

2016 GLEN PHILLIPS POETRY PRIZE

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

KEITH MELROSE

I would like to thank Peter Jeffery, OAM, for agreeing to be the judge this year for the Glen Phillips Poetry Prize Competition. By entering this poetry competition writers are provided with an opportunity to present their work to a highly qualified and respected author. Peter has produced an interesting and enlightening report.

Peter has lived in the world of art, literature, media education and multi-cultural affairs since he was 12 when he won an Australia wide essay competition for The Commonwealth Trades Alphabet.

Peter was educated at Perth Modern School, Claremont Training College (where he won the Bertha Houghton Prize for Outstanding English student), University of Western Australia, Birmingham University and London University. He taught at all levels from Infants to Tertiary and was Senior Lecturer before retiring. Peter was very much involved with arts groups as committee member and sometimes chair and deputy chair of Perth Television, Film and Television Institute of West Australia, Praxis that became Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts, CTV Perth and WTV 44, and Deputy chair of Ethnic Communities Council WA and WA Poets Inc (WAPI). This led to the award of the OAM.

Currently Peter is the editor of *Creatrix*, the online quarterly poetry magazine of WAPI. He is also producer of *The World of Art* at 6EBA community radio, and on the boards of WAPI and WTV 44. He is a Life Member of FTI and WA Poets Inc. Peter has published two poetry books *Scapes* in the UK and *True to Poetry in my Fashion*, and is working on a third. Peter has appeared in many anthologies and leading periodicals as well as ABC Radio. He has judged Avon Valley Arts Festival and has been approached for FAWA'S Tom Collins Prize 2017. Peter won First and Second Prizes for Tom Collins, and First prize for Randolph Stow's poetry prize.

JUDGE'S REPORT
PETER JEFFERY, OAM

Having now worked through the entries of the Prize, and the relevant sections, I have been very impressed with the forethought that the Peter Cowan Writers Centre had in the structuring of the competition. In winners – take – all competitions there is very little space if any allotted to the novice poet, and certainly youth, whereas here at crucial points there are very generous awards that allow the take-up of poems that would definitely have fallen in the cracks of the more aggressively competitive one-track competitions. Further there are cross over points that allow recognitions of novices as adults and in the youth section one candidate who was operating at the adult level. The Centre is to be further congratulated on carefully sorting out and checking the details of the entrants into their respective categories thus making my work so much easier.

In subject matter the topics were as much intensely Australian as universal and multi-cultural so that we had grand finals of Aussie Rules and the Melbourne Cup ranging against the European master of music Beethoven. Further, the formats ranged from villanelles and haikus (two of the standbys of creative writing classes and workshops) to powerful attempts at prose poems and the earlier staggered pagination of verse that was once so common as experimental work.

But the thing that impressed me the most was how genuinely Australian we have become with our hybrid culture though due recognition was given to 'the first people' in the recasting of an aboriginal myth. From our settler history and cultural dominance that saw things in a Victorian, Darwinian, European cast so that our unique flora and fauna were seen as strange and threatening we have come to love the bush and in turn have taken on board Australian flora as the ecological and economic basis of our domestic gardens rather than endlessly trying to repeat the European cottage gardens. I attribute this to the way we have embraced wildflowers and how our gardeners are endlessly displaying intense botanical knowledge in making gardens climate sound and diverse.

Though our faithful or autonomous domestic animals such as cats and dogs and even budgies featured almost in sentimental overload, so too we ranged with distinctive birds and fish and native animals that were markedly unique to Australia.

A healthy wide ranging competition that has attracted growing international and interstate recognition, it is a compliment to the forethought of its founders and can only continue to thrive and grow.

The only admonitory note I can strike is in company with the two distinguished judges before me, notably Dr. Marcella Polain and Shane McCauley, is that several entrants have not edited their work adequately and in some competitions this would lead to disbarment. I think Marcella makes this point brilliantly and better than I so I quote:

Has it beenperfectly proofed and edited? This is a competition with prestige and money at stake after all. Errors in spelling and punctuation undo good poems as has happened in this field : homophone misspelling makes mockery of the poem's meaning, turning a good

line into nonsense; multiple incorrect use of apostrophes undermine otherwise fine work. (Spell check does not find either of these kinds of errors). If perfect proofing is beyond you, find or employ someone to help. Or improve your skills. Writers are expected to be highly literate and there are many good style grammar guides in bookstores and online. All it takes is time and effort - and in my experience, it is much easier than writing a poem.

4 COMMENDED CERTIFICATES

In random selection from all sections and no particular order the following poems have been selected.

PATERNAL LESSONS by **ANDREW R LEVETT** shows how negatively the older macho culture accepts a pattern of life that is inherently sterile if not outright abusive in the advice it wants to relay to the coming generations. It moves through a recognisable pattern of quatrains which reflect chauvinism, wage slavery and greed, one eyed factionalism, alcoholism and hospitalisation and parental neglect of the recognition of childhood achievements, to a final three liner betrayal with perhaps incestual ambiguity of shocking intensity. Full marks for the control of graduated revelation that generates a superb climax.

VALIDATION by **ANNE BLAIR** tackles the tortuous elements of relationships with the face-saving hypocrisy that maintains friendship at the expense of the truth with its bluntness and unpleasant feelings that such honesty generates. Yet the poem delivers a crisis point where the truth erupts and causes a momentary rage, and the double filtering of a pre-arranged relationship of dominance and subservience shifts back into play but not before a true equality is achieved. A good poem that shows the oscillation between the black and white moments of friendship that are mantled by an agreed greyness.

