

A person with a backpack stands in a small boat on a vast, starry night sky. The person is looking out towards the stars. The boat is small and appears to be floating in space. The background is a deep blue and purple gradient with many small, bright stars.

OPTIONAL THEME

IS THERE
ANYBODY
THERE?

Dorothea Mackellar

POETRY
AWARDS 2019

Australia's
longest-running
annual poetry
competition for
school children

Presentation Booklet

OUR PRESIDENT **Juliana McArthur**



On behalf of the DMMS Committee, I am delighted to present the 35th national Dorothea Mackellar Poetry Awards.

The awards aim to inspire students across Australia to express their thoughts, emotions and dreams in poetry, continuing the strong heritage in our culture. It is a deeply personal exercise for the student and, for us, a window into their imagination which we are privileged to see. Poetry stands in stark contrast to quick Snapchat "streaks" but is a no less important outlet for students who may wonder "is there anybody there?" We encourage them to take the time to wonder and dream. Using imagination to conjure something that may please the poet or others is very special. We do hope the poems in this booklet ignite your imagination further.

The committee visited Kurrumbede earlier this year and it was a chance to wander the home, farm and stunning landscape close to how Dorothea would have known them. Her poem *My Country* was published in 1908, an idyllic time before the brutality of the Great War. It still resonates with us today.

Perhaps Dorothea is your muse. We would encourage you to visit us here at the Mackellar Centre. When you do come, you will see new treasures. Susan Duncan has generously donated Dorothea's Spanish silk shawl, a calendar made by Dorothea for a love interest, a book of Goya etchings and her Dunhill cigarette case and lighter. Mackellar Excavations has sponsored the acquisition of an original Art Nouveau fireplace from Kurrumbede. These are small but valuable pieces to add to Australia's cultural history and the centre is proud to host them.

To the many people involved in these awards, I extend a heartfelt 'thank you'. To our committee of dedicated volunteers and our project officer, Brittany Riley, for organising the awards. To the dedicated teachers who encourage their students to enter the awards in the crammed school year, the extra effort you take to enter students in these awards is applauded. Most importantly, to the students who give of yourselves in your entries – you are all brilliant. We are "here" for you.

OUR PATRONS

Susan Duncan

Susan has enjoyed a highly successful career, firstly as a journalist - editing the Australian Women's Weekly - then as an acclaimed author with her well known works *Salvation Creek* and *House at Salvation Creek*. A strong supporter of the awards, she has helped launch the competition and spoke at a literary lunch to raise their profile. With her husband Bob, she lives at Tarrangau, the house built by Dorothea Mackellar at Lovett's Bay, on Pittwater, north of Sydney when she isn't chasing cows on their farm near Wingham.



The Honourable Mark Vaile AO

The former Deputy Prime Minister and leader of the National Party, Mark is a frequent visitor to Gunnedah. Whitehaven Coal, which he chairs, has extensive mining interests in the region and is a longstanding sponsor of the awards. He served as minister for both Trade and Transport during his parliamentary career and lives on the NSW mid-north coast, giving him an unparalleled insight into regional Australia.





Photo: Kara Rosenlund

A LASTING LEGACY

The gracious homestead and its outbuildings, practically unchanged in 100 years, has been another focus this year for the Dorothea Mackellar Memorial Society.

Kurrumbede, the former home of Dorothea Mackellar, is located 25 km north west of Gunnedah on the Namoi River, a main tributary of the Murray-Darling River basin.

The 6600 acre (2750 ha) property is now owned by Whitehaven Coal and the buildings are located close to a proposed mine pit and coal loader.

Kurrumbede was bought by Dorothea's father Sir Charles Mackellar in 1905 and was run by her brothers Malcolm and Eric. The family lived in Sydney but relished country life, also owning another farm near Gresford. Dorothea's time at Kurrumbede coincided with her most productive writing years. References to the landscape are found in several of her poems - the iconic *My Country*, *Burning Off* and *Dawn*.

The Mackellar family held the country, raising sheep and cattle and growing wheat, for close to 40 years.

The homestead was designed by Sydney architect and family friend John Reid. Completed in 1910, it underwent alterations mid century but essentially maintained the same footprint. Located on a slight ridge, the house holds a commanding view of the plain towards the river. Outbuildings include stables, a carriage shed, a hay silo, workers' cottages, single men's quarters, a shearing shed, dairy, dog kennels and underground meat house. They provide a glimpse into station life in the early 20th century when people on outlying properties had to provide for themselves.

