

## **GLEN PHILLIPS POETRY PRIZE 2017**

### Vice President's Comments

My name is Holden Sheppard: I am a local Young Adult author and the Vice President of the PCWC, and it is my great pleasure to welcome you all to the 2017 Glen Phillips Poetry Prize Award Ceremony.

We have a number of special guests here with us today who I would really like to take a moment to acknowledge. Our lovely judge, Dr Vivienne Glance, joins me here on stage for the formal proceedings. I would also like to acknowledge this competition's namesake – and a longtime supporter of the arts and the local writing sector, Professor Glen Phillips, who is present in the audience today. I'd also like to take a moment to recognise the hard work of our President, Keith Melrose, and our other volunteers for the incredible and unpaid work they do in running the centre: without their tireless efforts, competitions such as this would simply not be possible. I also wish to acknowledge ECU for housing us and providing this wonderful venue.

We had a huge number of entries into the competition in 2017 – 186 entries to be precise – which reflects how important these competitions are to authors and poets, both locally and across Australia. In the Youth category, we had 25 entries; in the Adult Novice category, there were 39 entrants; and the Adult category had a whopping 122 submissions. This means that gaining a commended or highly commended place, or winning a prize, is no mean feat; in fact, it is the result of copious talent and plenty of hard work on the poet's part.

It is now my sincere pleasure to introduce this year's competition judge to read the judge's report and announce the winners. Our judge for 2017 is Dr Vivienne Glance.

Vivienne Glance is a poet and playwright. She has a PhD in Creative Writing and is currently an Honorary Research Fellow at the University of Western Australia. She has published two collections of poetry and her writing has appeared in many journals and other literary publications. Her plays have been produced or developed in Australia and internationally, including The International Playwriting Festival, London. She has been awarded writing residencies in UK, USA and Australia.

Vivienne regularly runs poetry and performance workshops for child and adult writers. She works with Afeif Ismail to trans-create his work from Arabic to English, and they regularly perform together.

Her commitment to the WA writing community is reflected in the positions she has held on arts boards and committees, and being a peer assessor for various organisations. She is currently on the Australian Writers Guild WA State Committee and the MEAA's Equity Diversity Committee.

I'd like to share a message of encouragement. I want to acknowledge as a fellow writer how difficult our path is: so, my message to today's winners is to be buoyed by your win today and consider it a good omen of what is yet to come in your career. It can sometimes be months or years between wins, so soak up this moment and enjoy it.

For those who entered the competition but didn't win, most authors and poets would say that it is often a case of knocking on 100 doors before even one opens, so keep learning and keep submitting your work – don't give up.

## JUDGE'S REPORT VIVIENNE

### GLANCE

I was greatly honoured to be asked to judge the Glen Phillips Poetry Prize, and also a little fearful, knowing I held the hopes and aspirations of so many poets in my hands. Judging is a subjective, as well as a technical process, and any of these poems may easily be winners when seen through for the eyes and heart of another judge. I have myself entered several poetry competitions, as well as submitted my work to journals and magazines. Achieving an award or publication is never certain, and what one person may enjoy another person may find unremarkable. That said, there are some fundamental elements that can be applied to help a judge determine what distinguishes a good poem from a prize-winning poem. However, the weight any judge may give to each of these elements can vary – so there are no clear pathways to ensure success.

Poems are multi-faceted works. They consist of a structure or form, which can be formal, such as a sonnet, or informal (free verse); a subject, that is, what the poem addresses; a tone, something that reflects the works emotional substance or intentional lack of it; and the poet's personal style, their voice. Using this as a loose matrix I read all 186 entries from start to finish to determine the final placings. I hope this report offers you some insights into my choices.

Firstly, I'd like to offer some general comments.

For a competition that allows up to 50 lines per entry, a short poem must be exceptionally good, and a longer poem must make every line count. Many of the shorter poems were effective in describing a situation, a place or a moment of insight, but would have benefited from taking this further: poetry is perhaps a striving for connection through a shared truth, and demands more than the superficial.

Some of the longer poems appeared to be two or more poems stitched together as a suite. This is an acceptable form, but for it to work well there needs to be a formal reason for them to co-exist as a single poem - a linking of poetic structure, perhaps, or a progressively more intense interrogation of the subject matter.

