



dorothea mackellar
poetry awards

2009 NATIONAL PRESENTATION CEREMONY

Searching for Stars



Australian Government

Australian Government Department
of Education, Employment and
Workplace Relations

2009

dorothea mackellar

Winner, Senior Secondary

Sophie Clark

Elizabeth College, HOBART NORTH TAS

The Fisherman's Wife

I have known a fisherman,
And I have been the hands,
That held the enemy down,
Firm and steady,
Against the planks,
So its eye,
Solitary and bone white,
Arrogant and pleading,
Gave only the slightest,
Quivering blink,
At the moment of the first incision,
(and I'd swear the thing,
The fish,
Looked right at me?)

When finally I am allowed to loosen the clamps,
My knuckles
Are bone white,
And glistening.

The fisherman has the hands of a surgeon,
And they look odd on him, I think to myself,
Turning from the cordial blood,
That laps at my boots.

I have known a fisherman,
And I have been the witness to the throats,
And have ground my teeth down,
In insomnia,
Thinking of my needle,
And my thread,
And how I have used them to bind salty lives together,
Then tossed them,
Into the great and crumbling mouth of the ocean,
Obediently.

I have known a fisherman,
And even as I pull,
And pull,
On the hooks that he has rigged me with,
They do not come loose,
They do not come loose.

Even as I shower,
And the cordial blood,
Of our daily enemy,
Circles the drain,
It leaves a stain,
It always leaves a stain.

JUDGES COMMENTS

England's new poet laureate, Carol Ann Duffy, published an anthology entitled *The World's Wife*, whose poems reinvented history from the point of view of the wives of iconic male identities. Sophie Clark's poem follows that theme and is so well-written that it would not have been out of place in that collection. Like all good poems, its complexity deserves several readings, each one revealing new layers of meaning. Dealing with the ties of matrimony, the conflict between the wife's distaste for her husband's occupation and her assistance in his work, it is a disturbing examination of a woman's dilemma. The rhythms and repetitions of the poem create an inexorable pull on the reader, just as the hooks in the poem have caught the wife.

Runner Up, Senior Secondary

Saba Vayani-Lai

Glenwood High School, GLENWOOD NSW

Sleep-washed

This,
This simplicity,
This sleep-washed morning,
The raindrops dancing gently
Upon soft glass,
Reflecting the sleeping forms of
Living poetry,
Of us,
Lost in a mindless tangle of limbs and
Sheets and sticky puddles of light.

At last,
Letting the words and the yearning finally,
Finally,
Spring from the page and into motion,
Into reality,
Into this tangible mess of feeling,
Lazily looped not in ink,
Not in restricting monochrome and colour-starved paper,
Not caged in the heavy iron lattice of forced rhyme -
But in the mixing of our breaths,
In the mingling of a million minuscule atoms,
Air cocktails slipping, shared,
Between our lips.

And then...
I feel the resignation festering,
Wild mushrooms growing in sad lumps, slow and hungry,
Around my tired heart -
Such joy,
Such interdependent joy,
It cannot last.
It can only cling
As raindrops do to a spider's web,
Desperately hoping the wind doesn't lose
Her temper.

But I have traced stars
With fearless fingertips -
Traced that pale harmony between living and
Expressing
In the creases and valleys
Of your skin.

To have known such joy,
Even just for a moment -
It is enough.

This,
This simplicity,
This sleep-washed morning,
I watch our lazy forms reflected
In rain-speckled glass -
All drowsy smiles and
Poetry,
Alive at last.

JUDGES COMMENTS

One of the rare poems that touches on sex!

Winner, Lower Secondary**Raaisa Islam**

Presbyterian Ladies' College, BURWOOD VIC

It Will All End in Stars

The charms jingle,
Ching-ching-ching,
As the arm of its bracelet takes life.

The pain of loss flares in her eyes,
The graphite stick, slicing the page into hairline cracks.

Right- left, the chalk moves.
Scratch-scratch-scratch, immune to gravity's pull.
A new world, for the escapist.