The Mackellars were keen horsemen - Malcolm and his brother Eric raced thoroughbreds

and played polo. The remains of a starting stall can still be found on the property. They also had racing dogs. Dorothea was also known to participate in farm life - she rode side saddle and talked of pastoral activities - mustering sheep and preparing for harvest - in her diaries.

Olympic swimmer Andrew "Boy" Charlton worked on the property as a jackaroo for seven years, training at times in the nearby river. The hut in which he lived is among the outbuildings.

Last year the society lodged an application to have Kurrumbede placed on the NSW State Heritage Register because of its historical and cultural significance. The nomination is currently being assessed.

Whitehaven Coal has promised \$500,000 towards the restoration of the Kurrumbede garden over the next three years with the intention that the garden will be open to the public several times a year. The Dorothea Mackellar Memorial Society is assisting with this project.

If you would like to support or assist in this vital work, please visit www.dorothea.com.au/kurrumbede or contact our office.





OUR COMMITTEE

Founded 35 years ago, the Dorothea Mackellar Poetry Awards have grown into Australia's best known national poetry writing competition for school students. The idea was seeded by Dutch migrant the late Mrs Mikie Maas who was inspired by the landscape immortalised in Dorothea Mackellar's poem *My Country*.

The competition is run by a volunteer committee from the district of Gunnedah, 420 km from Sydney in north west NSW, and is intended to foster creative writing and a love of country among young Australians.

The awards attract entries from across the country - from Schools of the Air, Distance Education students, juvenile detention centres, home school students to inner city schools. The independent judges are distinguished literary figures and authors in their own right.

Dorothea Mackellar's connection to Gunnedah was established when her family bought the property "Kurrumbede" in 1905.

A life size bronze memorial to the poet located opposite the Mackellar Centre in South Street was erected 36 years ago following an Australia-wide appeal led by Mrs Maas. It depicts the poet on horseback riding sidesaddle, looking north west towards "Kurrumbede." The inscription on the plaque at its base reads "This memorial was erected by the people of Australia, the children of NSW and the local community..."



GUEST SPEAKER

Gabrielle Chan has been a journalist for more than 30 years. She began covering politics in the 1990s for *The Australian* in NSW parliament and the Canberra press gallery. Since 2013, she has worked for *Guardian Australia* as a political correspondent and Politics Live blogger. Gabrielle has also worked for ABC radio, the *Daily Telegraph*, in local newspapers and politics. The city-born daughter of a Singaporean migrant, Gabrielle moved to a sheep and wheat farm near Harden Murrumburrah in 1996. She noticed the economic and cultural divide between city and country and the yawning gap between parliament and small town life. As a result, she wrote *Rusted Off: Why Country Australia is Fed Up*.

THE TROPHIES

This year's trophies have been individually crafted by the Gunnedah Woodturners, continuing a tradition whereby prize-winners receive a local memento.

Beautifully finished boxes in silky oak and gum have been engraved with a laser burner to provide a lasting memory of the awards. The project took a small group of six members more than 60 hours to complete.

Established 33 years ago, the group comprise 12 men and women of all ages who cherish the properties of good timber.

Group spokesman Neville Barnier said not only do the woodturners share their skills and knowledge among themselves but often school groups drop into their shed to learn.



Woodturners Peter Grace and Graham Murrell.

MUSCULAR SUBJECTS

Poetry builds muscle that can be used across all subjects, genres and ages and this diversity was evident in the Primary categories.

Entries explored scientific concepts, raised awareness of current social and political issues, and poeticised personal experiences. These were poems with purpose.

Poetry is also about creativity – and the musicality of words. It was heartening to see young poets entering deceptively simple poems that had been crafted to effect. Short is very sweet, when done well.

It was good to see poets experimenting with line breaks and playing with word placement for pausing and emphasis. It's a process to transition from paragraphs to poetry, but writing is punchier without the clutter of filler words and excess punctuation.

Many schools wrote to themes or visual prompts, or followed a recipe, which sometimes gave a familiarity to the poems but also increased the delight when young poets took these prompts further, stepping outside the box, stretching rules or turning expectations on end.

There were a large number of poems written to the theme 'Is There Anybody There?' and very often titled the same. Some poems were cryptic – the connection to the theme not immediately obvious – and this was like finding a hidden gem.

I must mention the poets who stretched themselves writing to form; sonnet, haiku, cinquain, diamante, tetractys, reverso, villanelle ... I was delighted each time I recognised an old friend.

