

2018 GLEN PHILLIPS POETRY PRIZE PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Congratulations to all our award winning poets and thank you to all those who entered their poems for consideration. It is always pleasing to see such a strong field of entries. It is fitting that Dr Nandi Chinna has judged this competition. Nandi works as a research consultant and Community Arts facilitator. Her poetry publications include: *Swamp; walking the wetlands of the Swan Coastal Plain* (Fremantle Press, 2014); *Alluvium*, (with illustrator Andrea Smith, Lethologica Press, 2012); *How to Measure Land*, (Picaro Press, Byron Bay Writers Festival Poetry Prize Winner, 2010); and *Our Only Guide is Our Homesickness* (Five Islands Press, 2007). She is also represented in many journals and anthologies including, *The Fremantle Press Anthology of Western Australian Poetry*; Editors; John Kinsella and Tracy Ryan, Fremantle, Fremantle Press, 2017, and the *Australian Poetry Anthology 2018*. Her latest poetry collection *The Future Keepers*, is forthcoming from Fremantle Press in 2019.

In 2016 Nandi was Writer in Residence at King's Park and Botanical Gardens in Perth, Western Australia. She won the 2016 Fremantle History Award for her *History of Clontarf Hill*, and was shortlisted for the 2016 Red Room Poetry Fellowship. She has had several residencies at Varuna the Writers House in Katoomba NSW.

As a creative writing facilitator, Nandi has many years of experience in a variety of settings including community, schools, universities and festivals. She has taught poetry courses at Community Centres, TAFE, Edith Cowan University, Murdoch University, Margaret River Writers Festival, and Broome Writers Festival, Kings Park and Botanic Gardens, and in the remote Kimberley region. As a community Arts facilitator Nandi works with diverse communities including the Nyoongar community, seniors, and people with disabilities, children, and CALD communities. She facilitates regular writing labs on 'poepatetics' – the art of walking and writing.

Nandi regularly collaborates with artists and musicians, including ***SKRYF – the sandwriter***; with Gijs van Bon, Fremantle Festival, 2015, and Swamp Clubb with Mei Saraswati and Matt Aitkin. During the 2017 Perth International Arts Festival, she collaborated with Amy Sharrocks and the Museum of Water on a community water poem and an interactive walking tour of lost water bodies.

2018 GLEN PHILLIPS POETRY PRIZE JUDGE'S REPORT

First of all I hope you will accept my apologies for not being able to be present to deliver my judges report in person. Unfortunately, I have a prior engagement, which means that I cannot attend the awards ceremony, so I'm sorry not to be there to congratulate all of the shortlisted and winning poets.

It was a great honour and privilege to be asked to judge the 2018 Glen Phillips Poetry Prize. Judging poetry is a task not to be taken lightly, as I know the amount of effort that goes into creating just one poem. So reading the 183 entries was a pretty big undertaking!

On the first read through the entries there were already some poems that stood out and I was able to make a pile of shortlist pieces. Of course reading poetry is a subjective experience, and different types of poetry appeal to different people. I try to put aside my own likes and dislikes and to encounter the pieces for their emotional impact, craft, and technical skill, use of metaphor and imagery, and ability to engage the reader. I think good poetry should be able to 'shoulder the burden of the mystery' (Edward Hirsch, 1999), i.e. poems should not try to over explain and/or offer simple answers. I think the great poem is an experience rather than a statement. Imagery and texture are essential elements of creating an experience for the reader.

American poet Jane Hirschfield writes; 'we feel something stir, shiver, swim its way into the world when a good poem opens its eyes'. And this stirring and shivering is what I look for in my own response to reading a poem. I want to be moved in some way from where I was before I read the poem. I want to find a new way, or a fresh insight into the poems subject, one that will expand my understanding.

I'd like to thank all of the writers who submitted work. I know how much hard work goes into writing even just one poem, so well done to everyone who entered, for making the effort to create their poems and submit them to the competition.

Before I talk about the winning pieces I would like to offer some general comments about many of the entries. Those pieces that did not make it into the shortlist in general displayed a few commonalities. Some of the poems displayed spelling errors, punctuation and grammar mistakes, which highlights the importance of proofreading your work before submitting it!