The drawing, calm, subtle,
Opposite to the collage of pain, connecting its pieces inside her.

Arm tires, back weakens,
Yet fingers still tingle, mind still sharp, throwing life's fragility at every inch of canvas.
Salty drops slide down her cheeks.
Plop.
Land on her smudged fingers, staining pale skin in grey water.
She doesn't notice, too busy is she dragging up shapes out of lines.
Silver links blending together, a yearning on paper, she of all, cannot feel;
To know the future.

Life is quite impolite.
It takes you without warning, and then leaves without a goodbye.

Why is it that everyone wants to know the future, when we all already know where the final destination will be?
Laing knew.
Laing knew, just as her strokes no longer defied gravity, the stick heavier between her fingers.
Laing knew, just as she realised breathing, now took effort.
Laing knew, and accepted, just as she saw for the first time, her fingers stained in her grey tears.

She rests in peace now, a victim to life's rudeness.
Yet her last drawing still hangs, as if she was still here, the same hands, her hands, perched through the flaps of a fortune teller.
An item she did not need.
Ain't that ironic?

Andromeda replaces the numeric symbols.
Just as Laing believed;
'it will all end in stars'.

*Yet her last drawing still hangs, as if she was still here, the same hands,
her hands, perched through the flaps of a fortune teller.*

JUDGES COMMENTS

Powerful, sharp, ironic and laconic. Raaisa Islam's poem is an elegy to the artist Cassandra Laing. Laing was particularly known for her drawing skills and her last exhibition in 2007 was entitled "It Will All End in Stars."

The poem is extraordinarily mature. Its rhythms are spare and subtle, and the apparently simple choice of words vibrates with sound, movement and life. This makes its juxtaposition with death all the more devastating. The poem faces that final reality with a mixture of irony and defiance and then, with a final twist, leaves the reader with an even bigger picture to contemplate. Never sentimental, never overworked, a strong element of the poem's success comes from the writer's personal response to the artist and her work.

Runner Up, Lower Secondary

Emma Dell

Gosford High School, GOSFORD NSW

The Wanderer

At noon
red ochre sun sleeps.
bubbling the asphalt
rehearsing the moonshadow dance,
beckoning him to the shoreline.

Footwhispers on the sand...
green hat bobbing
arthritic hands clasping,
and
brown-knit jumper sprigged
with tumble-weed
limbs...
bobbing, bobbing.

Gravel voice sigh
unheard...
in the waxing breeze
waning, winging
among salt-tattooed bay –
and the silky oaks
stage-whisper
of the ageing monarch.

He remembers
the red-cast tide,
the trees, the dunes,
the ebbing wind tsunami's,
Gone and blown
by.

As the shadows kiss the ruddy sky
Lianas grovel
to
The Thunder Clappers,
tussling above.
His wreck-wood stave
Drums
the smouldering sand,
and deep down
Poseidon
Swims
Strong,
he knows.

His fool-failing gaze
hard
at the rattle of pills
In
His
Pocket.
Stark white brazen ghost gums
kneel
to
honeycomb cliff
and
thousand-facet sky.

JUDGES COMMENTS
A beautifully achieved study of old age, which manages to combine the tragic inevitability of passing time with a sense of mythic immortality. The poem vibrates with the sounds and sights of nature. Its staccato rhythms and sophisticated enjambment give it an exciting momentum.

And Thor's-thunder-hammer flashes
Bright.
'Sunders
dark from light
and
light from dark,
and thunderbird cries,
the Old world's mourner,
quake
pyroclastic rain cloud...
bends knee
as the
King is
leaving.

Back to the old chair by flickering fire,
in rendered house on the brink
of lonely suburbia.

But it walks with him.

Winner, Upper Primary

Robin Allsopp

Chapel Hill State School, CHAPEL HILL QLD

Sodden Dreams

Memories that will haunt my dreams forever.
Never-ending droplets,
drumming down on cracked ground,
filling potholes,
swirling, murky puddles,
spilling out,
creating pools.
The rain drives on.
Quietly,
like a tiger stalking its prey,
the water creeps up.
Slowly, slowly people leave,
but I stay.
It'll stop,
I'll be okay,
won't I?

