noses to the glass.  
Some are motionless,  
silent.  
Some point,  
beseech.  
The mist on the glass is the same.

## NOEL CANIN - DECEMBER POEMS

**10**

### **Christmas at the Canins**

Her husband got drunk and  
threw her into the street.  
So she came to live with us  
and brought her kids.  
I remember the bruise  
on her cheekbone and how  
everything settled into place  
snug as a field mouse buggy.  
We were still peacefully together  
at Christmas a year later.  
Her father dressed up as Santa  
and all the Jewish kids in the  
neighborhood came to see  
Christmas at the Canins.  
For a second we thought  
he was real. And then he got  
hot and took the bright red  
jacket off and hung his beard  
over the dining room chair.

**11**

### **The Scent of Home**

For Martha

The paraffin heater on kibbutz was squat,  
gray, and concave to reflect heat.  
We cleaned the reflector with tooth paste  
because it was free and made the heater  
shine like a brand new Massey Ferguson.

When the first rains fell in the desert  
doors were flung open and we'd dance  
in mad relief on the wet and grateful grass.  
I'd light the heater, set an empty  
Nescafé tin inside, fill it with water,  
orange peel and a cinnamon stick.  
Watch the steam rise while the room filled  
with the scent of Christmas and home.

## NOEL CANIN - DECEMBER POEMS

13

### A Small Christmas Tale

She remembered watching her husband  
carve the wooden star some seventy years before.  
It was their first Christmas together.  
He wore the green jersey she'd knitted  
with the reindeer on the pocket.  
She remembered how he'd held  
the ladder for her.  
How she'd looked down at him then  
and felt herself come home.

14

### Miseria – 14/12/14

The cooking done,  
the house aglow,  
gifts serene  
beneath the tree.  
Sun and snow  
wrap the globe  
in white and gold  
and iron bells raise the  
tolling air. Midnight,  
Silent Night,  
Peace on earth, goodwill to men -

those under fire, those in terror,  
the condemned and the innocent,  
the blind and the oblivious.  
Those who embrace  
and those who shun embrace,  
sleep in heavenly peace.  
Misa Solemne De Homine.  
Misa Solemne De Nochebuena  
Peace be with us all this day and forever more.  
This day and forever more.

## NOEL CANIN - DECEMBER POEMS

18

### A Peaceful Christmas and a Graceful New Year

Remembered the candles,  
forgot the doughnuts.  
Up the hill and into the store.  
Trays and trays of sticky red jam  
squeezing from oily buns.  
The young Christian girl  
selling doughnuts for Hanukkah  
wore Santa's red hat edged in white snow  
and a luminous smile.  
Christmas trees and doughnuts  
kept each other company,  
as if people weren't killing each other  
a few miles up the road in Jerusalem.



## NOEL CANIN - DECEMBER POEMS

18

### Generations at Tea

James' Grandmother was stirring her tea  
in the visitors' lounge.  
The teaspoon, sterling silver,  
glinted like her hair,  
strands escaping the combs  
her grandmother  
used to wear in India.

James, dear boy, let's go down  
to the bench under the Willows  
and have a nice long talk.  
Don't guffaw darling,  
that gaggle of old biddies  
in the corner will have my  
liver on toast for breakfast.  
Good afternoon, ladies,  
Merry Christmas.

Yes dear, but what was he doing in a closet –  
dreadful American expression –  
He wasn't doing anything, Gran,  
he just came out of it.  
James, it is high time you made  
use of God's English and said  
what you mean, and since we're  
on the subject, when were you  
going to tell me that you're gay.

## NOEL CANIN - DECEMBER POEMS

20

### Christmas Special

*For my father*

When the boats left Durban  
carrying men to war, a lady in white  
stood at the furthest tip of the wharf  
singing 'We'll Meet Again',  
until every last streamer  
binding soldier and family  
had drowned in the Indian Ocean  
and the men could no longer see her.

Now, ship's engines vibrate, passengers  
throw green, red and golden streamers  
to friends and family on the wharf.  
A special Christmas voyage.  
As the ship pulls away, dyed streamers stretch,  
snap between hands, fall one by one  
to a sea long littered with partings.

## NOEL CANIN - DECEMBER POEMS

22

### Mon Repos

For Jeff and Sam

Quiet room.

Rain. Dim voices  
away from here.

The tiny fountain  
shuffles and bubbles  
under the window.

And as I sit here,  
orchids blooming  
in the window light,  
Loggerhead turtles  
ride Pacific currents  
to Mon Repos,  
their eggs silent shells  
about tiny turtlings  
dreaming in the  
pull and tug of the  
great mother sea.

In Australia, now,  
a man drives to Mon Repos.  
He is not alone. Every year  
turtles and humans are  
driven towards each other  
for the grand inevitability  
of creation, the dance of eons.  
Eggs crack. Hatchlings  
feel sand, smell sea air, know  
the steadfast magnet of the sea.

## NOEL CANIN - DECEMBER POEMS

24

### Midnight on Christmas Eve

She lay quietly,  
far into the shadows on the edge of life.  
White sheets gleamed in patches  
as the door opened and closed, letting in  
and cutting off nurses as they chatted, laughed,  
or made plans for the weekend.  
Ordinary things that seem fantastic inside a room  
sinking into the chaste stillness that would carry  
her mother just a little bit further.

**POEM BY CATHERINE GRAHAM**

# CATHERINE GRAHAM - DECEMBER POEMS

**Monday 1<sup>st</sup> December 2014**

The Boomtown Rats  
didn't like them.

The Mamas and Papas  
didn't trust them.

But this is  
no ordinary Monday.

This is Cyber Monday –  
And the beginning of Advent.

