

SECOND LIGHT POETRY COMPETITION 2015

JUDGE: MYRA SCHNEIDER: PRIZE WINNERS

Judge's comment: I went through over a thousand poems looking for poems which travelled, paid attention to form and really made words work. Eventually I reduced a long list of 101 poems to 26 which I was determined to pick out and by this time I was very excited because the winning poems were telling me loud and clear which they were!



Myra Schneider

Short Poem First Prize Winner: Carolyn King

Souvenir

He's playing God again: puffing out his cheeks
like the great north wind in a fairy tale; breathing life
into a shapeless blob. Immaculate conception.

And now I see the bird before it's hatched; watch
as he thrusts his *canna da soffio* into the furnace:
genesis – before my very eyes!

When he plunges it into cold water, I freeze.
Baptism by fire – a hiss of steam rising
from amorphous silica: life in the raw.

In the city, shapely gondolas snake
along shot-silk waterways;
sunlight glances through stained-glass windows.

I'm in another world – intense with the heat
and passion of giving birth as he breathes again
into the blowpipe; watching the bubble

of molten glass, seeing him reach for the forceps
he calls *borselle* to coax the emerging shape
of a tiny bird out of its red-hot nest.

Under the *scagno*, his work-bench, I glimpse
the broken wings and malformed heads
of the imperfect ones;

fragments of twisted perfume bottles
glinting like jewels
on the unswept floor beside the furnace.

They remind me of home
and the wastepaper basket under the desk
brimming over with shredded poems –

the ones I sometimes wish I hadn't thrown away,
as they gnaw at my heart and stick in my craw
like little glass splinters under my skin.

He shakes his head.
I'm crying now; begging him not to reject
the tiny misshapen form.

He tosses it, still warm, in my direction.
"Mine?" I ask. But he's already back at the glory-hole,
the glare of mass production *Murano*-style.

And I shall carry it home swaddled in cotton-wool,
as tenderly as I carried home my first-born
from the hospital.

I'm used to this – unflappable;
stroking the flattened head,
meeting the glassy stare,

pressing my lips to the *rara avis*;
whispering
"We shall fly!"

previously published in *South* magazine, Carolyn King 'Poet Profile', Autumn 2013.

Long Poem First Prize Winner: Margaret Wilmot

Editors' note: *November Journal* is a sequence of 30 14-line poems, one for each day in November, reflecting on events and memories of events in the poet's life. These extracts can only give a flavour of the whole.

November Journal (extracts)

Names As Building-Blocks (1 November)

The new carer has a way of saying a name
so lovingly that she evokes all that is most beautiful
about that person, conjures Brian or Jack
into a warm presence. They are *there* – and *there*
...

Huachinango (2 November)

When Mother came home from Mexico, words
were her best souvenir. Even then, so long ago, it was the sound
which gave her mind delight. I'm sure she always ate
red snapper because she loved its name – huachinango.
...

In The Beginning (29 November)

Get it clear in your mind. Get it down. Words.
It's words which have the energy, given their own space,
to let go. Take off. Like kids. Or swallows.
We don't always know where they're going but
...

Early Train On St. Andrew's Day (30 November)

Once I waited in the bitter wind to file past
his skull and little finger. Women had great candles,
stood barefoot, or inched forward on their knees.
This was the day the children were late home, happy
from a bun-feast for their House-saint.
A friend's birthday too. Each day echoes.
Frost covers the fields; sheep congregate in a patch of sun.
Nearby two kids are chatting. Politics and Economics do connect,
really, the girl assures the boy. At Music College, he begins.
I miss the music, said Mother recently, grandsons away.
Cloud has piled itself on a high wind-shelf, is streaked
with early sun. It looks like Tiepolo. I'd like to go back
to those churches in Venice, I tell my husband.
I didn't appreciate them when I was young...

an excerpt of the poem was first published in *Scintilla*, 2008

Second Prize Winner: Judith Taylor

Binding (extract)

Leatherbound, they need the touch
of our fingertips, our palms, and so
this ritual to assuage them: in the dimmed light
of Special Collections, customary
cotton gloves laid aside
you hand me down a volume

and I hold it as I've been trained: firmly,
not too tight.

I massage its spine thoroughly, touch
every nub of the hard cords
that keep the body together.
I work its every moving part

I let it drink in my essential oils
that will keep it supple, ready for use
beyond my time.

It's Volume I of a treatise.
You work on II
and we face a little apart

as if what we do here
is private. But I watch
the roll of your shoulder-blade
inside the cotton labcoat
and your fine hand, against
the grain of the
– calfskin, is it?

I stroke the smooth covers
gently, steadily, slowly:
as if the living animal
were beneath my hand
and needed soothing...

Third Prize Winner: Kathy Miles

The Lady and the Unicorn

Georges de Fournival, Journeyman Weaver, 1490

I wake with her face reflected in my head,
the rough draft of her cheek
the half-shaped cup of her chin,

and I'm impatient to begin my work.
She is woven into my breath, into
each heartbeat. Every day she grows

under my skilled fingers as I fill
the unformed landscape of her skin.
Here, the music of the loom purls through

the shed, creaks like a horse in his stall.
We string the heddles tight as a harp,
put the warp threads into the raddle,

set the tension right for an even weave.
We are deaf to the world, our hands raw
with the cut of wool, the stinging winter frost.

Today I'm gifting her a string of creamy
pearls, to be placed inside the casket held
by a chatelaine I have not crafted.

(For Antoine Serres has that task.
His lady is not so excellent as mine, her
features coarse, her dress a plainer *moiré*.)

At night I toss on the dark hours, see her
in my dreams. Imagine coiling her mouth
with scarlet, shadowing her eyes in plum-

a hint of woad perhaps, the slightest touch
of gold. I would weave a maiden's
fiery blush: but fear the *lissier's* anger.

I'd twist her lips with desire, put a beaded
pulse on the line of her cheek, so when I run
my hands along the ribbed warp-edge

I can almost feel it beating. But her eyes
are just for me. The lids heavy with pleasure,
the *hachure* of colours braided in her gaze.

For she is my Lady, *mon seul désir*. Already
I would fight lions for her, as I turn her slender wrist,
her shoulders' slope beneath the silk brocade.

And when she is finished, I would lie with her
in pansy and sweet rocket. In our senses, scents
of hyacinth and jasmine, her skin fresh

as strawberries, a plainchant of leaves
singing in the branches of the oak.
I would touch her outstretched palms,

take the jewelled pendant from her throat,
untie the narrow cord of her cabled belt,
unloose her hair from its stiff *aigrette*.

I would undo the unicorn stitch by stitch,
cut the warp-threads of his horn,
lie in her lap forever, courting her favour.