Silently it seeps,
through every crack and crevice.
Drowning memories.
Destroying everything with watery fingers.
The streets are rivers,
and houses lakes,
but I stay.
It'll go down,
I'll be okay,
won't I?

Roaring now,
in torrents,
past my house.
Sucking away everything in its path.
Pushing down,
sending dreams and possessions to a watery grave,
but I stay.
What choice do I have?
Help will come.
I'll be okay,
won't I?

I step out.
The water grabs me with its powerful hands.
Trying to carry me,
willing me to follow it,
forcing, forward.
I struggle, it is strong,
yet I defeat it.
I want to leave,
but I stay.
What else can I do?
Not long now.
I'll be okay,
won't I?

Silence takes over.
I look outside,
finally the rain has stopped.
Ever so slowly,
The water slinks away,
leaving rot and filth behind.
Inside and outside are much the same.
I could leave this all behind,
but I stay.
It will recover.
I'll be okay,
won't I?

Dots of orange against brown.
Helpers as abundant as the debris.
Tears fall,
cleansing the ground where lives will be rebuilt.
Community pulls together,
sharing donations and stories.
Working as one.
We make progress,
But we'll never forget.
Slowly, slowly people return,
but I stayed.

I was okay,
wasn't I?

JUDGES COMMENTS

This is very good piece, with evidence of the poet being close to the events. The echo of "I was okay" works beautifully with a simple twist of the question at the end. Her voice is sensitive to the action but not burdened by the pain of the events. An excellent sense of word power and flow ("the water slinks away leaving rot and filth behind..."). there is momentum in the work as the water moves: "Sucking..." , "Pushing down/ sending dreams and possessions to a watery grave". The descriptions are rich, going step by step from falling rains to rising flood, the waters receding and then to the clean-up afterwards. The writer is there all the time; she sees, hears and feels the water encroaching on her life. The poem is a vivid response to something that has happened so recently, expressed simply and spontaneously and without apology for the writer remaining in her house when she might otherwise have left.

Runner Up, Upper Primary

Grace Stanhope

Valentine Public School, VALENTINE NSW

Searching For Stars

I'm searching for stars,
But I can't find any.

I can't find stars on the Internet,
Only people who think
They're fabulous
And more important
Than people like me.

There are no stars to be seen
On the TV,
Just well-known celebrities,
Famous for being ... on the TV.
They mean nothing to me.
I see a broke man begging for money
By the side of a humble church;
One by one,
The worshippers file out
And hand the homeless, sunken-eyed man
A dollar each.

I see kindred spirits;
I know where the real stars are.
They're not shining and twinkling in the sky,
They don't come out at night, on the TV,
Or hide away from the world
In a stretched limo, the length of the sea.
The true stars are plain to see,
They're right here, in front of me.

I'm not searching for the stars anymore.
I've found them.

The stars on the street
Must be hidden from me,
Because all I can see
Are posters
Advertising places
where people go
To hear YELLING faces.

In magazines,
The stars are playing hide-and-seek,
But the ones
Who've done bad things
Mustn't be very good at that game:
They glare icily at me
From the glossy front cover.

Older teenage girls
Yabber on and on and on and on
About hot guys and movie stars,
But all I hear
Are ridiculous things ...
Skirts shorter than my attention span,
Earrings longer than blue whales,
Heels taller than the Eiffel Tower,
Lipstick scarlet like a rose flower.

2009

dorothea mackellar

But then,
I see a teacher,
Patiently explaining difficult maths to a child.

I see a worn and harried business man
Gripping the filthy hand
Of a teary-eyed little girl
Taking the time to find her mother
In a noisy public place.

I see a pet shop owner,
Eyes glowing with enthusiastic fervour,
Showing a fuzzy, licking, affectionate dog
To a euphoric laughing boy.