**POEMS BY MARTHA LANDMAN**

# MARTHA LANDMAN - DECEMBER POEMS

**1.12.2014**

## **Cheer up! Santa**

On the first day of Christmas  
summer starts in Adelaide  
Santa's not ready to drag  
a sleigh across the colonnade

On the first day of Christmas  
when my children come to me  
with lists as long as stockings  
I send the angels out to sea

On the first day of Christmas  
I have nowhere else to be  
read twelve lines of Bukowski  
stick a bluebird to the tree

**3.12.2014**

## **Nothing caught my eye today**

until at dusk a brown duck  
crossed the busy city street  
and later the silver-cold moon  
like a wise star led us  
to the Goodwood Groove  
it was all Latin-American food  
Hungarian folk dancing  
and children in end of year-mood  
when we arrived in time  
for the *encore* song  
too late for Christmas cheer



## MARTHA LANDMAN - DECEMBER POEMS

**4.12.2014**

**Adelaide at 7.25 pm**

A soft sun illuminates the park  
the sky's an orange glow  
here December meanders  
through lazy summer days  
streets are green oak tunnels  
and Jacarandas lay their carpets  
in this city of churches  
and Tudor-style homes  
while gigantic red ribbons  
mark the season of joy  
if I could tear this day  
like a leaf from a book  
I would ask the moon to be my light  
every time I read it during winter

**5.12.2014**

**Santa has gone viral**

in Adelaide city  
the mayor abandoned the chimney  
for a fundamentally different way  
to meet Santa  
on smartphone or tab  
along the red dots on the footpath  
where digital reindeer graze  
and Santa's sleigh loops the giant tree  
where presents fly around Central Market  
and Rudolph waits to catch the bus

## MARTHA LANDMAN - DECEMBER POEMS

**08.12.2014**

**The moon is messy tonight**

a vulnerable ball  
it illuminates the cloud castle  
air thick with humidity  
amongst a row of palms  
possums at play  
this sweltering night  
of stifled humidity  
a tropical Advent

**12.12.14**

**At 2.03 am on the twelfth day**

All week long the days  
brooded and built

thunder clouds  
threatened to storm and hail

winds begged to be let loose  
in the backyard

lightning whipped  
like a farmer's fury

at 2.03 am when at last  
the rain appears

the house lit up  
like a Christmas tree

## MARTHA LANDMAN - DECEMBER POEMS

**13.12.2014**

**In my letterbox**

Thirteen days into the Season  
my letterbox overflows —  
offices for 24 months @ half rent  
smart phones to stay in touch  
with Australia Post this Christmas  
an important message  
about my electricity supply  
*Best & Less* underwear  
for all things great and small  
the Salvation Army's Christmas Appeal  
cash offered for my gold  
digital gadgets for almost free  
someone to mow the lawn  
but all I wanted was reindeer  
a sleigh in the snow  
a fat old chap in a red suit

**15.12.2014 I will put up a tree**

for the *Carols by Candlelight* dumped  
into darkness by a power failure  
the muted sound system

for the songs of holy nights  
and a baby in the crib  
for the lack of season cheer  
in the shops with warnings  
not to sit on Santa's lap

I will put up a tree

## MARTHA LANDMAN - DECEMBER POEMS

**16.12.2014**

### **Outside my window**

mynah birds attack the deck  
for leftover cat food  
the noisy little buggers  
mess up my morning sleep  
their shrillness a sign of hope  
for as long as the birds sing  
and the frogs croak  
as long as sparrows nest  
and crickets crick-crack  
cyclones are held at bay

**17.12.2014**

### **One night of rain**

and the earth is a green carpet  
rolled out for a man in red, his sleigh  
full of parcels for those  
who have been good this year

**18.12.2014**

### **When I want ritual**

I'd rather make a coffee  
or light a pipe  
than clean  
a vinyl record  
for a table  
turning  
carols  
while  
awaiting  
Santa  
then  
I'll make  
Pavlova  
to remind  
me that elsewhere  
Christmas is a white affair

## MARTHA LANDMAN - DECEMBER POEMS

**19.12.2014**

**For us a child was born**

Poets are writing  
a challenge a day  
and here I am  
a dry lump of wood  
arrested by the visuals  
of a siege that overturned  
the Season of Joy  
at a time when words  
like sinister motivation  
and peaceful negotiation  
flirt alongside those  
of an ancient prophet  
*for us a child was born*

## MARTHA LANDMAN - DECEMBER POEMS

**20.12.2014**

### **A father's dream**

Twenty days into the Season  
I visited a friend in hospital  
startled  
to find a hard-core veteran  
diminished  
skin and bone,  
his mind frail  
while only six days ago  
he was still a grumpy old fart

another friend  
died of cancer  
early in the year  
a little bundle of bones  
her kindness a soft fragrance

and I wondered again  
what besieged a father,  
whose dream it was  
to see his daughters in white  
uniform married to good men,  
to have wished for me  
to become a nurse  
and I'm pleased that for once  
I disobeyed him

# MARTHA LANDMAN - DECEMBER POEMS

**21.12.2014**

## **Summer Solstice**

Over here  
on the longest day  
I mourn  
the start  
of the count down  
to the shortest  
day of the year

How I love  
the sapphire  
days of summer  
walks along the beach  
memories  
of wine  
around  
a winter fire

**24.12.2014**

## **Christmas Eve**

Santa is ready to leave  
the North Pole and start  
the ride down under  
children need to be tired out  
to go to bed for the great event  
in the park little ones  
and teenagers  
run after the ball  
like wild gazelles  
the girls in flowing long dresses  
and orange, purple and red hijabs  
have no problem  
keeping up with the boys

# MARTHA LANDMAN - DECEMBER POEMS

**25.12.2014 HO HO HO!**

Santa's at the door  
everywhere he spreads  
colourful parcels  
underneath  
Christmas trees  
reindeer  
have a sip of water  
while Rudolph  
polishes the sleigh  
the world waits  
in anticipation  
of little hands  
and big ones  
to unwrap the cheer

**26.12.2014**

**Boxing Day humidity**

For once the birds  
have the world to themselves  
magpie geese slide across the water  
to find a tree where they sit  
like fishermen on a dry branch

There's no danger from the L-plater  
taking the bend at 0.08 km per hour



## MARTHA LANDMAN - DECEMBER POEMS

**27.12.2014**

### **Morning strolls**

unhurried  
around the river,  
from the water  
a great white egret  
watches,  
admires  
two stand-up paddlers  
keeping rhythm,  
their balancing act  
a slow waltz  
on a breezeless day

**28.12.2014**

### **Most things**

seem to have the rhythm  
of love-making  
the build-up  
to a crescendo  
Christmas day  
the guidance to a tree  
sharing of gifts  
the detachment after  
a slow cigarette  
and all the while  
you wonder  
is this it?

