

**SECOND LIGHT POETRY COMPETITION 2013
JUDGE: MONIZA ALVI: PRIZE WINNERS**

This competition's world was an adventurous one, with so many of the poems ambitious and strongly engaged, from the very short to the extended. The selection included the magical and mysterious, the familiar made strange and the unfamiliar strikingly evoked. Silence could resonate as powerfully as words. Experiment was often in evidence, and the vitality of contemporary poetry affirmed.

Moniza Alvi



Short Poem First Prize Winner: Kathy Miles

Gardening With Deer

And now you know for yourself how it is.
The ragged hours' breathing,
long nights and longer days.
Watching her shift in her sleep,
as the moon turns and skies alter
and the ghost-trees of early morning
are heavy with frosted leaves
like a fruit of hanging doves.

A lifetime of gardening with deer,
their rough noses huffing
over the fence, nipping at the roses.
Apple and dogwood, linden and birch.
Fraying the bark of saplings
to remove the velvet, their heads
laid against the trunks. The stag
whipping the branches with his antlers.

All this is remembered in a still room
where the spirit of the white deer
with an arrow in his heart
walks through her dreamtime,
and the sweet musky sigh of roebuck
in the back of her throat
rises with every breath.
You hold her hand,
anxious, yet dreading her waking.

Long Poem First Prize Winner: Clare Best

Cell (extracts)

In 1329, Christine Carpenter – a girl of fourteen – took a vow of solitary devotion and agreed to be enclosed in a cell built on to the north wall of the chancel of St James' Church, Shere, Surrey. She spent more than a thousand days in the cell before asking to be freed. When the Bishop learned of her release, he ordered her to be re-enclosed.

I

Come Mother, sit with me by the hearth.

I have the Book, a woollen blanket, pewter plate,
two sets of clothing – the rest burned
before last night's burial feast.

Each day I'll wait by the grating;
you'll pass me bread, water, eggs. I'll give you
the chamber pot, my clothes to wash.

I'll see the altar through a window
three hands wide, three high.
I'll seek and find forgiveness for my sins.

Come, sit with me. Cut my hair.

*we brought nothing into this world
it is certain we can carry nothing out*

XXVII

The cold is my friend,
we talk and talk
into the slightest hours of the night.

The night is my friend –
I know the Lord
will fill me, swell my loving heart.

CCCMLXXI

Lucifer, again.
He slips in, whistling –
sloe-black eyes, long fingers,
narrow hips – so handsome.
This time: a conger eel
from the Caspian Sea,
myrrh, mandrake, twigs of wych elm,
oyster pearls to stop my ears.
We dance and dance –

he spins me off my feet, scatters
fennel seeds and clover for a bed –
he spreads me,
enters like a fist.

Sunrise – he's gone,
vanished
with his gifts.

MCXXI

The Bishop has written –
Finish What is Begun.

No words. No more
words.

Kiss me.
Warm my hands.

Wrap these bird bones
in a yard of wool,

bear me on your shoulder
to the cell,

lay me on the briny slabs.

*we therefore commit her body
to the ground*

*earth to earth
ashes to ashes*

My ulcerous tongue
caresses pitted gums –

the final stone's
in place.

*her body
earth to earth*

Second Prize Winner: Gill Learner

Chill Factor

He tries to dream cool – of ponds he dared to step on
till he heard the gun-shot crack, stilled waterfalls
in Cumbria, of sleeping in an igloo or an ice hotel.

Singin dust grits between his teeth, chafes
his shoulder blades, sticks to his sweat no matter
how much care he takes undressing, shaking out.

His final tour. It's 48 degrees: he must think cool –
frost fairs on the Thames, blue light of glacier caves,
Shackleton's *Endurance* trapped and crushed.

Heat beats at his helmet like a welder's torch,
his nape's on fire, eyes sear with watching
as the search team makes its slow way back.

His last long walk. The escort's guns are poised.
Without his body armour he steps light
along the track. Tomorrow – home, to stars

in their proper places, Cathy's frown, the garden
gossipy with birds, the children's bikes to fix.
Soft-fingered sun. Rain. He lies flat, tools

to hand. The silence grows. Now he believes
cool – in Saturn's rings, the Skaters' Waltz,
a white bear on its lonely floe. He wipes his mind,

strokes away sand and earth, starts to unpick
a knotted mass of metal, batteries and wires.
The desert holds its breath.

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Third Prize Winner: Helen Moore

Earth Justice (extracts, sections 1, 2, 4 & 7; sections 5, 6 & 8)

*"I don't want to frighten you, but not a stitch can be taken / On your quilt unless you study.
The geese will tell you – / A lot of crying goes on before dawn comes." – Robert Bly*

For Polly Higgins

(read whole poem at <http://internationaltimes.it/earth-justice/>)

1.

What reason might I have to fly
with unknown Waterbirds to Canada?
(Reason which is not derived

from corrosive profit
or the scientific abstract) –
oil, synthetic crude

which brokers world warming, hunger, war,
and ecocide, the international crime;
ecocide, destruction of life.

[...]

*the reason that I'm mentioning this
is that it's the first time an offence
has been tried under the act ...*

In the dock stand the CEOs of Global Petroleum
and Glamis Corporation –
Clerk of the court: *Mr Bannerman, Mr Tench,*

you are here today on the following indictment:

[...]

How long for tired Ducks to learn new tricks?
...] *This 'processed water,'
hypoxic zone,*

which swallowed them like men dressed in lead.
And o, how the bitumen burned
their throats, their internal organs –

*...] we're dealing with vast areas here,
These are lakes,
Not ponds.*

2. Pondlife

... recall your worst case of heartburn, and multiply
by ten thousand. This is caustic soda passing through
your gut. Excretion
is impossible. One hour later, you're dead.

4.

[...]

*...] there's a pattern we weren't able
to predict –
the birds arrived prematurely*

[...]

Answer: these desolate wastes
pitied by the Christian mission;
these godless crusts awaiting our consumption.

5.

*...] Mr Bannerman: there's nothing
that can be humanly done
to prevent a bird landing in a lake or pond.*

*...] Christopher Parker QC: this case of Robin
Bannerman, scapegoat extraordinaire*

6.

Ah, and what justice for beloved ones
who sing and speak in other tongues?

7.

[...]

*...] It is not a defence to say
operations were licensed according to national rules
and were operated in accordance with the terms*

*...] has the question of leakage from the ponds
into the ground water, the Athabasca River
ever come up at board level?*

*...] Members of the jury,
it's now time for you to consider.*

8.

*...] Judge Norman: I think we have a verdict.
Shall we call them in?*