Editing is essential. As Ernest Hemingway said, "The only kind of writing is rewriting." A first draft is a blueprint, an exploration of an idea. Further drafts can tease out the best use of language for a particular line, add detail, build a sensory world, or help to refine the subject matter to better take the reader on a journey.

Another aspect of editing is to discover spelling mistakes, to help improve the rhythm of the language – whether a regular metre, or varying pace to build tension or emotion – to review line and stanza breaks, and so on. These more technical skills of writing are very useful when crafting a poem hewn from a raw, emotional impulse into a literary jewel.

Several poems dealt with similar topics, such as growing older, environmental destruction, political helplessness, social isolation, depression, loss and grief, and love in its many forms. These are all valid and profound subjects to explore poetically. It is therefore unsurprising that these topics also occur in the commended, highly commended and winning poems. I hope my following remarks will indicate how these poems stood out from the others. If I could generalise – never a satisfactory action – then I would say that each of the following

poems demonstrated an understanding of the possibilities of poetry to take language further; used imagery and metaphor to enlarge on both the emotion within the poem and the intensity of engagement for the reader; and each showed an awareness of poetics – rhythm, different forms of rhyme, line and stanza breaks, and the dual possibility of a poem when both read on the page and when spoken aloud.

I congratulate all the winners, and all the poets who submitted their work to this notable competition. I would also like to thank the volunteers at the Peter Cowan Writers' Centre whose hard work makes events like this possible.

As in previous years, the standard of the entries was very high. All entrants can be proud to have taken the courageous step of sending their work out into the world and I would encourage everyone to continue submitting your poems to other competitions.

Happy writing! Thank  
you.

Vivienne

#### **4 COMMENDED (in no particular order and using pen names)**

##### *1. The Prayer of Small Men by Damen O'Brien (Adult)*

The opening lines 'To all the avian-headed gods / the secret councils that rule the world' recalls Mantıq-ut-Tayr's twelfth century Persian tale, 'The Conference of the Birds', where each bird represents a human failing. From this ancient reference, the poem moves to more contemporary 'shadowy conspirators' who manipulate financial markets, laws, and other acts of greed. The title 'The Prayer of Small Men' is (I assume) ironic. It is the urgent plea of the 'small men' who understand what is going on in the world, but desperately want to survive, whilst also knowing they could become the victims of the iniquity they are witnessing. It is a poem of our times.

##### *2. Light Rising by Robert Wallis (Adult)*

This is such an honest poem that is specific in its focus, with each stanza charting a specific concern, beginning at birth, through childhood and then as a child emerges as an adult. It is addressed to 'you', the mother, and takes the reader on a journey of witness as the child discovers their true self and, as an adult, transitions to become a woman. It is a somewhat unique approach to this topic, as it captures the struggles and concerns of the mother, her sense of both loss and gain (the 'light rising' of the title) and her enduring support.

##### *3. Reef 'n Grief by Yanika O'Brien (Youth & Novice)*

This poem, while full of protest and some anger, uses language in a visceral and exciting way. Each stanza is a metaphor that contains a strong image on the destruction of (presumably) the Great Barrier Reef. It is a desperate cry from a young voice to the 'blindfolded crew in Canberra' for the salvation of not only the reef, but of their future.

##### *4. Dance of the River Red Gums by Gregory Piko (Adult)*

A prose poem with long lines that wind us through a small patch of river bank where River Red Gums are dancers at dawn. The moment is serenely captured through careful attention to

detail, and the world of this place comes alive with a timeless rhythm, ‘the way young people fall in and out of love.’

#### **4 HIGHLY COMMENDED (in no particular order and using pen names)**

##### *1. Reset by Scott-Patrick Mitchell (Adult)*

Ten years of Facebook with all its highs and lows are captured in this poem. It is daring in its structure, with repetitive opening lines that catalogue a shifting relationship over the years with this social media platform. This is followed by a prose poem section that despairs at the human condition and dares us to free ourselves from data. This is an active, performative poem that is full of rhythm and cascades with images that warns us ‘we are all going down / together...’.