I see an elderly, solitary gardener,
Tending, caring and guarding his family:
The stretching trees and spreading flowers.
He gives passersby the occasional nod
As he shows his grandchildren
How to plant daisies.

Winner, Lower Primary

Charlie Kairaitis

Arden Anglican School, BEECROFT NSW

My Night Time Friends

When I go to bed at night
So I don't feel scared
I have my favourite animals
Wrapped up in my bed

Mini-Ted, Sheep and Panda
Came from the local fete
Panda and I play DS
The panda game is great

My Unicorn has a squeezable belly
A purple horse with a sparkly horn
A soft loving baby from my Aunt
Annabel is my Baby Born

Zoot the Zumble has purple wings
I dream of us flying together
Zoe's head pokes from her pouch
They'll keep me safe forever

Monkey Go-Go with long arms that hug
We bought from Dubbo Zoo
Cat came from the neighbours
And likes to jump on my trampoline too

There's not much room but in squeezes Sarah
My doggy, the long eared pup
And most precious of all, made by my cousin
My pink blankie that wraps us all up

My toys are very special to me
They make me safe and sound
So when I go to bed at night
I hug them all around



JUDGES COMMENTS

Here is a convincing account of the writer's bedtime friends, each given a cryptic description with the whole drawn together in a rational conclusion. The writer uses simple images clearly expressed in simple words and he shows an ear for sound: "a purple horse with a sparkly horn" and "Zoot the Zumble has purple wings".... While the end rhymes seem to fall into place easily, in the main, it is the internal rhyming which is the most effective and contributes well to the meaning and cheery spirit of the poem. Well done!

JUDGES COMMENTS

Here is an intelligent, well argued interpretation of the star theme. The poet's voice is clear as she spins out her ideas. There is a good range of characters, neatly established...the teacher, business man, mother, petshop owner, gardener, beggar. Deft touches of character enliven her world, her "kindred spirits", while she debunks the imagery from contemporary technology, fashion, magazine and TV culture. This is an interesting piece of work, well crafted. [It is unfortunate near the end that "broke" is used when "poor" would be more apt - or possibly "broken".

Runner Up, Lower Primary

Tryphina Reu

Bradshaw Primary School, ALICE SPRINGS NT

Lhere Mparntwe

Gushing, rushing water,
Trickling in my ears.
A stream of clear blue water turns muddy.
Now I realise,
The spangled grunTERS are rushing past me
In groups of ten.
Mostly it's a dry sandy place.
I know deep down inside my heart,
I'll remember the ice cold water
Running through my legs.

As I dip
I feel the water,
Running through my body.
It's a cold icy feeling.

The trees blow wildly,
As the rain falls down.
Thunder booms loudly,
The sky darkens.
I feel so scared.
But I wouldn't miss it.
I love the sounds.
I love the river.

People shout:
"The Todd's flowing!"
And run to the river bank.
It's our river, the mighty Todd.
Lhere Mparntwe.

[*Arrernte name for the Todd River in Alice Springs - Lhere Mparntwe]

JUDGES COMMENTS

This poem captures the quality of the event from a personal experience. Details are well chosen, like: "the spangled grunTERS rushing past" and the "ice cold water".... The writer pinpoints well the chill of the water as it runs between her legs. She feels it in her whole body. There is colour and excitement in the poet's response to the scene, which we all know is a rare event in Alice Springs. Well done! I love the line "But I wouldn't miss it". Her voice is clear.

Winner, Learning Assistance and Special Education - Primary

Jayden Wilson

Katherine School of the Air, KATHERINE NT

Nelson Springs – My Home

It is daybreak.
Sunrise -
the dawn is shattering and the silence passes.
Native birds are looking hungrily for survival food -
Soaring, wild, wedged tail eagles,
Screeching, noisy, red-tailed cockatoos,
Bouncing, active, grey brolgas,
Chorusing, together, black & white magpies,
Perched, bush turkeys
Whistling -
Racing -
Hovering -
my alarm clock!
It makes me feel hungry as well.