There were a significant number of poems that did not seem to have the benefit of an edit, either from the student, or a teacher/mentor. This is dis-

PRIMARY SCHOOLS' AWARD

Winner – The Cottage School, Bellerive TAS

It was so good to see students exposed to a range of poetic forms and trying them in their own writing. Clearly students found the style that best suited them as individuals, as three students finished in the top 20, with three different poetry forms - and there were more in the top 100.

Commended

- Ravenswood School for Girls, Gordon NSW
- Oxley Christian College, Chirnside Park VIC
- Trinity Catholic Primary School, Narre Warren South VIC
- Cherrybrook Public School, Cherrybrook NSW
- Tamworth Public School, Tamworth NSW
- Redeemer Baptist NSW, North Parramatta NSW

appointing, as first drafts are raw ideas and rarely polished to competition standard.

Thank you to the many parents and teachers who encouraged students with their poetry endeavours. Please continue as you are gifting students with skills they will transfer through the years of education and life.

And thank you poets, for making use of this opportunity to share your word-works with a wider audience. It was a privilege to read your poetry, and I congratulate you all for your part in this wonderful competition.



PRIMARY JUDGE Kathryn Apel

Kathryn Apel is a born-and-bred farm girl who's scared of cows. She lives among the gum trees, cattle and kangaroos on a Queensland grazing property. Kat is the author of three verse novels and a rhyming picture book, and has been published globally in magazines, anthologies, text books – and on walls. Her younger reader verse novel, *Bully on the Bus* won the Australian Family Therapy's Award for Children's Literature and was selected as a 2019 Notable Social Studies Trade Book for Young People (America).



LOWER PRIMARY – Lincoln Cecil
Age 7. Rowena Public School, Rowena NSW
Sponsored by Mackellar Care Services Ltd.

The Beat

Harsh rays on wrinkled skin.
Lungs suffocated, breathe out.
Callused hands scarred deeply.
Vision forced through cracks.
Hope strangled and choked.
Life turns lifeless.
The heart beat stops.

Joyful rhythms pour down.
Drops dancing on rusted hope.
Falling from prayers passed down.
Veins of water stretch out flowing.
Ancient arteries filling,
Bringing family trees to life.
The heart beats again.

Judge's comments

So many phrases take my breath away. The imagery, vocabulary and maturity in this evocative poem is astounding – especially in such a young poet! A poem written from the heart of experience.

Dark

I'm not scared
Of many things:
But I don't like
The dark.

It's always there,
Inside boxes, waiting
To get out,
Waiting patiently
For the day to go
So it can seep down
From the sky;
It's there,
Under my bed, waiting
For me to turn out
The light
So it can jump out
And frighten me...

It even follows
Me around.

Darkly
Copying
My shape

Without
A sound.

Judge's comments

A deceptively simple poem
with a clever twist to end.
Well crafted!



UPPER PRIMARY – Sanu Kariyawasam

Age 12. Seymour College, Glen Osmond SA

The Earth is in Good Hands

Earth is in good hands...

It's not

it's too late now.

Don't tell me

We can still save our earth

We can take a step forward

That we can still stop

You know

It's too late.

They say

We're getting there.

You know

It's a lie.

We've gone too far.

We can't stop now.

Every day you hear how

Animals are killed.

Wildlife is burned.

We need to take-action,

We can't just hope.

That's what they say...

Earth is dead.

It's the end.

(now read from bottom to top)



Judge's comments

I am in awe of this young poet, who has crafted a reverso that reads fluently both ways. The form is perfect for this topic – first portraying a bleak reality, then rereading it with shades of hope. Having attempted a number of reversos, and completed three, I fully appreciate and admire the skill that went into crafting this masterpiece.

RUNNER UP

UPPER PRIMARY – Henry Maning

Age 11. The Cottage School, Bellerive TAS

“I think my teacher is Cinderella”

It's not just
that she drives to school in a carriage,
or that she wears a tiara.

It's not just
the way she mops the floor
and lets us treat her like a slave.

It's not just
the way she talks to mice
or when she chats to the prince she blushes.

What gives her away
at the end of the day
is how she leaves
her glass slipper at the gate.



Judge's comments

Perfect use of repetition
and rule of three, with
rhyme to build to climax
and every word working to
earn its place. And humour!
Simplicity at its finest!
Absolutely loved this poem!



