

Seagull

Surreal animation:
one aerial herring gull,
between smooth blue sky
and craggy coastal path,
with an ice-cream cone
clutched in its beak.

On the beach below,
a child points up
while her mother
mops tears from cheek
and vanilla from chin.

Her wails waft up to us,
in spite of screeched battle-cries,
when a flock swoops in,
lunges, parries, snatches;
threatens litterbins.

Passers-by move faster,
check their hats, hide snacks,
laugh; but mutter that Hitchcock
might have been right.

Courtyards

You may not remember you taught me this
practice: to look for courtyards hidden
among buildings like crystals in fissures;
to peer down alleys for secret gardens.

I have discovered shaded squares, green with
ivy-hung walls and potted ferns; concrete
corners furnished in wrought iron, wreathed
in baskets of geraniums and white-

washed. I have known disappointments too, of
course. Neglected patios offering
only broken flower pots. Worse, I have
seen dead ends; nothing but litter stirring

shadows. I still look for courtyards, although
I recovered from our parting long ago.

THE PK POETS

The PK Poets is a series of free to print poetry leaflets highlighting the poetry of a single poet. It is intended to be a sample introduction to the work of a poet who is also a member of the PK Poetry List. The PK List is a free to join community of poets who share their work using email and the internet. Information about the PK List can be found on the front page of the Poetry Kit Website at www.poetrykit.org. We are grateful to acknowledge that this series is inspired by “The Bards” leaflet series from Atlantean Publishing.

ABOUT LESLEY BURT

Lesley Burt lives in Dorset. A qualified social worker, she has been involved in social work education for 29 years and has recently retired from lecturing at Southampton Solent University. Her first published poem was Courtyards., published in Tears in the Fence (Number 33, Autumn 2002). Since then, her poetry has been published in several magazines including the Interpreter’s House, Roundyhouse. She has also received commendations in various competitions.

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THE PK POETS

#14: Lesley Burt



The Air Between

it was my first outing
to Billy Smart's
where pink and silver
sequinned princesses
climb to the roof
of the big top
then swing by fingers toes
and teeth

walk across ropes
fly from one trapeze
to another
while a man hangs upside-down
to catch them now and then

I clutch my mother
fearful of the height
of air between them
and the sawdust
I imagine
not the thud
of flesh and bone
but how it feels to fall
as I do in nightmares

not the leaving or arrival
but all the air between

Intimations of Mortality

Aged ten, I am home alone when
I pinch my forearm; examine skin
puckered where fingernails dig in;
know for the first time that one
day - but not which - as certainly
as I experience pain right now, I
will understand how it feels to die.

Observing indentations modify
to weals that fade and vanish, I wonder
how long it will take me to transfer
from this state to the other; whether
I will also watch myself disappear.

Rooks

Bedtime was at seven.
I envied older children
who played outdoors
on summer evenings
until the rooks roosted.

At dawn, the colony's
neighbourly cacophony
woke me to say
my world was as it should be.

Lamb's tail catkins shook pollen
around the hide-and-seek woods.
Knobbly oaks sprouted scalloped leaves
and fairy-capped acorns,
but harboured monstrous larvae
in so-called apples.
Gorse pricked and shone, yellow,
while heat popped its pods.
Bees bumbled into foxgloves
and shuffled out backwards.

Meanwhile, rooks swarmed;
hurled twigs that, by chance,
fell as tangled nests
knotted, all year,
in the network of branches.

One Easter Sunday,
a fledgling trapped its head
in a crevice high on a tree trunk.
A brave boy climbed, but failed to free it.
The crowd called up:
it would be kind to wring its neck.

In the silence feathers
floated; floated.

That night, I dreamed
a crow flew out of the plughole,
through the window,
towards the stars,
like a witch to her coven.

The Kite

We stride along the prom.
A stiff breeze sprays grit
that stings my face and wafts the tang
of seaweed left to dry as tidemarks.
Against a backdrop of Purbeck hills,
frog-legged surfers in wetsuits
ride the white-frilled bay.

Black-headed gulls screech and wheel.
Stonechats play hide-and-seek
among gorse and thrift on the cliff face;
overhead, a kestrel hovers.

Among dog-walkers on the beach
a man stands with string and handle.
Flat on the sand: a red-and-black kite;
he throws it up; it wavers
and drops, yards away.
A woman rushes to collect it.

He reels in a little; tries again.
She jogs after it, waits; he shouts and points.
With his kite aloft, she trots backwards
and - at his signal - hurls it up
while he manipulates the string.

It plummets.

We slow down, hoping to see flight
as the scene is re-enacted
with minor variations to his length of string,
volume of his instructions,
distances she must run.

We pass by their spot; march on,
turn occasionally,
but see only gulls in the air.