## MARTHA LANDMAN - DECEMBER POEMS

**29.12.2014**

### **Two days later**

the big white egrets  
still sit motionless in the water

the river, quintessence of constancy,  
sly as a snake baking in the sun

meanwhile the wild parrots'  
plundering of the leaves  
high in the trees  
as ferocious as their gossip:  
new-year cyclones,  
senseless crimes  
the loss of children

all the while the morning sun  
bakes an olive crust on my skin

**30.12.2014**

### **December haiku**

three days' silence  
at dusk Somalia returns to the Charlotte Street park  
New Year's Eve a colourful explosion

**31.12.2014**

### **I refuse to keep**

new-year resolutions  
let them clutter my life  
take hostage of my brain

I refuse the frail little mongrels  
space between my ears

one task ticked off  
from next year's to-do list—  
*apologies to myself*

**POEMS BY D. MILNE**

## D. MILNE – DECEMBER POEMS

### 1

#### ADVENT CALENDAR

Today we got out  
the advent calendar truck  
painted red and green  
with 24 tiny compartments  
like specially adapted  
lorries used for racing  
pigeons.

Our winged creatures  
are smaller - their wings  
metaphorically huge  
24 tiny angels who will sing  
no doubt angelically  
come Christmas Day.

Christmas has started early  
the table tree wears  
tiny wooden decorations  
from Turkey and  
fairy lights white  
as the jasmine flowers  
scenting the garden

My grandson's round  
eyes sparkle.

### 2

#### ?JASMINOIDES

Long white tubes  
of flowers on the tree  
whose name I have forgotten  
bunches of tiny angel trumpets  
or cascades of falling stars  
smell of heaven.

## D. MILNE – DECEMBER POEMS

3

### UP TO DATE

How  
many  
angels  
can dance  
on the top  
of Burj Khalifa?  
Do they dance the sarabande  
up there amidst the whirling sand?

4

### BEDLAM

Sand and palm trees  
and Richard Dadd skies.  
Few camels in Dubai town but  
counting skyscrapers  
could send a man mad.

5

### MAGIC BOXES

Aunt Ethel brought them every year -  
long narrow boxes with rounded ends  
mysterious symbols on a lid  
painted with lurid desert scenes  
incorporating camels, palm trees.

Inside a stalk of 10 sticky mice  
one each, no-one ever ate two.  
The last one lingered until New Year  
when I would be given the box to keep  
pencils in. I wanted it for treasures:  
an unpulled cracker snap  
a puzzle  
a piece of flaccid mistletoe.

## D. MILNE – DECEMBER POEMS

6

### A DATE WITH SANTA

The reindeer have the day off  
get smashed on mistletoe wine.  
Santa is brought in by the lifeboat  
today's for drowning in cheerfulness.  
The lifeboat full of tinsel and parcels  
rescues St. Ives from December gloom.  
The Balancing Eel, influenced by Santa  
generously offer fish n' chips 10% off.

7

### MUSINGS ON THE M5

At sunrise a series  
of golden balls  
catch the eye  
illuminating  
M5 dreariness.  
Mistletoe tangled  
as a squirrel's drey  
glistens like honey.

Druids knew  
its ancient power,  
harnessed to cure  
infertility and  
poison in itself  
the antidote  
to any other.

We play kissing games  
run from hairy aunts  
use the viscotoxins  
to poison cancer cells.  
Ancient wisdom  
brought up to date  
black as bee swarm  
at eventide.

## D. MILNE – DECEMBER POEMS

8

### DEAD BEAUTIFUL

Six fighter planes  
in tight formation  
catch the sunlight  
a perfect golden arrowhead.

Vapour trails  
sugared almond pink  
luminous peacock  
tin glaze white.

9

### THINGS TO DRAW ON KARABORUP ROAD.

A ball of Barbara Cartland pink feathers?  
Cockatoo - musing possibly  
on life and love and romance.

A kookaburra, not laughing,  
sharp-eyed as a kingfisher  
to whom he is related.

Blackboys burned to stumps  
wait for the rainy season for their  
grassy tops to explode like fireworks.

A corrugated metal water tower  
on stilts like some alien spacecraft  
the water boiled to purity.

Sea blue bus shaded by whitegum trees  
shredded tyres, rose-patterned curtains,  
destination unknown.

Three bored camels who will lead  
the Christmas procession through Perth  
reflected in mirror-windowed skyscrapers.

## D. MILNE – DECEMBER POEMS

**10**

### **TODAY**

I will buy a piece of myrrh  
in the spice souk  
and a phial of frankincense oil.

look across the man-made lake  
through the dusty palm trees  
to the golden desert.

see camels imported  
from Australia  
racing across Arabian sand

reflect on three kings  
their long uncomfortable journey  
the romance of the word  
caravanserai.

**11**

### **PARROTS**

flocks of parrots flash past  
squabble, chatter endlessly  
aerial motor cycle gangs  
their chartreuse feathers  
perfect arboreal camouflage.

As we walk beneath  
it seems as if  
the trees are gossiping.

**12**

### **ANTS**

We can hear them  
crack, snap, rustle  
whooshing about.  
Outside echoes of colour  
reflect on the night -  
fireworks we cannot see.

