

POEMS ON THE MOVE

Guernsey's International Poetry Competition 2021

Judge Kate Clanchy

OPEN CATEGORY

1st prize: *PRUNING THE LAUREL*, **Ros Woolner**, UK
Poems on the Move & Poems on the Buses Exhibitions, £1000

PRUNING THE LAUREL

Three points of contact with the tree, the way
my mother taught me: two feet, one hand, one free
to hold the saw. A smell of bay leaves now,
pale sawdust on my clothes like flour, the thump
as each branch hits the ground. I'm high enough
to see across five gardens: wheelbarrows
and washing lines, a football goal,
a Wendy house. My neighbour steps outside.
Where's hubby then? he asks, his meaning clear.
Things must look different from down there. I guess
I seem quite small to him, my saw no bigger
than a bread knife. *Not sure*, I say, my eyes
on what I'm doing – one hand on the saw,
three points of contact – *What did you want him for?*

2nd prize: *FLAK*, **Katriona Campbell**, UK
Poems on the Move & Poems on the Buses Exhibitions, £500

FLAK

The pattern round the hole in the windowpane
looks like a snowflake cut from cellophane.
Snow scar or scatter from a nine mil bore,
I stay back in case more fall.

The marks on your left rib
have faded to a net of pale red ink,
a finely needled claret hidden under your chest hair.
Even so, I can't forget the flake that settled there.

3rd prize: *THE LAST CHANGING ROOM*, **Ros Woolner**, UK
Poems on the Move & Poems on the Buses Exhibitions, £250

THE LAST CHANGING ROOM

No mirror, just a bin for skirt and top,
knickers, bra, shoes, socks
and, on a hook, one garment:
a coat of moss. Its emerald tufts
are springy to the touch.
You slip your arms inside the sleeves,
feel the cool earth lining on shoulders,
hips, thighs, the backs of your knees.
When you walk out barefoot, stomach still bulging
with bulbs under your green pelt, the birds
carry on singing. And you
carry on too, down the road
and up into the hills where there's bracken,
wild ponies, a stream, and rain, yes, rain.

CHANNEL ISLANDS CATEGORY

1st place: *SHE'S NOT OUT OF THE WOODS YET*,

Camille Brouard, Guernsey

Poems on the Move & Poems on the Buses Exhibitions

SHE'S NOT OUT OF THE WOODS YET

and there's no map for this
and the compass is spinning
and she's feverish and forgetful
and can't find her way.

Reluctant adventurer,
my grandmother sets out,
empty basket in frail hand,
red cardigan tattered and frayed,
walking into a fairytale.

My grandfather calls sometimes
through a rusty tin can phone
discarded by kids in capes
on the needle-lined forest floor;

It's rare to hear just his voice, alone.

2nd place: *WHERE ARE YOUR ARCHITECTURE CRITICS NOW*
Poppy Bristow, Alderney
Poems on the Move & Poems on the Buses Exhibitions

WHERE ARE YOUR ARCHITECTURE CRITICS NOW

At midnight I am a resident of myself
soft and yellow as the butter I craved for five years
and fearing collapse into my own foundations. My wife keeps
the island wrapped around her, singing as she sleeps:

*On a nearby latitude a bunker has been built
viewed south you call it gratitude
viewed north you call it guilt.*

If only. Up on the hill, away from home's carrion
I bite the useless blade of my pencil. A decade
of keeping the perfect doll's house for this. If I could laugh
I'd call it modern but the concrete fills my mouth like a brace.

The question bites my dreams again and again.
Bullets spat from the gun-hard face
of a commandant I have never seen. I shan't go back to bed.

3rd place: *WARP AND WEFT*, **Judy Mantle**, Jersey
Poems on the Move & Poems on the Buses Exhibitions

WARP AND WEFT

From ridge to ridge it's a four year old's stride
from furrow to furrow the same.

She weaves the warp and weft of beach
sand hops, counts one, two three four

then turns towards the setting sun,
five, six, seven, eight.

Her rainbow boots reflect retreating streams
which thread past sculptured ripples on the strand.

She sews sea fabric, tacks and hems her world
while overhead a seagull imitates

by stitching clouds, criss crossing mackerel skies,
swoops and soars, embroiders wisps of dusk

flies landward silhouetted to its roost,
looks out, then up, the out to sea and sleep.