A TEENAGE TIGHTROPE by **SKYELAR DUFFY** resides in the Youth section and gives us the viewpoint of teen suicide from the experienced level rather than that which the adult world imagines. The poem moves from the nihilism of our troubled world where the only hope seems to be fatal release through suicide and yet happily self-preservation overcomes the various forms by which one could take one's life and leads to a maturer view that shows a more optimistic balance whereby the full life has its rewards and its triumphs over momentary adversity. Read to others in the youth generation it speaks of a mutual recognition of their occasional or obsessional thoughts of suicide but throws out a lifeline for the fully lived life of the adult and family.

THE STONES CRY OUT by **ANNE BLAIR** gives voice to the victims of child sex abuse and shows the hideous hypocrisy of what purports to be the spiritually pure motivation of erecting a colony of shelter and towering walls and sacred sanctuary of cathedrals through the unyielding exploitation of child migrant labour. The poet moves skilfully through the idyllic world of innocent childhood to an ever darkening tragedy of maintained abuse that has had no release until our present time and so is a timely witness of what once was hidden through avoidance or what is worse, conspiratorial networking and corruption.

4 HIGHLY COMMENDED CERTIFICATES

As before this selection is random and in no particular order of excellence.

GOING WITH THE FLOW by **SHANE McCAULEY** was very close to a Prize winner with its pacy onrush of that thing we call life in an unpunctuated strategy that forces the reader into the momentum of a rapid decoding and the random thoughts we have of our flowing mortality. From the public external life roles it moves through the visceral parallel of that self preservative but sadly declining - thumping heart. Death is inevitable and protest is vain unless one takes the marrow or exquisite chord of high moments as the rewards from the boneyard skeleton of our being.

EXTINCT by **DAMEN O'BRIEN** is an ecologically conscious tribute to a layman conservationist who contributed to the gradual development of a scientific discipline or alerted us to vanishing species. It moves with a measured pace and as a quiet elegy has a narrative of modesty, tentativeness, and timely message and a sense of climax that echoes its title 'EXTINCT'.

REVELATION ACCORDING TO JAVA by **DAMEN O'BRIEN** shows up the fact that tragedy gains much more respect than comedy or light verse, yet both require the same level skill as the poet so delightfully demonstrates. In a way it reads well against another highly recommended poem 'GOING WITH THE FLOW' for both have much the same strategy and message. Skilfully then Bonaparte moves through the world of coffee with a barista's knowledge and ends up with a cosmic climax - a truly delightful piece that is redolent of our coffee mad era.

FUSHIMI INARI by **SIOBHAN HODGE** reflects Australia's multicultural identity by giving us an insight into the beautiful world of Japanese temples and their accompanying gardens as moments of isolated sanctuary and meditative quiet away from the normal tourist bustle of bargains and noisy city traffic. The romance of lovers is skilfully mediated between cultural ikons such as the fox with all its Japanese connotations, and the ever ubiquitous bamboo. The poem then utilises an impressionistic strategy with an underlying natural presence as with the cicadas against the unseen presence of all who have gone before.

NOVICE POET AWARD

FAMINE ON THE PLENTY by **DENISE PARKER** has a helpful footnote to explain its enigmatic title. It was a jump-out poem amongst others in the section with its telling refrain 'you were Black we left you there' striking a sombre note that shows an inherent prejudice that still lingers on. Further it shows how that prejudice is reinforced by the ideology of self-preservative disregard despite scriptural injunction, and travellers' aid, and the frailty of the aged. The fate of Falconio is left tauntingly anecdotal of not what should have been but ultimately was. Nicely formalised.

JUDGE'S ENCOURAGEMENT AWARD FOR YOUTH

BEETHOVEN'S NINTH by **LUKE BRADSHAW POIER** was by far and away the triumph of the youth section for it evidences a maturity that would rank highly in our very fine ADULT section. The poet's response to an anecdotal account of how Beethoven could not hear the applause that his symphony - possibly his greatest - generated and how he was graciously led to it by his soprano is beautifully modulated and amplifies the personal side of the musical genius and what he had achieved. A carefully considered cameo that helps our cultural consciousness of the great artists that have gone before us.

THIRD PRIZE

ON FORGETTING by **RENEE PETTITT-SCHIPP** was one of only two prose poems and showed the effectivity of this format brilliantly. Alluding to Alzheimers and the fading of memory that gives us our identity it is a portrait of rural life at its rawest, and conceals a family tragedy of what might be restfully forgotten, but in the poem's course is revealed to the reader. In short, as the poem discards it also amplifies with its momentum and leaves us with an ultimate paradox.

SECOND PRIZE

UNPICKING A BIRD by **SHEY MARQUE** utilises the element of pagination that came to poetry with the invention of printing with its broken line that creates a suspension of time and place that generates a meditation as it also moves the event forward through carefully selected detail. The motif of the fishing line strings out the 'unpicking' of the bird and leads to the necrophiliac desire to re-animate the bird like a puppeteer moves string and wood. For us West Australians who love the margin of sand and sea it draws on similar memories of washed up gulls, and also alerts us to the ever-increasing pollution of discarded plastic and nylon.

FIRST PRIZE

HALFWAY AND BACK by **STEPHEN SMITHYMAN** is beautiful elegy very much in the Australian idiom with its understatement and sardonic humour undercut by the gentle meditative calm of witnessing another's passing. Some of us take our cars mysteriously for granted but others like Roger dwell in the wonderland of technical knowledge with its own rhetoric and poetry and we indulgently nod to that domain, and yet, the romantic and the sensitivity break through with his epiphany of the moonlit ladder of the sea. The ultimate pilgrimage to what is our spiritual omphalos ULURU taken up by Fay's anecdote of the guide's trap - 'halfway and back' takes the reader full circle to the final moment of the lingering silence where the heartbeat fills the room. A poem of careful balance and sensitive revelation and cultural awareness.