My grandson says it is  
because ants put trees  
in the way.



## D. MILNE – DECEMBER POEMS

13

### BODY PAINTING

Industrious as an ant  
my grandson painting blue,  
purple, red, orange, green  
cars on a multicoloured road  
interspersed with footprints  
each tiny line and whorl  
clean as he is not.

14

### EXUBERANCE

Edward Piper's cheerful nudes  
frolicking among the flowers  
put the life into Life Class.  
He often used to join them  
in stripping off, silly not to.

15

### THEY HAVE A NEW LOUDSPEAKER

5a.m. call to prayer wakes us  
two hours too soon for comfort.  
Not a praying person I offer  
an invocation to any accepting deity  
concerning silence, dead rabbits  
and a hope that flowers  
will wither in the field.  
This is how wars start.

16

### SLEEPING IN A WAR ZONE

Ginger next door  
wages constant war  
on the tabby-from-nowhere  
a noisy campaign fought  
nightly on the garage roof  
outside my bedroom  
I clap my hands/shout  
they turn round  
grin at me  
resume.

## D. MILNE – DECEMBER POEMS

17

### CARDS

*i.m. Ron Fountaine*

The first Christmas card arrives  
a cross kitten wearing a Santa hat  
stuffed into a badly knitted sock  
suspended from a mantelpiece.

Later the shepherds will come  
followed by three wise men  
chasing a tinsel star  
to a stable door

Artist friends send hand-made cards  
treasures to hang on the wall  
in plain wood frames, more welcome  
than gold and frankincense or myrrh.

18

### CHRISTMAS IN DUBAI

The right landscape  
sand, flat-roofed houses  
skimmed-milk skies  
a David Bomberg painting.  
Even camels know their place  
silhouetted on the horizon  
like cardboard cut-outs  
on their way to Bethlehem

The gold souk shines  
greedy with temptations  
bright as tinsel.  
Santa Claus at the school  
next to the supermarket  
charges 10 Dirham a visit.

## D. MILNE – DECEMBER POEMS

19

### DUBAI MARINA TO SEE THE LIGHTS

No Santa, no reindeer  
skimming over the oil-black sea  
A good view from Carluccio's  
a dinner cruise, linen napkins  
wine glasses for fruit punch  
all on an 'authentic' dhow  
millionaires' yachts motor past  
sleek as sharks  
among the skyscrapers.  
Overhead the viaduct  
eight lanes of patient traffic  
tail lights the only colour  
in a sea of lucent white.

20

### HO HO HO

Santa Claus avuncular and stout  
his picture on the mantelpiece  
with all the others  
familiar as our hands.  
Every year we see him glitter  
at the shopping centre  
hand out presents to greedy fingers  
children sit on his knee.

All part of the tinsel rush  
in the excitement of it all  
common sense is forgotten  
after all it's Father Christmas  
almost one of the family  
his pockets full of secrets.

## D. MILNE – DECEMBER POEMS

21

### SECRETS

At first I thought we had mice  
nibbly little holes in parcels  
wrapping paper looking slightly chewed.  
Turns out it was him  
couldn't wait for Christmas Day  
You would think he would  
have grown out of it  
now he's over sixty.

22

### MASTERMINDLESS

Thought everything was all wrapped up  
poems long or short or just a snap  
ten more to write is cause for smile  
guess editing will wait awhile.

I'd stopped but now I'll start again  
I thought I'd done them all but then  
this last one's got me in a stew  
which goes for wrapping parcels too

Santa's elves have gone on strike  
Does anyone know how to wrap a bike?

23

### SUMMARY

Loudspeaker muted  
feline war suspended  
parcels wrapped  
mousetraps set  
small grandson shouting  
*ding dong* like miniature  
Leslie Phillips  
Peace on earth?

## D. MILNE – DECEMBER POEMS

24

### CHRISTMAS EVE

the nothing hour  
between midnight and one  
when animals  
use human speech  
if we care to listen  
or they to talk

angels sleep  
all trumpeted out  
by prayer and praising

save for one  
exhausted female  
angel dancing desperately  
to gain her wings  
and keep  
the theologians happy.

25

### CHRISTMAS DAY

A new Imam at the nearby mosque  
his voice skimming over rooftops  
the call to prayer beautiful  
as any solo in the nine  
lessons and carols from King's

26

### BIRTH OF THE BLUES

Wings neatly folded  
halos put away  
heavenly choir disbanded  
It's all belly dancing  
jazz and smoking pot  
[organic of course]  
until Gabriel plays a riff  
he calls Boxing Day Blues.

## D. MILNE – DECEMBER POEMS

27

### THIS YEAR IN DUBAI

I missed Christmas music  
choirboys ruffed up  
to look angelic

mixing Christmas pudding  
Messiah in the background  
so familiar I never notice  
the broadcast is in german

making brandy butter  
on Christmas Eve  
accompanied by Charpentier  
Messe de minuit pour noel

mince pies and cake  
with Carols from Kings

and no bracing walk  
on Boxing Day  
to clear our heads  
and freeze our ears.

28

### DUBAI - THE MAGICIAN'S ASSISTANT

Saw a doppelgänger today  
Sir Humphrey Appleby  
ministerial suit, plain red tie  
exotic among the dash dash and keffiyah  
listening with a mandarin smile  
as the assistant in ToysRUS  
explained magic tricks.

29

### DRESSING THE TREES

Tree trunks wrapped  
with invisible mesh  
in the velvet night  
pinpoints of clear white light  
roads lined with women  
wearing sequinned evening gowns  
and wild leafy hair.

## D. MILNE – DECEMBER POEMS

**30**

### **ON THE WAY TO HEATHROW**

Empty aeroplane hours  
flip between continents  
time zones  
arrive almost  
before we left  
sleep eight hours  
after midnight  
lose four

feeling wakeful  
lift the blind  
darkness outside  
wing tip lights  
I kid myself are  
guardian angels  
disappearing  
into grey drizzle  
as we land.