WINNER

ASSISTED LEARNING PRIMARY – Felix Liu
Age 12. Redeemer Baptist School, North Parramatta NSW

Untouchable

The apricot on the table was my heart's desire,
But there was no right way this extravagant fruit
Could ever enter my covetous mouth.
I tried, I dared.
I resisted, I stared.
Like a diamond just out of reach.
As rare as gold.
However, I couldn't give in.
Until finally ...
Temptation overcame me.
I felt as black as the devil,
Yet as rich as a king,
It was as sweet as honey,
As soft as marshmallows,
As astonishing as the universe.
This amazing fruit,
Had corrupted my mind,
And made me forget,
That it wasn't mine.

Judge's comments

This poem is delicious! It weaves similes, rhyme, alliteration and rich vocabulary into a tightly controlled poem, with the inevitable ending looping neatly back to the start.



ASSISTED LEARNING PRIMARY – Jasmine Safrglani
Age 9. Redeemer Baptist School, North Parramatta NSW

Artistry

When the rain falls from the sky
A rainbow appears.

The sun grabs the rainbow
And uses it
As its pallet.

Judge's comments

There is beauty and poetry in the simplest, quietest moments. This poem makes me look at rainbows in a different light.

WINNER

DAVID MAHER SMALL SCHOOLS' AWARD – Lachlan Spence

Age 11. Booligal Public School, Booligal NSW

Forgotten Tree

I hear a loud noise to my side,
I fly towards it, using sound as a guide,
The land is barren and no good for crops,
Then all of a sudden the noise stops,
I land on a branch so I can see,
Alone in my forgotten tree.

A rusty ute was making the sound
A man steps out, onto dry ground,
His ute must have run out of fuel,
I notice his finger bares a jewel,
It glitters in the sun so I see,
Alone in my forgotten tree.

If I could swoop right down with speed,
I'd grab that jewel a prize indeed,
I need to think of a masterplan,
To steal it from this lonely man,
It would be easy I can see,
Alone in my forgotten tree.

I see his face and it looks sad,
if I steal that jewel, I will feel bad,
I realise that this man is alone,
And a long way from his home,
His life is the same as mine I see,
Alone in my forgotten tree.

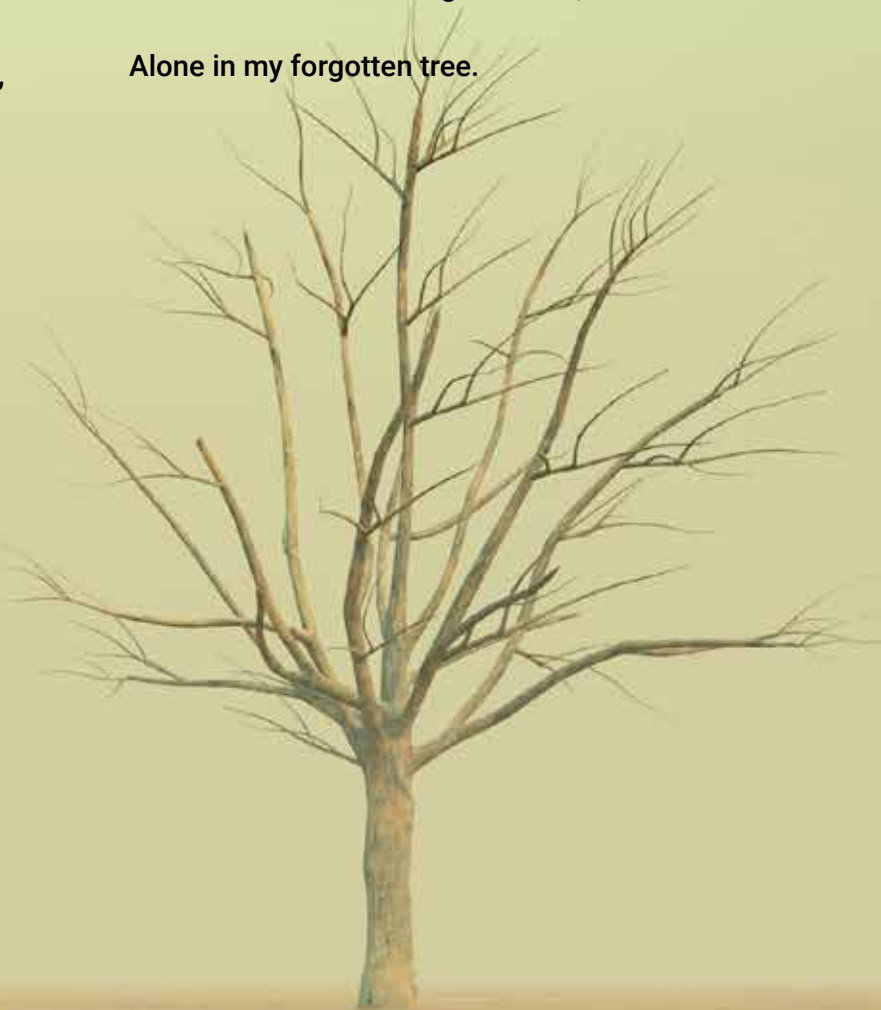
For days on end I watch this man, I see him
suffer, his face is bland,
The process is so very slow,
Oh how I wish he would just go,
In the night he dies, I see,
Alone in my forgotten tree.