I love the quiet -
the fresh smell of, breezy, seasonal rain.
In the stock camp
counting big horned, brindle, scrub cattle
floury, fine, red, bulldust floating in the dry air.

Drinking hurriedly -
fresh, cool, dripping water from the nearby spring -
dancing wildly
and furiously over smooth, limestone boulders.

Our Negri River fed by the ever, flowing Sterling River -
both deep, wide, bending, skipping down to the lake.
Flowing aggressively
and quickly
to the vast Ord -
into boundless, diamond, blue Lake Argyle.
Fish - white, big, juicy, bream, silver, grey catfish,
Ancient, ridged, concealed crocodiles - protecting their precious eggs
Flowering white gums,
paper bark shedding its seasonal cracking skin,
yellow, orange flowering prickly pear trees,
grazing cattle, newborn calves, fat steers,
scaly, black-headed, rock pythons.
Goannas, wild buffalo, feral pigs, big, shiny brumbies -
sharing our lonely land.

Stunning, scenic sunsets,
everything is humid -
I wish I could get closer to the sun to feel it more.

Natural, open spaces -
The cool, evening breeze on my young, smooth cool, brown skin -
Nelson Springs,
My home,
My country -
Forever.

JUDGES COMMENTS

This is a very good poem which observes carefully the landscape of the writer's world at daybreak. He writes from a knowledge of the experience. The piece flows well and shows a sense of colour and sound, especially sound. Well done. What does it mean "to get closer to the sun", especially so in the NT? Why would you want to do that? The ending could be stronger. As it is, the writing drifts away, somewhat.

Runner Up, Learning Assistance and Special Education - Primary

Bettina Liang

Redeemer Baptist School, NORTH PARRAMATTA NSW

I Am, I See

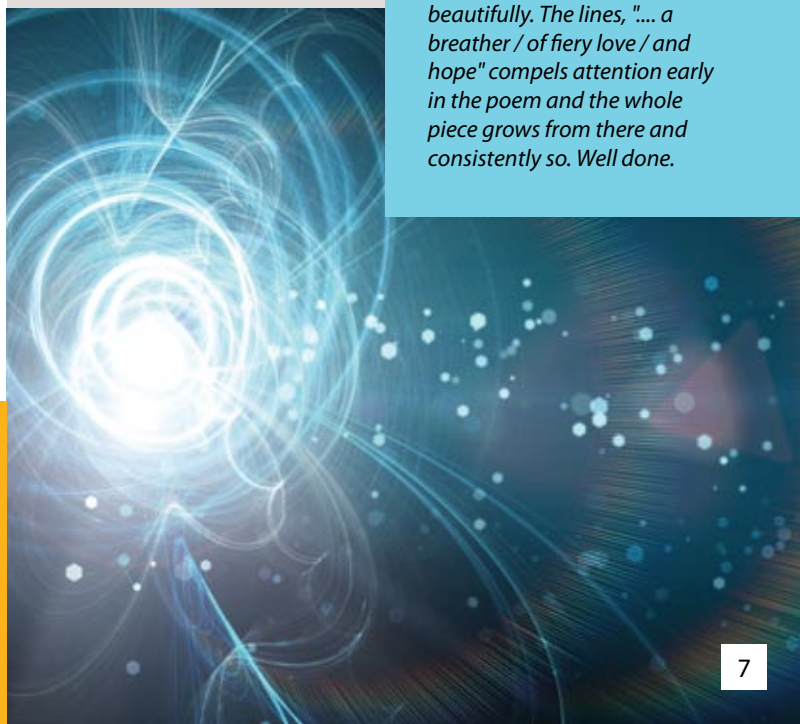
I am a star
I am a breather
Of fiery love
And hope
I am a dancer
Synchronising in time
With my fellow companions
I am a small speck in time
A small piece of the vast universe
I am a follower
Of the angels from high above.