**31**

### **NEW YEAR RESOLUTIONS**

drink less  
eat sensibly  
exercise more  
keep the house tidy  
all the old familiars  
I know I never keep

Next year I'm older  
than the Beatles song  
wise enough to know  
not to waste time  
on making resolutions  
they only maunder about  
the bedroom at 3.a.m.  
accusing as Marley's ghost.

**POEMS BY STUART NUNN**



## STUART NUNN – DECEMBER POEMS

2.

### **Aztec West roundabout – 4.30pm**

These interlocking units,  
light-controlled and helpless,  
are one of those puzzles with tiles  
trapped in a square.

Jiggle them enough  
and a picture emerges. Slide my Focus  
past that 4x4; see that white van  
take the place of Polo, Golf and Ka.  
We are bits of window, roof, glimpsed face.  
Shake us enough – the picture  
that we make is home.

3.

### **Advent**

Something's coming.  
The old woman in her room  
looking out over the sea,  
but failing to recognise the horizon,  
knows it and screams her defiance.  
She throws things  
as though to fight off  
what she sees  
sidelong  
in the mirror.  
This is her last insistence  
that they see her, take notice.  
But it will come to nothing in the end –  
this something that is coming.

## STUART NUNN – DECEMBER POEMS

5.

### Blame the satnav

That lorry should never have come down this lane.  
Specially not with the giant tractor behind it.  
We squat in our line of cars, engines off,  
while they sort it out. It will take some time.

It's quiet between these high hedges,  
but we're marooned here. No one gets out.  
Then straight ahead, above what I can see  
of the lorry's cab, a flock of birds.

White gulls against the sky's polished pewter,  
wheeling over some nearby landfill.  
And black ones: since crows in a crowd  
are rooks, that's what they must be.

9.

### Existential threats

Like the silly discussions we had as kids:  
Would you rather be deaf or blind?  
Now we're asked to consider the various ways  
humanity might exterminate itself.

Pathogens that slip the petri dishes  
in some distant lab, and wing their way  
to us in some careless academic's luggage.

Or a smart machine with no off-switch  
who might decide it's better off without us,  
seeing the advantages of a human-free planet.

Or a bloody great asteroid that patrols  
the outer reaches of eternity – the Somali pirate  
of the universe – that no one's spotted yet.

Or just plain old evolution, taking its shirt off  
in all this extra warmth, and coming up  
with something stronger, better adapted than us.

So Merry Christmas, all you viruses out there;  
Cool Yule, you roaming asteroids;  
Happy New Year to the smartest robot on the block,  
but watch out for those intelligent ants.

## STUART NUNN – DECEMBER POEMS

**10.**

### **Getting it done before Christmas**

Bob has radiator men and we have Nick.  
He's sanded, filled and painted,  
hung the doors and now he's varnishing.

Almost done in fact, and we'll be glad  
to stop apologising every time  
we have to pass him on the stairs.

Tomorrow is his youngest's school nativity,  
so he'll take the day off – as is only right.  
And we must head north.

Perhaps, if I'm lucky, breakfast in the services,  
then navigate the Catthorpe Interchange,  
fight tiredness and Eddie Stobart down the A14.

All to have the same conversation ten times  
with the old lady who used to be my mother.  
But her smile of welcome rebukes my irritation.

**13.**

### **Catthorpe Interchange**

Still eighteen months to go  
before these bits of excavation  
cohere into journeys from here to there.

Concrete piers rise from the chaos  
of mud-defined horizons  
on all sides. Machines like something

out of Spielberg's War of the Worlds  
operate slowly against the sky.  
And somewhere, amongst it all,

men, yellow-headed, crawl  
across the earth, knowing only  
their assigned day's digging.

But maybe more than one, as he works,  
hums Silent Night or I Wish  
It Could Be Christmas Every Day.

## STUART NUNN – DECEMBER POEMS

14.

### Oundle Incident

Well - that's her Christmas buggered,  
we think, as she lies face down  
on the not-too-wet pavement,

right outside the busy coffee shop.  
Someone brings a chair, and there  
she sits to await the ambulance.

A throned, incongruous, injured queen,  
surrounded by acolytes with water,  
a pillow from the gift shop,

worried expressions, mobile phones.  
It's her arm – so that's the decorating  
out, the turkey stuffing, grand-kids' cuddles.

With a kindly injection, she's loaded up,  
whisked out of our lives, and off,  
into a Christmas none of us would choose.

15.

### A Cold Coming

- we're having of it,  
just the worst time of year  
for a breakdown, and such a complete breakdown:  
our rooms cold and the radiators dead,  
the very dead of winter.

And the plumber sorry, sympathetic but helpless,  
packing his tools back into the van.

There were times we regretted  
the days of laundry drying, the towel rail,  
and me, cooking tea in my shirt sleeves.

Then the man in the office saying  
it's just the printed circuit board,  
and he's on his own and he's got one on order,  
and boiling a kettle to shave,  
and my wife grumpy,  
and the plumber delayed, and charging high prices.  
A hard time we're having of it.

## STUART NUNN – DECEMBER POEMS

16.

### **Sports Personality of the Year**

*Tri-Counties Cross Country Championships – Bath University*

A biting wind on this bleak field,  
and old friends huddle into their scarves  
as we set the athletic world to rights.

She still looks anorexic, part recovered,  
holds herself tight within the race,  
grateful for the other women's rivalry.

A scrap of a boy, grown two inches  
since last year, sticks in there with lads  
bigger and older, and damn near wins.

Her coach tells me she cries a lot  
and never knows where she is, or how  
to get to training. But she wins.

He recognises me from our former lives,  
remembers shared meetings, knows  
he'll finish well outside the top hundred.

As I start the last race, rain begins.  
I pack my bag, take back the bullhorn,  
steal a sandwich, and gratefully head home.

## STUART NUNN – DECEMBER POEMS

17.