Some pieces were rather prosaic, i.e. were telling rather than showing. A good poem creates an experience for the reader, rather than a statement. Imagery, texture and metaphor all work to provide the experience of the poem. It's always better to show rather than tell, and trust that the reader will gain their own understanding, rather than the one dictated to them.

Having said that, it is often not enough to simply describe something. There has to be a purpose for the poem, why are you describing it? Does it have a deeper connection to a wider experience? What do you want the reader to gain from reading your poem? What you are describing needs to connect to the wider human experience.

Some of the poems tended to be rather on the sentimental and romantic side, and used archaic forms and florid language. This belies a lack of wide reading of contemporary poetry, as well as its historical context. The poet Mary Oliver comments that, the best teacher of writing is reading. She even suggests that reading is a much more effective way of learning than attending workshops. Being aware of what is going on in the writing milieu is of great value went attempting to write your own poems.

Another common element was that the meaning of the poem remained unclear to the reader. A common mistake that many of us make is implied knowledge. We may know a lot about the subject we are writing about and forget that the reader does not have the back-story. It's a bit like when you go to the doctor and he or she diagnoses an illness but tells you nothing about it, or what you might expect to experience. So you head to google and look up all you can about it. We need to give the reader enough information, images, and understandable metaphors, so that the meaning of the poem is clear.

And finally, editing is essential. Revision, rewriting, leaving time for the poem to sit and ferment, then returning to it with a fresh reading are all crucial elements of writing a poem. Reading a poem aloud to help improve the rhythm of the language, using the thesaurus to help deal with too many repeated words, and getting an outside eye to read the poem to scan for meaning are all good tips.

So to the winners!

4 COMMENDED

1. At the end of Hope – Mark Pearce

This poem is written in Memorium to Nyoongar activist Rob Riley who was a member of the stolen generations. In 1995, Riley announced that a trio of older boys had sexually abused him during his time at Sister Kate's children's home. On 1 May 1996, Riley committed suicide in Perth at the Bentley Motor Lodge. In this short poem the writer creates a strong rhythm within the four, four-line stanzas, and effectively uses the metaphor of the 'Anglo picket fence', and the 'exclamation mark at the end of a long sentence' to articulate the terrible horror of Mr Riley's experience.

2. Yesterday's Hero – Norma Schwind

This poem is interesting in its structure, language, and subject. The writer articulates the experience of an Indonesian political activist, leader of the KPI party coup. By using a staccato kind of structure, with spaces inside the depiction of violence, the writer offers a kind of splintering in the experience of the reader. The writer is not telling us too much about the whole situation, but in the imagery, sound, and structure, the writer shows us a situation which articulates the broader issues of living under a dictatorship. A good example of showing and not telling. The writer gives us specific details such as the 'red leather sling backs', the 'smile and stiff bow of the soldier', the 'tinkling of the betjak drivers bell', which all create a vivid picture in the mind of the reader.

3. Reading Colonial Art: in Western Australia – Elanna Herbert

This poem, uses the metaphor of colonial art to articulate some of the grand misunderstandings, and shattering impact of colonisation upon the Aboriginal peoples of the land that was to become Australia. The colours used by early French and British artists failed to depict the reality of the Western Australian light, flora and fauna. The writer effectively compares the colours of European art to the colours of the banksia woodlands, ochres and ash of the original owners of the country.

4. At a Loss for Words – Nyah Gray

This poem is a highly structured piece which uses the repeating refrain 'I'm at a loss for words' to articulate the writer's feelings about modern language, texting language, and the improper uses of English. There is a rhyming structure also, which effectively conveys the writer's message.

4 HIGHLY COMMENDED

1. Wednesday Scorchers – Ross Jackson

'Wednesday Scorchers' is effective in showing the reader the experience of the incredible intensity of hot summer days in Perth, and the desolate heat traps that are Perth's sprawling new suburbs – a desert of rooftops burning in the sun, without one tree for shade. The writer uses some great images such as 'with a ferrule of red-hot iron', 'elephant sized cars', and 'a paralysed stick insect drowsy patient in a burns ward', which beautifully recreates the feeling of the scorching hot day.