I watch the Goanna's feed on him,
The foxes too, when the light is dim,
His memory is haunting me,
Alone in my forgotten tree,
There I see his bones sink in,
I choose to leave the ring with him,

Alone in my forgotten tree.

Judge's comments

A complex poem from bird's eye view, exploring the use of symbolism, rhyme and repetition.



PERSONALITY PLUS

'The standard was so high, choosing between them ... left me with many sleepless nights and passionate discussions with fellow writers.'

Congratulations to all the talented writers who entered the awards this year. I was thrilled and honoured to read the hundreds of wonderful entries submitted by secondary students from all over the country. Their poems are brimming with elegance, joy, wit, drama and compassion, and provide a wonderful snapshot into the concerns and interests of young people today, along with an understanding of their place in the world.

Many of the entries directly referenced the optional theme: 'Is There Anybody There?', with goosebump-inducing accounts of spooky foot-steps outside the door, while others took a more oblique approach, wondering what will be left of our planet when so many of its people seem hell-bent on destroying its precious resources.

There were clever and humorous pieces about family life and friends, and heartbreaking tales of love and loss. There were exquisite descriptions of landscape – both rural and urban – packed with powerful imagery. There were poems that questioned the meaning of life, and others that confidently provided answers.

There was also a wide variety of styles and techniques, from rollicking ballads or poems with sophisticated rhyming schemes, to free-form verse, to poems where the structure was as much an element of the piece as the words themselves. The best poems allowed the personality of their creators to shine through, employed a judicious use of poetic devices, had a powerful emotional impact, or left images that lingered. The standard was so high, choosing between them to prepare a 'winners' list' left me with many sleepless nights

SECONDARY SCHOOLS' AWARD

Winner – Presbyterian Ladies' College, Peppermint Grove WA

'The poems submitted by the students of Presbyterian Ladies' College, WA were of an exceptionally high standard, thoughtfully constructed and brimming with originality and poetic devices. There are obviously wonderful things happening in creative writing classes at this school!'

Commended

- Ravenswood School for Girls, Gordon NSW
- St Michael's Collegiate, Hobart TAS
- Baulkham Hills High School, Baulkham Hills NSW
- SCEGGS Darlinghurst, Darlinghurst NSW
- Darwin Middle School, The Gardens NT
- Redeemer Baptist School, North Parramatta NSW

and passionate discussions with fellow writers. But everyone who took the time to put down their carefully-constructed thoughts on paper can be considered a 'winner'. Thank you for sharing your hopes, your dreams, your joys and concerns.

Credit must also go to the teachers – and parents – involved each year, who are obviously doing a wonderful job promoting the joys of both reading and writing poetry. I am sure many of your students will go on to have 'brilliant careers' as poets and writers and look forward to seeing more of their work in print.



SECONDARY JUDGE Meredith Costain

Meredith Costain is a versatile writer from Victoria, whose work ranges from picture books through to poetry, novels and non-fiction. Her books include CBCA Honour Book *Doodledum Dancing* (a collection of verse for children illustrated by Pamela Allen), *Musical Harriet*, *Bed Tails* and her new series *Olivia's Secret Scribbles*. Meredith wrote stories and poems in her head while riding her bike to school along the banks of the Bunyip River, and her poem *My Little Creek* was published in the children's section of *The Age* when she was eight.



SENIOR SECONDARY – Amelia Neylon

Age 16. Individual Entry, The Friends' School, West Hobart TAS

When Penelope went sailing, instead of

Dear Odysseus,

Tell me of Aphrodite
lipstick war stripes on her cheeks,
trying to finish the war she started.
Tell me of Athena
eyes blazing,
trying to justify being the God of War.
Tell me about Arachne
and sewing that shames Gods.
Tell me something I can believe –
I'm sick of hearing about Trojan horses and Nobody.

