

## **Texts of the Prizes and Honourable Mentions Winners, Reuben Rose Competition 2015**

### **First Prize: "Romantic" by Johnmichael Simon**

Mister J.P. Hornbill, ninety fast approaching,  
reading glasses unreliable as fog lamps blinking,  
has taken to watching movies from some wondrously  
benevolent provider of purloined celluloid, streaming  
down to his rusting yet still functioning computer

And like the zipped-up overcoated teenage dreamer  
he never has relinquished, chooses Romance as his  
favorite genre and watches, eyes misting up his specs,  
how in script after metropolitan script, the camera focuses  
on yet another pair of star-crossed strangers

Young and good looking, bumping unexpectedly, yet  
also quite predictably, into each other, locking eyes  
for a short magnetic moment, exchanging a word or two  
on this or that, and having kindled in us a spark

That Mister J.P. Hornbill (like hundreds of other  
lonely viewers) hopes, fondly imagines, nay is certain,  
will within the next two hours become a flame, consuming  
time and space, surviving improbable adventures,  
partings and re-meetings, losses, tragedies and with  
a quite implausible belief in destiny, burn on to help them

find each other once more in scene after scene then part  
again, until the final minutes and that inevitable, arms-around-  
each-other, lips and tongues entwined, ecstatic moment,  
after which the actors' names and all the other collaborators  
in this great pretense appear in black and white across the screen

Mister J.P. Hornbill takes off his glasses, wipes his eyes,  
prepares for bed. Somewhere, in a dream perhaps, he knows  
he'll meet her. Maybe she's not far away now, closing her  
computer, brushing her teeth, filling her hot water bottle.  
Possibly they'll meet soon he thinks, sit in the back row  
munching popcorn look at each other sideways, smile  
and exchange a word or two, as strangers sometimes do

## Second Prize: "Samson's Saga" by Helen Bar-Lev

Delilah wondered if all Hebrews were such gentle lovers  
as she clipped his curls and left them lying on the ground  
like so many question marks, slipped out of the room,  
nodded to the waiting soldiers  
musing if she would miss Samson,  
surely the best tryst she'd ever known,  
but she pocketed the pouch of payment  
and vowed to forget him

What they didn't tell her  
was that they would bind him, blind him,  
a bit too cruel she winced, braiding her hair,  
admiring her image in the waters of the Jordan,  
applying more kohl to intensify her eyes,  
consoling herself with another swig of the finest mandrake wine

Samson mused too as he begged for food  
and listened to gossip as passersby spat on him;  
so weak was he that two men had to help him home  
but ever so slowly his hair was growing;  
he wound a turban around his head  
so that no one would notice and continued to beg  
while at home he lifted weights and envisioned revenge

Meanwhile a feast was planned to celebrate his defeat;  
all the populace entered the temple,  
tingling with pagan anticipation  
of the humiliation spectacle

A shackled Samson stumbled into the temple  
and fumbled for the pillars he remembered  
from the time when his eyes could see both light and night  
and the beauty of Delilah whose betrayal had brought him  
here to these pillars and whose jasmine perfume wafted  
through the room, firing him with the passion to push and push,  
harder, harder, a labour of anger  
as the temple collapsed, burying them all

And then he could see again

**Third Prize: "Father and Daughter" by Breindel Lieba Kasher**

**Father:**

I took my daughter  
To Poland in the winter  
Snow made it impossible  
To walk from  
Auschwitz to Birkenau  
But we did it  
She insisted  
She said she felt it  
But she didn't  
For her it happened  
Long ago in a foreign country  
She could never get it

**Daughter:**

It was bitter cold  
Snow made it impossible  
To go from  
Auschwitz to Birkenau  
But we did it  
I insisted  
I needed to feel it

He said the trip  
Didn't change me  
How could he know?  
The war was his secret  
He never shared his dead  
He loved them more than  
He loved me  
I felt it

## Honorable Mentions in random order

### “Toro” by Elizabeth Claverie

the sun in madrid scorched  
my last summer there.  
1936, hemingway, hunched over a pad,  
drumming his fingers, glassy eyed,  
cigarette smoldering.

