December Poems
A PK POETS PROJECT

POEMS BY
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STUART NUNN GRANT VAN WINGERDEN
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A selection of poems written in December 2014 by the poets on the PK List

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POEMS BY JAMES BELL
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
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
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

snead 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
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
Rorscharch 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
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
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
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
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
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
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
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

25th 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...*
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
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.
Hogmany shuffle

remember the furst pint
an the first wee nippy sweety
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 sweety
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 sweety 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 vanished 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 vanished 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
awaaaa haeeyeey shake hands cuddles wi complete strangers
waay 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 vanisheder
in wan endin is anither beginning
or in beginnin 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
1
1\textsuperscript{st} 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
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
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
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 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

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
crotched squares and knitted scarves
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
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
there is 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
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
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
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
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

during Christmas
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
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
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 where 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 spike 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 anywa y he gestured at his colleagues the other mans grass is always greener
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
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
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
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 laughes
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
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
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
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
25-2
presents

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

you 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
27
snow

the snow falls
deap and thick on the wall
a white curtain across the grass
in the beam 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
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 woman's 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
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
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.
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.
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.
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.
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:
marrige turned out to be a disaster.
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.

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.
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.
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 embalmment; 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
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 be 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.
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.
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.
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,
hailarious 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
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.
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.
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.
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.
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.
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.
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.
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.
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.
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.
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
Monday 1st 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.
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
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
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
**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
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
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
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
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
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

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
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

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?
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

December haiku

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

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
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.
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.
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.

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.
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.
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.
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 mantlepiece.

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.
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 mantlepiece
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.
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?
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.
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.
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.

NEW YEAR RESOLUTIONS

drink less
eat sensibly
exercise more
keep the house tidy
all the old familiares
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 maander about
the bedroom at 3.a.m.
accusing as Marley’s ghost.
POEMS BY STUART NUNN
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.
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.
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.
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.
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.
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.
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.
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.
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
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.
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.
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.”
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.
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]
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
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
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
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
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
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
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
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
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
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
16 – At Last

I like happy endings but there's no use pretending
I can see the scrawl on the wall
Feel the pride decrined 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
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
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

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