Gather me onions
so I have an excuse for all of these tears.
Gather me smiles
so I have one for every occasion.
Gather me pens
so I can finally write you love letters.
Gather me stars
and I'll tangle my hair in the sky, so it'll stay out of my eyes.
Gather me fabric scraps
because I
want an ocean...

I'll go sailing in an eggshell like the witches of old
and drown sailors, in charm.
I'll teach lonely sirens sign language
I'll thread the sun through a needle,
stitch stories to the constellations
and teach the Kraken embroidery.
I'll learn how to cuss and how to use thimbles as knuckle dusters
I'll trade an eye for tall tales,
give away my protest songs
to mermaids bored with their hairbrushes,
give away my hair
so a selkie can sew a new skin.



waiting for Odysseus to come home

I'll give away my buttons
to hold down starfishes in storms,
and give away my shoelaces
to seabirds
a long way from home.

And then I'll sink my eggshell
to make a reef:
use all my tapestry thread
to weave coral.
Anchor it with my pins

and I'll come home

and you will kiss where my eye used to be
and bandage my bloody knuckles,
sew buttons back onto my jacket, and dye what hair is left.
And I will tell you about the sailor, the siren and the selkie's
happily ever after.
I'll embroider constellations and krakens on your clothing,
I'll give you all the tall tales I collected
and the pamphlets of the Mermaids' Liberation Army.
I'll tell you about buckling down in storms and seabird's
nests tied to clouds:

So, gather me wind
and I'll make us a sail
Gather up new bones and old boots
and I'll make a boat
And gather up your things
and come with me
But, please...

Please don't take too long gathering your thoughts.

Judge's comments

Gutsy and strong like its subject Penelope, and brimming with carefully-crafted imagery, this poem takes no prisoners as it whirls the reader on a journey through ancient mythology, triumphantly turning accepted truths about power on their head. A well-deserved winner!

boys i love

he is small and soft and
his dark eyes search for the most beautiful parts of you.
he longs for trust and safety. my eyes in his eyes in
my eyes and
his hand in mine.
when i show him magic he believes me.
he speaks softly and clumsily; always gently.
he does not have the voice of a boy but of a dandelion
making a wish.

he is tall and swells with watery strength.
he smiles shyly.
he is small inside and is always trying to
grow.
he occupies space he doesn't understand yet.
he hides memories of dancing and high-pitched giggles behind strength;
make-believe.
he tries to be a man but shaves his body hair in discomfort.
he does not have the heart of a boy but of a sapling
stretching
toward
the sun.

he is gangly and his hugs are gentle and long.
he makes me feel safe with his apologies and the way he tells me
it's not my fault.
his anger swirls around that shadow i'm not sure is real.
he is reckless and clumsy and beautiful. he is surrounded by girls but
shoved amongst boys.
he hates the harsh world we gave him.
he does not have the arms of a boy but of the ocean.

he is stifled and silent.
he muffles everything he can to hide from their ultraviolet eyes. his
despair echoes in his body. he feels alone and mistranslated.
he is sweet and sends kisses. he is shy but
when he trusts he is as strong as the boys he longs to be.
he holds his body, confused. he does not have the body of a boy, but of
a light green caterpillar.
he is sweet and his eyes spill
into the way he stops to watch and listen and love.
he orders his mind as best he can;
he doesn't know the mess is entrancing. he
thinks in twists and turns insisting on black
and white.
he thinks until he is exhausted from trying to stem
what pushes at his order.
he does not have the mind of a boy but of a tall
pine tree.

they fall from slanted trees, i catch them
one by
one
and cocoon them in my hands.
when i unfurl them they glint with speckled
sunlight.
when i fall they sit with me
and when i stand
they stay.

Judge's comments

This highly original and well-observed poem was a joy to read. I felt privileged to meet each of the boys in turn, from the shy and gently trusting to the reckless and clumsy, 'surrounded by girls but shoved amongst boys.' A quiet gem.



JUNIOR SECONDARY – Janiru Liyanage
Age 14. Baulkham Hills High School, Baulkham Hills NSW

Can You Speak Sinhala?