and there i was in the middle of the arena  
pacing below the cheering crowd,  
ladies waving roses and scarves.  
I eyed you  
as your fringe-covered arms  
and  
sequin-laden hips  
twisted my way.

you held the lance through many passes.  
you danced around me with your sour face.

later, among the petals and lipsticked sighs,  
finally gored  
by a mediocre maneuver  
you didn't intend to make,  
i let my face  
fall onto the sand, warm and nurturing.  
a stay-with-me, beseeching, plaintive cry  
of desperate wanting fell from my mouth.  
saliva and snot dripped from my flared nostrils.

and in my feckless stupor  
i misconstrued the stab—  
didn't see it coming, didn't feel the torero's blade  
and when I looked back at you, thinking the blood was yours,  
i realized it was mine.

**“Ezekiel of the Junk Yard” by Jane Seitel**

God sends the angel of death into the graveyard of wrecks.

Piles lie in ruin, shells of cars and ramshackle trucks:

An antisemitic Edsel, that El Dorado my zeyde coveted and a behemoth of a black Hudson. The Blessed One gives the angel of death a list, but the thief first steals for himself a chrome hubcap, a cracked rear view mirror. He pries off an Infinity emblem to wear on his lapel. Gulls swarm the edge of the junkyard. They shrill the mounds of squalor,

shit on crushed cars and in gutted engines. They hover, become a shroud of soaked feathers. They shield a solitary burnt out vehicle from death’s sight. in the sinkhole of furtive visions, the spokes of the chariot splinter, frame warped beyond repair. The owner, Ezekiel, strikes wet flints together. The wind scoffs them. Yellow eyed dogs worry near. The prophet blurts out consonants—SPTT and PTSD. Letters ascend, gibberish assaults driving rain. Craws wide, the gulls gulp down each letter, one by one.

## **“One Small Scratch” by Jed Myers**

Paper lasts where it gets tucked  
away in stacks, in sheds, huts,  
collapsing attics.... It outlives  
the struts of its brittle houses. But  
print, intently typed or dashed  
off in offhand moments, ink  
or lead, will bleed away and marry  
other atoms—fade  
to blank. They’ll X-ray scraps  
they find in heaps, like they did  
of late with hills of ancient trash  
in Egypt, discerning bits  
and pieces of old porn and Jesus  
quotes, but most is lost. So this  
note to you, who scavenge  
wrecks and squint at sheets of gray  
forgotten tracts in languages  
the world neglects—this message  
sent by spirit, in an instant,  
touching you or not. You breathe  
a carbon atom I exhaled.  
You blink in brightness from the sun  
I wandered under. You are someone’s  
son or daughter. And now that I am  
invisible, I kiss your brow  
and bless your wonder, there across  
the time-rift, down the spirals  
round our star, from now  
to now, one small scratch of life  
on life’s papyrus to another.

## **“The Right Time” by Rochelle Mass**

In our family  
time was measured by watches  
my father repaired  
he returned precision to people’s lives  
by bringing minutes of the day  
back to where they belong  
My father believed in time  
he believed he had the power  
to bring it back to life.

My father always wore a gold watch  
that was heavy at the end for the thin person  
he had become.  
“This fancy closure bothers me,” he said,  
“I need a regular strap, a lighter watch  
nothing exclusive.  
I need a watch for an old man with a cane.”  
My father died a month ago, he was 97.

My father kept a wooden clock by his bed  
He wound it morning and night  
aid he could feel time moving, with new clocks  
you don’t feel it, he would say.

I brought his clock home with me,  
put it by my bed, I forget to wind it  
keep the digital one there also. I’m hoping  
I’ll learn more about the spirit of time  
how it pulses, how it enriches  
yet unravels my life

I need time to understand  
what it really does.

## **“Hemming” by Patti Tana**

I need a little help to thread the needle, a metal hook  
to catch the thread and guide it through the eye,  
with pins to hold the folded cloth in place.

Lately as I walk up and down the stairs, I’ve caught  
myself stepping on the hem, so I spread the nightgown  
on my lap, smooth it flat, and stitch a wider hem.

When I was a child, my mother taught me how to sew  
on her Singer, my feet playing the cast iron treadle  
as though it were an organ, letting out and taking in.