I see mortals on the watery planet
Named Earth
I see them fight in terrible wars
During which many lose beloved ones
I see Mercury
The hot and flaming realm
I see Venus
the planet of love and beauty
I see Mars.
Earth's twin.
I see Jupiter
With its Great Red Spot
I see Saturn
With its rings of fire
I see Neptune
The icy kingdom
And Pluto
The land of the dead.

I am a star, I see everything.

JUDGES COMMENTS

This is a bold piece, written with vigour; it moves along beautifully. The lines, "... a breather / of fiery love / and hope" compels attention early in the poem and the whole piece grows from there and consistently so. Well done.



2009

dorothea mackellar

Winner, Learning Assistance and Special Education - Secondary

Drago Kalinic

Katherine School of the Air, KATHERINE NT

Marralawa

Marralawa -
Marralawa -
Ancient voices calling me from a deep, dreaming sleep -

Looking –
Searchingly towards the East's dawning, reflective horizon -
Feeling instinctly – age, old intuition -
Something in the sky, shimmering in the shadowy dimness caught my eyes -
Something so bright -
Existing – nomaleea -
I want to shine, flicker and flash like the mythical, magical Marralawa.
Everything Marralawa can see -
Whatever belongs to the land, belongs to me.

Touching –
Crisp air - washes over me -
Arousing alertness -
Something awakens exhilarating -
Something rouses and stirs -
Beginning of another, age, old day -
I want to shine, flicker and flash like the mythical, magical Marralawa.
Everything Marralawa can see -
Whatever belongs to the land belongs to me.

Fading –
Waiting for Marralawa -
Hiding behind the sun's fierce, powerful, intense light –
Something moving and looping westerly across the daily track -
Something setting - the reddish, orange sun fading over the dry, brown plains
Appearing silently - visible, and unreachable.
I want to shine, flicker and flash like the mythical, magical Marralawa.
Everything Marralawa can see
Whatever belongs to the land, belongs to me.

Marralawa,
Marralawa,
Ancient voices calling me from a deep, dreaming sleep -
I want to be Marralawa.
I want to shine.
It's my shining and my dreaming –
I wish,
I wish,
Oh I wish I was Marralawa,
the Morning Star.

JUDGES COMMENTS

An enchanting indigenous aesthetic. Most Australians have very little understanding of Indigenous mythology or aesthetics. This poem about Marralawa, better known to us as Venus or the morning star, is like a sacred hymn that provides a window into a world where all things are unified. What the poet proclaims is not mere connection with the land and the ancestors but a sense of oneness with and belonging to the cosmos itself. It is a joyful poem, full of light, aspiration and confident well-being.

Runner Up, Learning Assistance and Special Education - Secondary

Joshua Wood

Redeemer Baptist School, NORTH PARRAMATTA NSW

The Search for Stars

Into the night sky I look
Darkness is before me.
Searching, probing with the naked eye
There is not much to see.

A world is awakened
When I look through the lens.
Bursting with brightness:
It makes my heart bend.
The mystery of the darkness
Is dawned in me.

JUDGES COMMENTS

A short poem that says a lot with a few words. I particularly love the lyrical sense of the final verse.

Winner, Centenary of Canberra Award**Saba Vayani-Lai**

Glenwood High School, GLENWOOD NSW

Canberra's Song, Morphing

1. There is beauty in
Simplicity,
In air thick with insects and
Kangaroo-sweet fire, roasted strands of grass
Sprouting from the earth's flaky scalp like
Uncut hair.

Night-time,
The wind is trying her hand at
Opera –
Her off-key soprano vibrating through
Mouthfuls of warm air,
Sending flames squirming
Like toes when they are tickled.

We reach into a star-cluttered sky,
Catching Bogong moths between hungry fingers –
Oh, how they struggle, dying in the
Firelight –

How alive,
How terribly alive,

Wriggling moth bodies, crisped flesh,
The outer shell fizzing into atmosphere to reveal
Succulent, melting syrupiness,
Coating our teeth and tongues and mouths and faces
In summertime.