There are nights when the brightest star
looks a ripped hole in the middle of that
sheet of black

behind the vast canvas of night,
is a roar of orgasmic light -
something angelic perhaps,

that maybe has a form,
maybe doesn't;

regardless, I'll look at the pinprick,
that fleck of
white,
and believe,
and believe,
that's all I can do right now

then, that star light travels millions
of miles to perish in the back of my eye -

I used to believe that my father was so powerful,
that his nightgown beckoned the night into being,
his umbrella uttered the rain from the sky

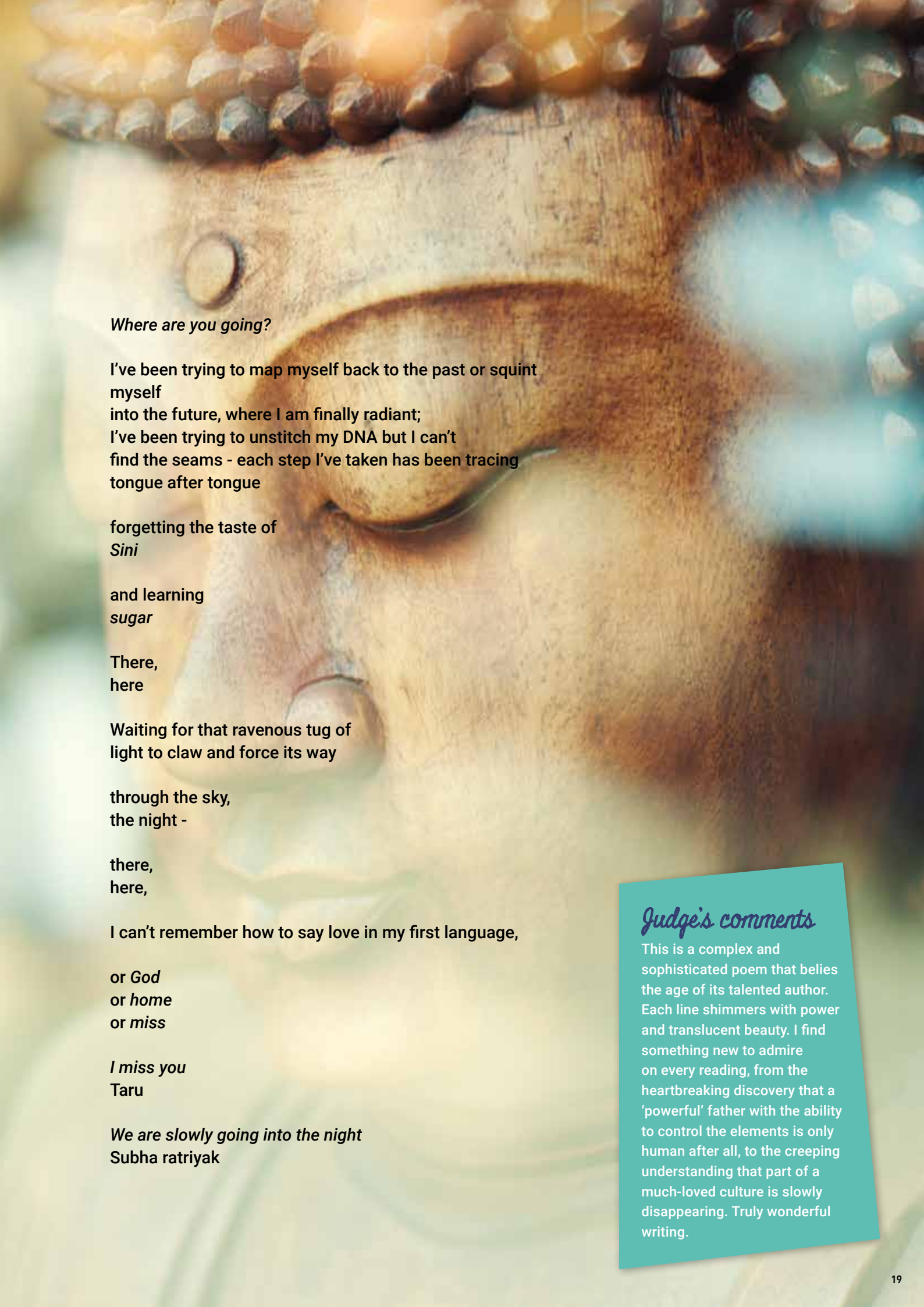
I've been so careless with everything I've said,
ushering all my words into the basement

Subha ratriyak
Good night

Taru
Stars

Can you see?

What do you see?
Taru



Where are you going?