YOUNG PEOPLE'S CATEGORY

1st place: *SCHOOL BUS*, **Emily Hunt**, Warwickshire
Poems on the Move & Poems on the Buses Exhibitions

SCHOOL BUS

For a moment I'm inscribed, reflected
my face a canvas of copper, russet a ripening landscape
spun-gold stitches defining my features, hair woven into
hedgerow and copse, gorse plumes and hilltops -
an ivy-eyed blink as twigs etch icily upon grimy glass.

I'm aground in a sea of burgundy, mustard, navy
of over-packed rucksacks, ringtones, lip gloss, mobile phones
as the bus's kaleidoscope heart splutters to life
as we lurch away as I watch myself go.

2nd place: *SONNET TO SURRENDER*, **Armanche Flesselle**, France
Poems on the Move & Poems on the Buses Exhibitions

SONNET TO SURRENDER

I want to write poems, and recite them
To my ceiling fan, if you won't listen,
Maybe he'll take your place, and say *je t'aime*
To this ink, like waves on paper hidden.

I want to lie naked, surrender to
The ashes on my skin, the smoke in my
Eyes. Hurry now, we've got dinner for two
Waiting in the big beautiful sky.

Let's eat in the nude, on a shooting star,
Perhaps catch a movie, cheesy rom-com
We can laugh about as we drive our car
Fast, to feel the sand blow out of my palm.

The waves in outer space roll forever,
Sit with me, one day they'll wash us over.

3rd place: *MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGE*, **Robert Ebner-Statt**, UK
Poems on the Move & Poems on the Buses Exhibitions

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGE

I can speak a foreign language, yet I can't say how I truly feel
I can prepare an advanced titration, yet I can't prepare a meal
I can work out any maths problem but not how to be happy
I know exactly how a baby grows but can't change my cousin's nappy
Can adults read the future? They often tell me what lies in store
If I put my head down, do my work and write till my hand's sore

This generation listens, lesson after lesson.
We learn everything you tell us, you don't tell us about depression
You don't tell us how to spend our money, but that we'll have none
if we fail

I know a balanced diet but not what a balanced lifestyle should entail
You tell us about exams, that they're the point of no return
You teach us about the environment whilst the world you gave us burns.

HIGHLY COMMENDED: *TINNITUS*, **Holly Harrison**, N.Ireland
PEACOCKS, **Freya Leech**, Oxford
THE PEOPLE AT THE POND, **Madeleine Jones**, UK

POEMS ON THE BUSES

(12 poems listed *alphabetically* by poet's surname)

AFTER THREE YEARS, **Vasiliki Albedo**, Greece
Poems on the Buses Exhibition

AFTER THREE YEARS

You wake me up,
ringing me early in the morning,
how are you, I've missed you...
I hang up, open the blinds
to find worms creeping all over
the cat-food. I want to tell
you I'm married now, though I'm not,
I want to vacuum the worms
but don't. I call you back and ask
what you've been doing, say
I'm seeing someone, *nothing serious*,
take the broom and dustpan, open
the window to lay the animals
on the glossy, overgrown grass.

ROS, **Carole Bromley**, York
Poems on the Buses Exhibition

ROS

You were always fashionably late.
The light fell differently then,
the leaves outside trembled,
the house was coffee-scented,
the clock cleared its throat.

Sometimes, crossing the hall,
I think of the way everything fluttered
when I opened the door to you,
like hens fussing to settle again
on warm brown eggs.

THE FISHMONGER, **Carole Bromley**, York
Poems on the Buses Exhibition

THE FISHMONGER

How he used to horrify me
decapitating fish with a chopper
Afterwards the heads would stare
and gape at the witnesses
who queued with worn purses
for sprats and sole and finnan haddock,
slapped in a scale, wrapped in newsprint,
slid, stinking, obscene into shoppers.
The blood surprised me, soaking the sawdust
and the way the fishmonger flirted,
wiping on filthy trousers
his reeking, slimy hands.

IT SEEMS LIKE YESTERDAY, **Christina Buckton**, Cambridge
Poems on the Buses Exhibition

IT SEEMS LIKE YESTERDAY

She liked to play with boys.
She knew where she was with their roughness -
horses dogs boys smelling of bracken and new bread.
Tony Wooster burned her initials in a leaf with his magnifying glass
catching and holding the sun -
the sun blinded her, splintered him in dazzlement.
His house seemed to be without adults -
nobody stopped them sliding
down the stairs on bolsters or chewing hunks of bread - her teeth
left prints in the marge, left prints on his cheek.
They lowered their heads, cracked
their skulls together like stags and now
she wonders if he married someone sensible.

