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Karina Fiorini, London Independent Story Prize 2023 Poetry Winner by 'Sea major'

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The LISP 23 Winning Poem will be published in LISP Anthology 2023 soon. Subscribe to our website to hear when it's out!



- Can you please tell us about you and your daily life?
My daily life is peppered with moments of simplicity but also profound moments. I enjoy having a stroll in my garden with foliage around me where I live in France with my husband Kenneth. I also carry with me the Mediterranean fragrances and vibes, given I was born and bred in Malta. Additionally, experiences have thrusted me in filtering the noise to find that which really resonates with me.

Having a diverse academic background, including geography, sustainable development and literature, it enabled me to spend a chunk of my career working in the Maltese national environmental policy-making, the European administrative sector and volunteering. This context, my mother's passing 18 years ago as well as supporting an intellectually disabled sister of course left their mark. Reading, writing, artistic and environmental activism prove to be cathartic. Between 2014 and 2016, I was delighted to have been entrusted with coordinating and participating in a number of poetry readings in Valletta and Mdina (both in Malta) under the auspices of the Valletta European Capital for Culture 2018 and the Mdina Cathedral Contemporary Art Biennale, as well as in Luxembourg together with poet Antoine Cassar and with the support of the National Book Council (Malta).

- When and how did you get into writing?
My mother, Mary, was pivotal in engaging me into the use of the fabric of the word within different genres. I started writing around the age of 10, wrote a few poems at school, and a short story. Studying Othello and Philip Larkin's poems in college was a turning point; the sounds, the woven words, and the different manner of presenting truth, became more than ever fitting, so I started writing tirelessly but never submitting my work. It was only in 2013 that I decided to submit *Ruts*, placing third in The Mattia Family 15th Canadian International poetry competition. Following that, I decided to pursue poetry, and despite numerous rejections and a handful of wins, I continued working on the craft of poetry. A few master classes with award-winning poet and writer Philip Gross energised my awareness and diligence, besides being a privilege to learn from his insightful observations.

I have had some positive opportunities in having poems commended and featured in a number of journals and anthologies. In 2022, *Habiba* was highly commended by poet Joelle Taylor, judge for the Ledbury Poetry Competition. In 2021, the poem *The Calling* featured in PEN International and PEN Malta's A Poetry Memorial for Daphne Caruana

Galizia. *Twelve inky years* received a special mention by the Welsh Poetry International Competition in 2018, whilst *La Moselle* was chosen as an editor's choice in the 2020 Hammond House International Literary Prize, awarded by the University Centre Grimsby. My latest work *Grigal's Mouth* featured last August in Modern Poetry in Translation (mpT), with the support of the National Book Council (Malta).

- How often do you write? Do you have a writing routine? And what inspires you to write?
I regularly jot down words, phrases, influences taken from various art forms and also during daily activities, which usually sneak in when I expect them the least. I feel a restless urge to write, especially if I have not written in a few days. So, the only way to tame it is to bring the work down on paper/screen and give it life that way. Eventually discipline spurs me to find the time to write, either early in the morning, during my free time or in the evening. Still, allowing a few days or even weeks for a poem to simmer, helps me come back to it with a crisp approach, ready for more editing or polishing.

I'm significantly interested in environmental and socio-political issues, and currently developing a repertoire of ecopoetry as well as nature poetry. Other themes on which I work include, mortality and human frailty, transient moments and urban fluctuations. Last November I took part in the challenge-packed workshop The Climate of Change Poetry Challenge led by Cath Drake, featuring Craig Santos Perez. It was great!

- How does it feel to have your work recognised?
It gives a complete sense of fruition that a poem is indeed germinating well. It also means that those lonely, focused moments - when thoughts are brewing and eventually being materialised, when I am doubtful whether the poem's ecosystem is congruent to the true meaning of the poem - are in fact succeeding! I am very grateful to receive this poetry award by the London Independent Story Prize.

- What's the best and most challenging thing about writing a Poetry?
When I write poetry, I know every word and punctuation count, and need to be relevant. I'm always ready to cut down or alter a pattern, for instance, if the internal music is not working well or the line structure appears flat. Developing a poem, makes me feel alive, and when the text itself responds, it's thrilling and colourful.

- How did you develop the idea for your LISP-selected story? Is there a story behind your story? And, how long have you been working on it?
With a limited area of 3.5 squared km, the islet of Comino is truly a special place. Years back, during a diving course I could sense that the relationship between land and sea became all the more evident. The island is anything but desolate in the summer months, but quite bare during other seasons. *Sea major* brings in the idea of the rock composition and the presence of the land and marine flora and fauna, captured in the permanence and the impermanence of time. It represents a slice of perspective, far from the typical maddening crowds and boats. The poem's title hints at the internal music of the poem and builds on a form that mirrors the flow of seawater.

- Can you please give us a few tips about writing a Poetry?
The idea that gels a poem starts sprouting and needs to be free to gain momentum. It involves listening to how the words want to develop; there is a flow of instances bringing in movement as well as resistance. You need to be ready to remove the unnecessary, to allow silences, to give in to contrasts - that might be the phrase, the technique or tone you were searching for, and not been completely conscious of it. Then it rings correct!

- What's the best thing and the most challenging thing about competitions?
I always write to fulfil my need. However, competitions offer an additional opportunity in applying and restricting myself creatively, together with providing possibilities that can take a poem further out into the world. Well-judged competitions can provide a higher impetus to the work under scrutiny, if chosen.

Rejection is tough though. Sometimes there is nothing wrong with a piece of work. Other times the craft may need more honing. Yet, never give up, make it more you or less you, but be ready to push yourself. Try again!

- Lastly, do you recommend the writers submit to LISP?
LISP is creating a dynamic community, inspiring writers and providing key opportunities, whilst collaborating with other writers, artists and platforms such as Modern Poetry in Translation. Of course, I would recommend LISP!

LISP LONDON INDEPENDENT STORY PRIZE

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