##### *2. Flare-up and Diminishings by Shey Marque (Adult)*

The beach with ‘saltbush and scrub wattle’, wind and sand is a metaphor as well as a location. The aftermath of ‘last night’s storm’ (an argument?) is blended with natural observations that build a sense of a long-term relationship that will endure. Not an easy poem, but well-crafted and multi-faceted, it deserves several readings, each revealing more subtle intent.

##### *3. Folk of Twigs and Frost by Jan Napier (Adult)*

Written from the point of view of a resident in an aged care facility, this poignant poem reveals the complexities and anxieties of this enclosed world. It is unsentimental but builds an intense, emotional life through astute observations and use of metaphor: such as, ‘At *see you soon*, shoulders soft and white as fungi sag’ and ‘Legs creeked with veins falter back through the forest / of corridors, find crumbs and emptiness.’ It has a two-line structure which creates a regular rhythm, and reflects the daily pulse of their lives.

##### *4. Things You Did by Veronica Lake (Adult & Novice)*

A contained poem that deals with how an everyday task recalls loss and grief. Poppy petals ‘spilling their frail tapestry across the yard’, their blood colour and their wider symbolism of remembrance instigate this moment and frame the poem. The poem exists in a contained world and this allows us to relate to the intimacy of feeling the poet explores.

## **YOUTH**

##### *Otello Cabaletta by Yanika O’Brien (Youth & Novice)*

The poet has a clear understanding of classical music, especially opera, and uses the language of musical scores to craft this ekphrastic poem. It reveals in real time the dramatic action of the cabaletta, a type of aria, and found in Verdi’s opera ‘Otello’. While this is a short 14-line poem, a contemporary sonnet, each line is extended and cascades over line-breaks to build the intensity of the moment. It includes not only the action of the drama, but the act of ‘[c]omposing with extremity and insanity’ to provide us with a multi-layered, sophisticated experience of music, music-making and story-telling.

## **NOVICE**

*Category four by Anne Casey (Adult & Novice)*

This poem recounts a moment during Hurricane Irma when, during the calm in the eye of the storm, two children ‘rumped from a fitful sleep’ venture out to survey the destruction. Whether this is an imagined story or an actual experience is irrelevant as the poem conjures up a truth that goes beyond the actual event. It asks us to think and feel beyond the human view of the world and understand that we share this planet with other creatures who will also suffer from the consequences of the Anthropocene era.

## **THIRD PRIZE**

*Amongst the Trash, The Treasure by Robert Wallis (Adult)*

A man and a woman in later life browse items in ‘a vast and tangled labyrinth’ of market stalls and each object they find provokes a reaction, an interaction. This delicate poem takes the reader on a journey of discovery with this elderly couple. Using snapshots of moments, we learn of their love and care for one another over the years, and of the new challenges they now face. Simply set in 3-line stanzas, it also asks us to question our own thoughts about growing older, and our responses to those who defy society’s expectations of old-age.

## **SECOND PRIZE**

*Armistice by David Terelinck (Adult)*

A poem for today, for our times. ‘Armistice’ means a cessation of hostilities and is an apt title for the anxiety found in this poem. Two people meet over breakfast after last night’s argument, but the ‘broadsheet brooding’ of the world news reported in the Sunday papers deeply troubles one of them. Through this lens, the horrors of war, refugees, shootings and other modern atrocities, stifle their ability to cope with a domestic battle. This juxtaposition highlights that all war is ultimately personal, and how helpless we may feel when witnessing it through saturation news coverage, and how this can deeply affect our lives lived in relative safety.

## **FIRST PRIZE**

*Maternal memories by Scott-Patrick Mitchell (Adult)*

A well-crafted poem that creates a cascade of images and builds up a relationship between the poet and their mother. Using sound, taste, touch and vision, small details of daily life draw the reader into their world, but then takes us further into the longing to understand the meaning of place, of home, as experienced by the child of a migrant. As it continues, the poem pulls us into the poet’s increasing need to cling to stories - those elusive memories and family fables that are fundamental to identity. There is excellent use of rhyme within the lines and the conscious shifts in rhythms add pace or hold us in suspense. This shows an understanding of the tools of poetry and their effective use in the prose poem form.