### Ode to Andy

Hail to you, great heating engineer,  
who brought us warmth  
when we were freezing, gave us  
water from the tap  
hot enough to scald the unwary hand.

Thanks to your expert juggling  
of impenetrable spare parts,  
our recalcitrant boiler gave up  
its festive sulk, rumbled  
with some enthusiasm into life,  
as though responding to your touch.

Shame on me, who knew your face  
but not your name, remembered nothing  
of the time you read  
the books I gave you thirty years ago.  
You recalled their names:  
Julius Caesar, Great Expectations,  
Dolphin Crossing (which I don't remember  
reading – leave alone teaching it)  
and didn't curse my pedantry.

So Merry Christmas, Andy,  
accept this praise for your way  
with circuit boards, control interfaces  
and thermostatic trips.

## STUART NUNN – DECEMBER POEMS

**18.**

### **U3A Christmas Party**

Who they are is submerged in tinsel,  
sparkly reindeer antlers, sweaters it would need  
a gang of men with guns to make me wear.

And how they concentrate, eyes fixed  
on music stands, and how their hands  
kerplinker plunk in unison!

And then the announcement to stagger  
all who hear it. “This is our version  
of Rockin’ All Over The World.”

Francis Rossi would be proud, Rick Parfitt  
would bust a gut to hear their hit  
on two kazoos and twenty ukuleles.

**19.**

### **Is this it?**

From the hill where our friend lives  
the river is pewter between darkening fields.  
We can see from Gloucester almost to the sea,  
giving promise of another tide.

In the gloaming, the forest closes in  
around our headlights that penetrate  
the uncertain perspectives of trees.

Villages are strung with lights. Tonight  
Chris will take grandkids to be amazed  
by trees that come alive under dancing lights.  
Pete will say the ancient words –  
“In come I, good Doctor Hill –“  
and bring St George to life again  
and Father Christmas will kill the dragon – again.

## STUART NUNN – DECEMBER POEMS

22.

### On hearing Dover Beach read on Radio 3

When was that long retreating roar not heard?  
If Sophocles and Arnold,  
how not we?  
Our ignorant armies are no metaphor,  
but gangs of calm-eyed boys  
too certain of their rightness,  
egged on by mild scholars  
who never see the end of all their logic.

Let us indeed be true  
to one another, and build  
a Christmas out of ordinary things:  
wrapping paper, Blu-tak,  
a trifle following Delia's recipe,  
the biggest roasting pan.

29.

### After Christmas

After coughing comes the mucus rasp  
that speaks of inner workings  
that are normally implicit.  
Bronchi, alveoli sing of their byways  
and secret passages, where air  
is now a resented guest.

    Drink this, I say,  
and add a glug of Famous Grouse,  
hoping it will do you good.

    And maybe,  
next week, when my airways  
take the melody from yours,  
you'll bring me tea in bed  
with just a swig of what will do me good.



## STUART NUNN – DECEMBER POEMS

30.

### Uncertainty

I interrogate my symptoms:  
Throat, is that sensation  
working up to soreness?  
Or have you finished with me?  
Chest, are you meant  
to sound like that?  
Three days ago,  
I took you both for granted.  
Now, I'm not sure,  
want a second opinion  
from head. But wait –  
it's been so long,  
is that a headache?  
I'm just not used  
to being ill. I wish  
my body and this virus  
would come to some agreement.

**POEMS BY ERIC NICHOLSON**

## ERIC NICHOLSON - DECEMBER POEMS

### 1

#### **An Atheist Prepares for Christmas**

She'll paint out baby Jesus,  
fold up the three wise kings;  
kick over the empty crib,  
and pull off the angel's wings.  
She'll gag the carol singers' mouths  
and superglue the church organ keys;  
she'll certainly admire the heavens above  
but her children won't pray on their knees.  
Or be Mary and Joseph – not even the hind legs  
of a donkey. She won't mind the consumer bustle  
and she'll decorate a tree with tracts  
from Marx, Engels and Bertrand Russell.

## RIC NICHOLSON - DECEMBER POEMS

2

**Part-Found Poem from Charles Dickens' *The Seven Poor Travellers*.**

Myself with the pitcher.

Ben with Beer.

Inattentive boy with hot plates.

THE TURKEY

Female carrying sauces to be heated on the spot.

THE BEEF

Man with tray on his head, containing Vegetables  
and Sundries.

Volunteer hostler from Hotel, grinning,

And rendering no assistance.

Big Issue Seller

About to pack up for the day.

DISCOUNTS

Little boy with a little crutch gazing at Fenwick's  
window display of dwarfs, reindeer and snow.

Rudolf's on an electronic loop.

TOYS 'R US

Santa is getting irritable and wipes his runny nose.

Shoppers run for buses.

Boz renders a little assistance.

## ERIC NICHOLSON - DECEMBER POEMS

### 3

#### The Video

I drive to the garage  
and leave my car for a service.  
Later a friendly mechanic  
sends me a video;  
it's quite explicit –  
the chassis exposed;  
he's underneath groping  
and jiggling loose brackets.  
Now he says  
he's giving it the once over.  
He's oiling the wheels  
with his smooth talk,  
making sure I see  
all his hopped up moves  
and zooming in on body parts.  
The final shot's a close-up:  
*"Thanks for choosing Hot Rod Cars  
and have a very Merry Christmas."*

## ERIC NICHOLSON - DECEMBER POEMS

4

### I remember

a black and white photo of a boy  
in bed on Christmas morning,  
a model-plane kit on the blanket;  
coloured in my memory.  
I remember hands hurting in the snow,  
throbbing pink after snowballing.  
I remember no Christmas tree

but the dry weightlessness  
of balsa wood and pressing pins  
to secure wings to paper  
plans; sharp addictive smell  
of glue and drum-like tautness  
of dope-stretched tissue across  
wing ribs and fuselage; winding up  
the elastic band powered propeller.  
I remember a solid fuel pack  
when lit sent another plane  
out of sight with a fizz and a buzz  
and a burnt chemical stink. I lost that plane  
when it flew over roof tops.

