



Second Place

Arrival of Kings **by Tamara Nicholl-Smith**

Arrival of Kings

Response to Stachiewicz's "Three Holy Kings"

Others have already wondered how
you could have known what route to take: contended
you read stars, could touch your fingers to

their bright braille and divine direction from
their winking warmth, that something deep inside
you, like a compass, gave you certainty.

But I am thinking of the moment when
your journey finally came to an end,
the moment you emerged from night's long road,

to gather at the place where Mary and
Joseph had made a home. Where one by one
you each stepped forward, backlit by the lambent

rays of the low-hung sun, to reverently
present your gifts of gold, of frankincense,
and myrrh. I can see it, the faint shape cast

by your bejeweled crowns in the dark play
of light, a fleet flickering glimpse of future —
shadow of thorns, crowning the holy child's head.

– Tamara Nicholl-Smith

Comments on *Arrival of Kings* by Judge Ryan Wilson

Writing to the Corinthians, St. Paul says 'the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.' The poet of 'Arrival of the Kings' does not engage Piotr Stachiewicz's beautiful Three Holy Kings in the way ekphrastic poems usually engage paintings, but does capture its spirit of questing. Thus, the poet quickly leaves behind others' wonderings to wander off on a personal quest toward the magi's arrival in Jerusalem, though the poet's quest is typologically the same as that of three Kings, as signaled by the supple (and subtle) iambic pentameter being grouped significantly into tercets. Nonetheless, the medieval crowns from Stachiewicz's picture do seem the basis of the conclusion's stunning imagery, their sharp angles transforming, as the perspective shifts, into 'a fleet flickering glimpse of future – / shadow of thorns, crowning the holy child's head.' Here, the transformation of the crowns subtly points toward the transformation of History by Christ's entrance into it, and the poem reaches a profound discovery about the nature of power. The delicacy with which the poet renders this earthshaking scene is stunning.