I was a tall girl, five foot seven by the seventh grade.  
Running races after school, my legs took the field  
like the blades of a combine harvesting grain.

My mother measured every inch I grew  
with pencil marks on the frame of the kitchen door  
and every inch was worthy of applause.

Sitting with her sewing basket at my feet, peace  
enfolds me, and I praise this part of the pattern  
that forms the fabric of my life.



**“Holocaust Legacy in America” by Judith R. Robinson**

It isn't that we are crazy-mad,  
this family.  
Better that we were,  
better that we  
honor the ghosts  
that hover gray and mute  
around the holiday table;  
but no, the eyes of this family  
shift and blink  
in restless constancy  
terror a vague clutch  
burrowed deep in the gut  
buried beyond any understanding.  
The stranger who comes a while  
sees the miles that loom ahead  
of scraping and bowing,  
the bent necks, the nodding  
and bidding for a safe place,  
acceptance if not among the privileged  
then a patch in the village  
of the contented, to rake up the leaves,  
stroll the sidewalk, return the dumb smiles,  
  
the occasional handshake.

**“Dawn” by Sheila Goldburgh Johnson**

I saw them on the slope  
behind the house, two young deer,  
frozen, catching sight of me through  
the upstairs bathroom window.

The way one stared at me  
while I groped for the switch  
to turn off the light that I might  
see them better through the fog.

In the dim we stared, the deer  
and I. Although the higher deer  
turned his back to me, the lower  
one continued to stare.

His (for he had the beginnings  
of the tiniest horns) great dark  
eyes continued to meet mine,  
trying to make sense of what

I could be in his reality.  
He lifted one hoof and turned  
in profile. I saw the outline  
of his slender leg, delicate

raised knee, as he glanced  
at his companion ambling  
gently up the slope. Oh, stay  
I whispered, but he completed

the turn and followed the other  
towards the forest.

A new day, a glimpse of peace  
in this burdened world.

**“Time Capsule — 1957” by Reuven Goldfarb**

My note is sealed in a plastic tube,  
the barrel of a ball point pen,  
whose openings I have melted shut in fire  
and buried behind the garage,  
a message to an unknown era,  
to say, “We are reaching for the moon.”

At *Kiddush Levanah*, the blessing on the moon,  
under its visible crescent or almost full arc,  
we leap skyward three times and declare,  
“Just as I cannot touch the moon,  
so may my enemies be unable to touch me.”

What, then, does it mean, to have actually  
reached the moon? — Not me, but one of my race —  
and even to have brought back moon rocks, moon grit,  
moon dust (we cannot call it “earth”),  
an actual piece of the lunar landscape?

Even as I can now touch the moon,  
can my enemies now touch me?

## “Language Lessons” by Ricky Friesem

English, I take for granted  
Yiddish never fails  
to break my heart  
French remains a jewel  
I covet but will never own  
German, a blister that stings  
with every word I utter,  
and

speaking Hebrew  
is a wild bike ride along  
a bumpy path where  
conjugations threaten  
to unseat me and loaded  
words loom to divert me  
with the memories of  
where I heard them first,  
like

the Hebrew words for  
shelter rocket blackout  
that I learned back in the  
War of '73 and the  
acronyms for everything  
from mortar shells to armored  
cars that I picked up

in all the wars that followed,

but  
what kept me, keeps me  
still, from steering off that  
path is *yesh*, a glorious  
word that lets me speak  
of being, wishing, having.  
*Yesh li*. I have. I have  
a language now, I have  
a people and a land.  
For better or for worse.  
It's mine. I have.  
*Yesh li*.

**“Cheatgrass” by Yonah Lavery-Yisraeli**

I will try to translate what happened into Field.

You were the field.

I was an invasive species of weed.

My seeds fell soon after the burn.

This is a nice place for germination, I said,

being used to a harsher ecosystem.

You did not answer, your thoughts burnt stumps.

I took your silence for adoption.

My inner sequences mutated and refolded

to imitate nativity to your soil. When I grew high and many

I understood it pained you to lose nutrients to me.

Neither of us called the bright plough.

You said to me, you do not need any father or mother, which I am not sure

how to say in Field, since even the most noxious weed needs soil.