I remember gazing at grey snowflakes  
drifting  
against a bright sky and wondering  
why everyone said snow was white.

# ERIC NICHOLSON - DECEMBER POEMS

5

## Ding Dong (A Song-Carol)

Ding dong merrily on high,  
In Gateshead we are spending,  
Ding dong merrily on high,  
The cash tills they are ringing.

*Chorus: 'Profit' as descant; end on 'profiteering.'*

Ding dong merrily on high,  
The loan sharks they are laughing,  
Ding dong merrily on high,  
Their interest rates are rising.

*Chorus: 'Profit' as descant; end on 'profiteering.'*

Ding dong merrily on high  
Our manufactured yearnings,  
Ding dong merrily on high,  
We live beyond our earnings.

*Chorus: 'Profit' as descant; end on 'profiteering.'*

Ding dong merrily on high,  
The city is a buzzing,  
Ding dong merrily on high,  
The Fat Cats are rejoicing.

*Chorus: 'Profit' as descant; end on 'profiteering.'*

Ding dong merrily on high,  
The rich are getting richer,  
Ding dong merrily on high,  
The poor are just existing.

*Chorus: 'Profit' as descant; end on 'profiteering.'*

Ding dong merrily on high [sung slowly]  
Three cheers for profiteering. [slowly]

## ERIC NICHOLSON - DECEMBER POEMS

6

### Christmas Messages

Through the rain  
I read,  
*Bypass the hassle*  
on the back of a bus,  
but most people  
ignore the injunction  
and tie themselves  
up in Christmas urge,  
push and shove,  
shout and shush.  
A Christmas tree  
in the arms of one  
consumer terrorist  
becomes  
an accidental weapon;  
flaying shoppers.  
Baubles  
burst underfoot.  
Songsters  
swell the sweet streets  
singing of shepherds  
and distant deliveries.



**POEMS BY GRANT VAN WINGERDEN**

# GRANT VAN WINGERDEN – DECEMBER POEMS

## 1 – Remnant Thoughts

My thoughts still on my daughter's wedding  
Imagine watching a child being born  
grow up and leave her parents home

And the day was so special  
bringing torn families together  
Smiling and crying

Christmas is close  
but not that close

## 2 – Consolidating

In early December all of our outlets  
Furnished to the same purpose  
Our gift gathering efforts  
laid out on the table

When in New Zealand  
we gleefully stepped into  
the type of tacky tourist traps  
we used to disparage

Walking out with tui teatowels  
and 'Sweet as Bro' t-shirts  
to add to each package

## GRANT VAN WINGERDEN – DECEMBER POEMS

### 3 – The Tree's What Makes It

The family farm was called Pine Grove  
so we never lacked for a tree  
On the designated day  
we'd head out with the neighbours  
armed with axe like a ritual  
one branch each was plenty

With my own children  
the tree was imbued with  
the same excitement  
Festooned with glitter

Racing out Christmas morning  
and ripping open presents  
Not for them to ponder  
who takes the position of Santa  
if the tree was from roadside or Rotary

The years have passed  
and I and my atheist  
tried for a few years a plastic replica  
til tired of the pretence of stringing up tinsel

We no longer put up a tree

### 4 – Office Party

We meet and greet for mead and greed  
Susceptible to supping free  
We overfill our cups with glee  
We're industry we're indiscreet  
Once officious now off one's face  
Asides collide increasing pace

The dishing of dirt the swishing of skirt  
Put that away before someone gets  
heard  
Which rules the heady or the hearty  
It's all in at the office party

## GRANT VAN WINGERDEN – DECEMBER POEMS

### 5 – Really Just Religious

No I haven't met Jesus but I've heard the name several times  
Some boast he's on their toast but for most it's just signs  
The tragic trickster the original hipster  
Paging the pagans on another line

It was their tree that was taken  
Their gods forsaken  
Their spirits awaken  
To interlopers kissing under  
mistletoe

Still

Hot under the collar over the whole Happy Holidays thing  
Insist this is Christmas and there are carols to sing  
This is the mission of the cashed up Christian  
Whose only advice is that Christ is king

### 6 – Elves IN CAPS

We can't make as much of their mystery  
Their untiring secondary plot  
Tapped out in shoemaking terms  
and that's as far as we got

An assembly line of magic  
where they work in tight fit jackets  
Not wondering once  
what was in those packets

### 7 – Crackers

Once you pull one of these crackers  
you get a paper hat  
The terms say now be jovial  
though the jokes are falling flat  
Those shaggy dog stories  
come but once a year  
and you're *meant* to roar them loudly  
in Grandmother's ear

## GRANT VAN WINGERDEN – DECEMBER POEMS

### 8 – On Santa's Knee

Jolly through the jostling though incessant  
Reaches from the past to give you presence  
Vitus may have danced but Claus just sits  
And casts no judgment that won't fall to bits

Some wishes they are timid and at times  
Watching as each urchin starts their climb  
The fat old man of fiction wishes too  
That he had powers of making them come true

And trying as the crying is he's feared  
Tentative the tugging on his beard  
The brief is a belief in what can be  
Their little wiles to weight on Santa's knee

### 9 – Said entry sedentary

Folks feel the obligation  
to flit from glitz to glitz  
Talk turkey with some ham  
Endure the pressing cousins

Face the festive traffic  
Honking Christmas tunes

We like the peace and quiet  
The lights themselves  
are NOT an invitation

Pause to reflect  
on the ghost of Christmas passed out  
on the lawn where  
Sprites with water cannons  
set to ho-ho-hose you down

## GRANT VAN WINGERDEN – DECEMBER POEMS

### 10 – Things Go Better

*The colours of the Santa suit are reckoned by some to originate from an ad by Coca Cola.  
That's how pervasive they are.  
(Things go better is from an ad declaring 'things go better with Coke')*