I've been trying to map myself back to the past or squint
myself
into the future, where I am finally radiant;
I've been trying to unstitch my DNA but I can't
find the seams - each step I've taken has been tracing
tongue after tongue

forgetting the taste of
Sini

and learning
sugar

There,
here

Waiting for that ravenous tug of
light to claw and force its way

through the sky,
the night -

there,
here,

I can't remember how to say love in my first language,

or *God*
or *home*
or *miss*

I miss you
Taru

We are slowly going into the night
Subha ratriyak

Judge's comments

This is a complex and sophisticated poem that belies the age of its talented author. Each line shimmers with power and translucent beauty. I find something new to admire on every reading, from the heartbreaking discovery that a 'powerful' father with the ability to control the elements is only human after all, to the creeping understanding that part of a much-loved culture is slowly disappearing. Truly wonderful writing.



JUNIOR SECONDARY – Massimo English
Age 14. Cranbrook School, Bellevue Hill NSW

The Thirsty Cow

This hesitation which overrules me,
These sweaty palms, the quivering lip,
The cases zipper, the gun stowed behind,
The crash of the closing car door,
The endlessly bland horizon,
Reflecting my dull soul,
The heavy ute door swinging open in harmony with the clank
of my R.M. Williams buckle...

The supple dust enveloped my rough creased face,
Tapping blindly, emotionless, at this vulnerable mind,
Seeping into all pores and rustling through my stubble,
Gleaming down from above cut the rays of life giving death.
Shadows become engulfed by luminous indifference,
Seeking out all points of darkness, nowhere to hide.
The swaying gumtree baked under, it's enduring thirst,
Gazing across vast dry space; The empty river,
The cracked clay, this still day,
This desolate surrounding, refusing promise for any hope.

The soil was dry, my weathered hands too,
It was absurd to seek help,
The lonesome gumtree, the only life within eyesight
Awaiting a voice in the void of simmering heat,
What kind of man are you?
The words reverberated back and forth.
How much longer could I be...
A man doesn't go through this.
"Why is it only me, why am I different!"
"what is making me feel this way, will it ever end?"
Down in the bog she mourned for release,

Raising neck skyward, making contact with me.
Then in time, she knew, but there came no noise.
I loaded the 22. fumbling one round in at a time,
As the gun fires and the smoke rises a shocking silence is overwhelming,
This disturbing image scars me, the immense blood is spilled,
Pouring from this mournful bullet wound,

The journey back is an isolated one,
No gum tree to question me, and she's not there either,
But this mind is not at ease,
The intentions are being challenged,
"At least the cow isn't suffering"

This car which feels so lonesome,
This helpless mind,
This bland plain horizon,
As my eyes gaze,
All I ponder is if there is anybody out there...

Judge's comments

A fully-imagined poem that takes the reader directly into the landscape of rural Australia: empty rivers, dying trees, 'supple dust' . . . and guns. The heartbreaking image of the doomed cow 'mourning for release' as she raises her neck skyward will stay with you long after you've turned the page. Highly emotive writing.



LEARNING ASSISTANCE SECONDARY – Han Zheng
Age 15. Redeemer Baptist School, North Parramatta NSW

The Place I Live

Ray of sunshine breaks through the cloud,
Cleaning the wet, dark sky.
Passing through infinity distances in space,
Light enters the room and sweeps the dark away.

Birds hold their head up from their nest,
They sing loud for a bright new day.
Alarm clock for a thousand souls,
Some fall back into dreams, but more awake.

Blob of white cloud spreading slowly over the sky,
An inverted canvas reflects on still water.
Horizon mixes sea with sky; a blurry brush stroke,
The wind blows and dries this canvas again and again.

But wherever you are,
In vibrant city or leisurely country,
Complicated forest or barren desert,
This is a beautiful country.

The place I take my daily waking breath,
The land I am standing on,
Endless desert to aqua sea
This is Australia, the place where I live.

Judge's comments

A well-observed love letter to the poet's home, laden with precise imagery. Every line sings.

Learning Curve

With the brumbies running free,
The warrior rides his steed in a far off place...

The gentle warrior lies silent,
Energated by his cloud-filled guilt.
Lost in his dreams and longed-for rest.

However...

Bothersome beeping blares into his ears,
Rising up from the dreams with no cheer,
The warrior silences the persistent noise
And begins his dreary morning.
Cleaned, motivated, brave

The warrior trudges on his 'adventure'
Powering through hours of teaching and talking.
Though he was like a weeping willow tree,
The warrior had the will and listened on
He did it all: Maths, History, Science...

Finally his freedom came.
His steed ready, awaits on the rugged, familiar path.

Embracing his freedom
The warrior leans back and sleeps
With the brumbies running free.

Judge's comments

A delightfully clever account of the protagonist's escape from the grind of everyday life into the excitement and action of fantasy. Well done!





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