HAVE NOTS, **Jordan Guillou**, Guernsey
Poems on the Buses Exhibition

HAVE NOTS

I have not laid wasted on a nightclub floor,
I have not laid waste to a hyper-calorific burrito,
I have not laid down my life in a postapocalyptic wasteland,
I have not gotten laid, what a waste,
I have not laid, wasting a whole day in bed,
I have not laid a pet fish to rest, condemned it to waste
I have not laid it bare for a loved one wasting away,
I fear to lay down, and to waste it all.

TWENTY MOONS, **Jo Haslam**, Huddersfield
Poems on the Buses Exhibition

TWENTY MOONS

We all said the same thing, *bad news*;
her best friend who can't believe she won't
just walk through the door. And those of us
who thought she still breathed, who thought
she almost stirred; but that was just a gust of air
through the open window, lifting the chequered scarf
around her neck, her dark red hair ;
I noticed how the heavy velvet curtain moved.
And still we can't believe the sea sound
of her womb is hushed, her flamy hair won't re-ignite,
how could its hundred thousand fires be doused,
and those hands, their fifty four small separate bones
reduce to ashy dust, or any night swallow up
their twenty moons when no dark is a dark enough?

UNSUNG, **Stephen Keeler**, Ullapool
Poems on the Buses Exhibition

UNSUNG
Xi'an, 1981
For Yu Xi

Four decades since I lived in the Far East
where yellow dust blew in each night from off
the Gobi and my students wrapped themselves
in cotton rags and carried tiny stools
to class and sat like circus elephants
practising their tricks
memorising English the way some nations
made the decision to re-arm

beyond the city walls on gentle slopes
the modest cherry trees began to swell
like baking loaves and after every day
of rain in spring she said the temperature
rises one degree
a kind deceit I chose to believe for ever.

SUDDENLY, **Shirley Nicholson**, Manchester
Poems on the Buses Exhibition

SUDDENLY

When the train jerks to a halt in November gloom
a young man surprises the silence with a voice
that flows the way cream pours from a jug, and passengers stop
looking at what they cannot see outside and voices fold
into voices as football fans, shoppers, tourists, children –
sitting, standing – become an upsurge of song and no-one
can stop themselves joining in as the tune is lobbed
from seat to seat, over tables, between people, across the aisle
and the sound pushes at the windows, bounces off the ceiling,
throws itself through any chink, into the fog, the morning.

MACKEREL, **Judy O'Kane**, N.Ireland
Poems on the Buses Exhibition

MACKEREL

We chop and sway with the waves,
slip the knife along the spine,
throw the remains over
our shoulders
like salt.
We
sit,
silent,
the terrier
snug on your lap,
staring out to the horizon.
*Take the wheel, you say, I'll open
the window so you can see where you're going.*

TRUE LOVE, BILSTON, **Steve Pottinger**, West Midlands, UK
Poems on the Buses Exhibition

TRUE LOVE, BILSTON

You notice the girl at the chippy
is different, stands somehow taller.

The weekly swelling on her face is gone,
the green of her gaze is electric.

As the bruises on her arm fade
she blossoms into defiance, ink

and shovels scraps into your tray
like a woman firing dirt into

a fresh-dug grave.

START AT THE START, **Owen Rees**, Manchester UK
Poems on the Buses Exhibition

START AT THE START

Start at the start with late kids running over and the crowd cheering
The place cold frost and your breath giving out steam,
The manager, the brains behind the product making important decisions!
The coaches giving advice and motivating,
The referee making occasional wrong decisions
The team talk cold, weary, only coaches speak,
The first player is the fly half, the point machine, the kicker,
one of the leaders
The scrum half, scared of tackles distributing, the smallest
The full back, agile, fast, calling marks, the stamina of a horse
The wingers, wiry, stealing tries, faster than the wind,
The physio, with his magic spray saying, "carry on, you can run it off,"
The bench, the magic finishers, ready to go, for the win,
The crowd with one tall guy obstructing everybody's view,
End at the end, where you have won, happiness around.

2000, **Mark Totterdell**, Exeter
Poems on the Buses Exhibition

2000

Twenty years on, they still thought of the cheese,
the cable car into the pale horned mountains,
the trek over rocks to a roadless village,
the baseless rumours of maggots and manure,
the unmodern woman who would only sell them
a lump of it like a keystone, which oozed in its bag,
had to be dangled from hotel windows,
the grottoes of blue mould concealed within it,
the acid tang of it, the crumble, the long finish
of flavour in the throat, their mild unease
at memories of the lows, the lows of cattle
from windowless old barns in wide green valleys.