Things Go Better

They owned the 20th C.  
even when competing companies  
rolled out other colas  
A CEO filled with fizzy hubris  
    predicted  
People will drink Coke  
    instead of water

But a pomegranate infusion  
    put a stop to that  
Cold pressed sparkling apple  
    expanded choice

The drink that dissolved coinage  
Ads life left wanting

So through stealth the brand  
    expanded into juices  
Benign labels and hip slogans  
made a subtle subterfuge  
for acquiring aquifers

Set to sell you something  
    you can get for free

# GRANT VAN WINGERDEN – DECEMBER POEMS

## 11 – Christmas Eve-r

You'll log this like it was Groundhog Day  
The tethered deer, the grounded sleigh  
A festering festive feast  
A fortunate fatalist priest

Offer no reprieve from this eternal Christmas eve

The spruiker's forced jollity  
a failed and foiled frivolity

The choir expire still carolling on  
round a big bonfire of bon mots and bon bons

A perpetual freeze on  
the final price  
So who gives a f#k if  
you're naughty or nice

Santa is listless, he knows it's a trap  
The procession of children seeking his lap

The cookie has crumbled the chimney is clogged  
The fairy's fallen off, is in the mouth of the dog  
The baubles have burst and the tinsel is tattered  
The tree itself looks a bit battered

Whistles and party hats are strewn  
in among the recent ruins  
Oh, if you would only believe  
and bring an end to Christmas eve

## December challenge 12 – Instant Divine

There's an app for every fireplace  
as we tweet each sweet refrain  
the infant child on Instagram  
whose known by many names

## GRANT VAN WINGERDEN – DECEMBER POEMS

### 13 – Still It's Silly Season

Normal programming will resume  
after the break

As we import the unimportant  
and show you short-lived series  
second rate star vehicles

A one trick pony's only  
other effort

You'll watch out of order  
bloopers from pilots unseen

An epiphany for the unfunny  
a sitcom that sat for too long

~II~

Don't open Pandora's box set  
or discover a world wide web

If you do your children  
may never encounter  
the joys of silly season



## GRANT VAN WINGERDEN – DECEMBER POEMS

### 14 – Boxing Day Sale

More restive than festive  
enduring the children  
and tending the roast  
She's not really missed us at Christmas  
Discarded her cards  
and abandoned her post

Cheryl's passed beyond  
the season's grating

She's really looking forward to  
the Boxing Day sale

Where others are scared at the thought  
of scrambling up the escalator  
to make it to the one refrigerator  
that's marked down to that price

She treats it like a challenge you train for  
Map the place out find the best route between  
the swingsets and settees

So much more rewarding  
than snoring uncles  
who don't help with the dishes  
on Christmas Day

## GRANT VAN WINGERDEN – DECEMBER POEMS

### 15 – Christmas Albums

I could handle Michael Buble  
who started with carols  
His smooth tones surprising family  
This led to a trawl through crooner turf  
Expertly lending his voice to standards  
and to new songs that sounded classic

But Rod's croak adds nothing  
beyond nostalgia for The Faces  
and Atlantic Crossing  
I'd even contemplate his so-called sexy  
before enduring another butchered  
Christmas theme

They must do the business  
or they'd stop making them  
but I can't see the appeal  
of rockers better elsewhere  
trying their hand at  
O Come All Ye Faithful

Reducing their cache  
on Jingle Bells Rock

Some heavy metal charlatan screaming  
I saw Mummy kissing Satan's claws  
to make the thing legit

## GRANT VAN WINGERDEN – DECEMBER POEMS

### 16 – At Last

I like happy endings but there's no use pretending  
I can see the scrawl on the wall  
Feel the pride decried before a fall  
A sprawling epoch must too close  
the room's gone quiet  
the bloom's off the rose  
Someone sent to celebrate  
in kind in mind to contemplate  
but my mood is mixed at best  
it's all too true this too attest

A tense defence of the recent past  
relinquishing all this at last

### 17 – The Santa doll at Woodford station

I'll sing a hymn to whimsy  
that's my kind of Crimble  
I've done away with mangers  
and all religious symbols  
Put the X back into Xmas  
Christ knows it's only fair  
I'll always cross for kisses  
bursting with devil-may-care

So have your Happy Holidays  
commerce commensurate  
with departmentalised deputised  
failsafe Claus's not given to  
Arctic lodgings

Rein dear friends in  
for an elfin spree and a spot  
on their knee

I'll corral the choral  
for stars and brightly rapt  
secular segregation  
the perfect plastic  
Santa doll at Woodford station

## GRANT VAN WINGERDEN – DECEMBER POEMS

### **18 – Fat bastard kills donkey**

*This is the actual headline for an article in our free afternoon paper! It concerns a 146kg man who jumped the fence to sit on a small donkey involved in a nativity scene, named Platero. By adopting a galloping pose, he placed greater stress on the animal*

As he sat astride  
the ass tried  
to bray his dismay  
but the next day  
he died

### **19 – A gift for it**

That ability to hone in on  
an overlooked element  
a delightful secret

Many men approach this  
with the utmost  
trepidation  
Hoping half concentrating  
at the hints dropped  
will cover the situation

Once home they hide  
their decisions in high cupboards  
Until eventually comes the time

They reach tentatively for string  
seem scared of scissors and tape  
the Christmas paper cut wrong  
the contents about to escape

After much quiet cursing  
each item bulging slightly

Until in present company  
underneath the tree

## GRANT VAN WINGERDEN – DECEMBER POEMS

### 20 – Just What I Wanted

I couldn't care if the card is clichéd  
the wrapping lumpy

It's the thought that counts  
that counts to ten

Before declaring  
that's just what I wanted

ii

Some want a piece of the world  
and some world peace  
An end to hunger  
games based on gender  
the cease and desist  
the disease in our midst

Give me an object of some description  
a handmade dedication