

## 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.