

Winners of the Robert Burns Poetry Competition 2015 - Published Poets

First Place:

H. Williford-Lower (Waikouaiti)

To Wee Russet Tuft

Yer wee, adorable hert is stilled
In yer dear, sweet feathered breast,
Still warm frae th' life wi`in it plucked
Just noo frae its dear, warm nest.

Yer tottie green heid curved sae neat,
Yer pearly neck sae bonilie fufft,
And atop yer smaw, innocent brou
Ye sported yer dink russet tuft.

More wyteless even than a babe,
Wha at least cries; Ye hud na ither thought
Than tae adorn branches lik' a gem
And sing whit th' mornin' sun hud brought.

Yer mither laboured sae tae feed ye,
Taught ye th' tricks 'n' th' bliss o' flight,
Does she ken yer twa bricht een hae closed
On th' mirk o' Death's ayebidin night?

It is ma deep want peedie Russet Tuft
That whin Death found ye, 'twas swift,
Ye ne'er knew whit de'il took ye,
And Fear a'missed that graveyard shift.

It's mah deeper hawp peerie one,
Ye didnae die o' gliff for a' that,
Ye awa somegate afore th' De'il pounced,
Enrobed in her velvet jaiket o' Cat.

She is bein' punished, o' course.
Jailed a' this day whilk seems tae lang,
But thare is na aefauld wey tae seek recourse
For yer saikeless soul wha didna ill-daein.

Yer death is oan mah hauns as well;
I harbor th' De'il 'n' gie her mah luve.
She gives in tae mere beastie nature,
While ah ken fou weel whit she's capable o'.

Wild wee Russet Tuft, A'm dowie tae say
In a wey, yer cutty life wull abide oan;
Yer bricht chirping is noo excheenged
For this awfu, mournful, 'n' tuneless cruin.

To Wee Russet Tuft

Your wee, adorable heart is stilled
In your small sweet feathered breast,
Still warm from the life within it plucked
Just now from its dear, warm nest.

Your tiny green head curved so neat,
Your pearly neck so prettily puffed,
And atop your lovely, delicate brow
You sported your little russet tuft.

More innocent even than a babe,
Who at least cries; You had no other thought
Than to adorn branches like a gem
And sing what the morning sun had brought.

Your mother laboured so to feed you,
Taught you the tricks and the bliss of flight;
Does she know your button eyes have closed
On the dark of Death's eternal night?

It is my deep wish little Russet Tuft
That when Death found you, it was swift -
You never knew what devil took you,
And Fear missed that graveyard shift.

It is my deeper hope little one,
You did not die of fright for all that,
You left somehow before the Devil pounced,
Enrobed in her velvet coat of Cat.

She is being punished, of course.
Jailed all this day that seems too long -
But there is no real way to seek recourse
For your stainless soul who did no wrong.

Your death is on my hands as well;
I harbor the Devil and give her my love.
She gives in to mere animal nature,
While I know full well what she's capable of.

Wild wee Russet Tuft, I'm sad to say
In a way, your short life will live on;
Your bright chirping is now exchanged
For this awful, mournful, and tuneless song.

Second Place:

Peter Matheson (Waitati)

Rabbie's Ode to Dunedin

Dunedin's a fair and sonsie toun;
Her lads and lassies
Clack oot my sangs
As if they be thir ain;
Ah'm heid-yin in the Octagon!

Ye're soon tae be a Gigatoun
Whatever that micht mean;
Flauntin' the high-falutin' name;
A toun o' letters.
Sic stottin', glorious fame!

Aye, maybe hooch aye,
But gardy loo, Dave Cull!
For 'tis weill kent,
Pride cums afore a grievous fa';
Best tak guid tent!

Pennies clinkin' in the till
Is a' the cry these days.
But ach, tae reach the hert
An' lift the saul,
A toun maun be mair pert.

Burns suppers, haggis,
Aw guid and weill,
Wi' a dram fir auld lang syne.
But better far the nip o' life
Tae gar the morrow shine.

Ramember Baxter, Tuwhare,
Cilla and Peter Olds,
Toil and pleasure weill they knew,
Rubbed alang with common fowk,
Tellt it plain and true.

Times hae cheenged ye ken,
An' we maun gang a cantier wey.
Sae tak me in, an' sit me down.
Ah'll lichten up yer day;
The toun sall ootblaze the mune.

Third Place:

Stephanie Mayne (Parnell, Auckland)

“Wha daurs meddle wi me”**The Song of the Scottish Thistle.**

You think you own this fertile field?
Ha! I will fight. I will nae yield
Try to pull me from the mud
Farmer man – I’ll have your blood!
I wear my prickly plaid with pride
My dirk and claymore at my side
Green my kilt and stout my stalk
Strong my growth and long my walk
By the light of midnight moon
I creep about in leafy shoon
Tough your arm, sharp your spade,
Pointless all the effort made!
I’ll fork and fight behind my shield
I cannae die, I will nae yield!
You’re no man compared to me
Weeds a term that’s best for thee!
By spike, by spine, by thorn, by bristle
Know ye this – my name is “Thistle!”
I spare no crop, I split the soil
I scrape your skin, I thief, I spoil
Oh, the poisons ye have tried
What faith ye have in herbicide.
A warrior is what I am
Leader of a barbarous clan
I lurk in ditches, hide in hay
I dodge the grubber, shrug off spray
You’ve cut my stem - I dinnae mind
For you have left my root behind.
“Come back tae me” Earth quietly begs
As sap smears my butchered legs
Although you ken me amputee
Wait till spring and then you’ll see!
O’er all the length and breadth of time
This lands been pierced by me and mine
My seed is sent on thistle - down
My children still will wear my crown!
Foolish farmers cannae harm me
For hark! My kinfolk join my army.