2. Landscape with Family – Rita Tognini

The towering karri forest gives us the context for this family portrait. The huge trees loom protectively as well as ominously over this scene. The metaphor of the new raincoat, which is too big for the girl, nicely elucidates her suffering, 'big enough for grievances to grow into'.

3. Overlooked – Sariah Hotai

It is very hard to write an effective rhyming poem, but in this case the writer has done a good job, by not forcing the rhyme, and by using some great metaphors and images such as ‘emotions flex inside my throat/ but still I must inject./ observed by kin in fitted coats/ who’ll learn this practice next’. The writer effectively imagines what’s going on in the mind of the person who must deliver a lethal injection to a prisoner on death row.

4. Yellow Fever – Jas Choo

Yellow fever is a powerful piece that describes the effect of racial discrimination upon a Chinese person. I like the tone of this poem, it articulates the awful experience of racism, but offers a strong, intelligent and empowered approach, which demands change. The poem challenges racism and embraces pride, connectivity and the need for all people to work together, to protect the earth that sustains us.

ENCOURAGEMENT AWARD FOR YOUTH

Beggar’s Belief – Chloe Diggins

This poem is quite well realised. Each stanza begins with the colour, which offers the reader a different view on the same scenario. The writer also uses real or imagined news reports, which also offer various perspectives. For a youth poem the language is sophisticated and effective. The writer has a good handle on the use of metaphor and imagery to create a powerful experience for the reader.

NOVICE AWARD

I feel suddenly very small – Ruby Paterson

Wow! I thought this poem was very poignant and beautiful. From a child’s perspective, we are shown the huge world and how small it makes one feel. Normally repetition of lines within a poem is difficult to justify, but here it works beautifully to articulate what it is like to be a small person in the confusing, loud, hustling world of adults.

The writer's imagination spans out into the seemingly infinite world of people, things, places, stars and universes, but is also concrete and particular, 'sometimes when I am reading a book, or looking at a map of the world, or sitting on the grass, or jumping in the air, I feel suddenly very small. I feel suddenly very small in an endless, infinite galaxy with there are other people who are reading a book, or looking at a map of the world, Or sitting on the grass, Or jumping in the air'. This poem was a real pleasure to read, surprising, poignant, and effective.

THIRD PRIZE

Settina for Juliette - Shey Marque

'Settina for Juliette' is an accomplished poem, which powerfully depicts the writer's experience of swimming lessons in the Canning River and the drowning of a young girl. The writer uses commanding and emotive images to describe the swimming and the drowning; 'it was a mirror, then filter,/ a distorted lens, bent light/ and I felt the magicians easy hands separate me from the bottom half of my orange bikini, it's frill floating off just out of reach'. The poem is resolved impressively by the image of falling branches.' Yes I knew that was the place/ where the branches had died and fell/ and circling was a scar'.

SECOND PRIZE

The Vase Room - Kevin Gillam

'The Vase Room' effectively shoulders the burden of the mystery! It opens with vital energy and action that immediately engages the reader. 'The Vase Room' is both place and metaphor. In the description of the Vase Room, the writer offers both specifics and abstracts. There is an energetic rhythm to the poem. Fantastic use of metaphor, which provides a powerful driver for this enigmatic and successful poem.

FIRST PRIZE

Endgame - Shane McCauley

Endgame is a skillful and wonderfully realised poem, which uses the metaphor of the game of chess to articulate the passage through life experiences, ageing, and facing death. I guess what makes this piece stand out above all the others is the sustained and effective use of metaphor, which trusts the reader to understand it without pushing it too far, or over doing its use. The poem has a great structure and rhythm, with effective imagery, all of which work together to offer crisp clean and well-executed poetry. There are no extraneous words, nothing left over, and everything gained. You can tell that the person who wrote this has put a lot of time into perfecting the cadence, imagery and atmosphere. The poem starts off running, engaging the reader from the very beginning, and keeping us there with its poignant narrative beautifully expressed through the metaphor.