

**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?*