This is Kanbarra, meeting place of the Ngunnawal,
Where moths tangle themselves in
Half-baked summer air, where rich soil
Is smeared across skin like
Saliva, sticky.

This is Kanbarra.
2. There is beauty in
Complexity,
In these city streets all lined up –
The Lego blocks
Of men.

The air is thin, playful,
Mussing hair and
Blowing tickling kisses
At coat-laden passers-by.

We find shelter under
A street lamp,
Revel in the electricity pooling over
Shivering shoulders:
The softest snow blanket.
Like all good presents
We are bundled heavy in mittens and scarves and hats –
Maybe if you lean in,
You can catch a smile
From mashed, frost-bitten lips,
Fizzing, fire-licked eyes.

Liquid sunshine,
Stretching warmth to fingertips and sprinkling stars into
Eyes.

This is Canberra.

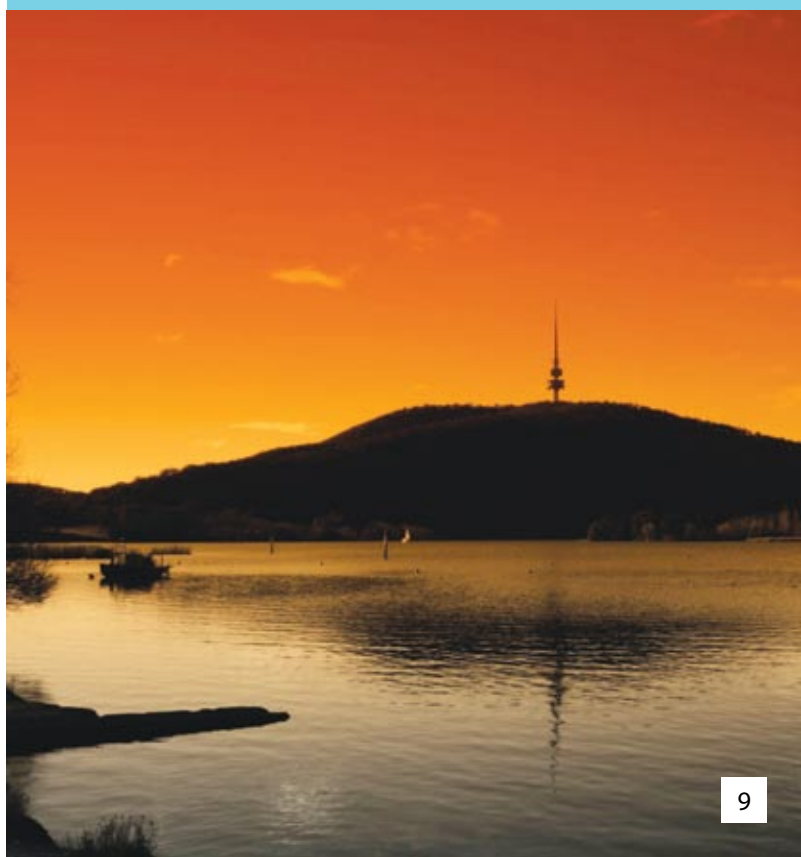
This is Canberra, the meeting place of Australia,
Where we trace an engraved Coat of Arms and imagine
Kangaroo-sweet fires, roasted strands of grass;
Where we join the bustling Café-on-Wheels queue,
Puff out frost and pretend to be dragons.
My mother flashes her Centrelink card
As though it matters,
And we close eager palms around Styrofoam cups,
Savouring the soupy slide of

Salt,
Chicken, chives,
Carrot cubes,

Wholesome and slipping down the throat like

JUDGES COMMENTS

This poem is, quite simply, outstanding-- sophisticated, insightful and always engaging. The observations are those of a writer of impressive maturity. The poem's seemingly effortless quality is maintained throughout, a rare thing in a poem from someone of Saba's age. The juxtaposition of eras and civilisations is so effective because the observations (and delightful images) never lapse into cliché. They are exact and tactile, the stuff of real poetry. The reader is provided with fresh insights into our unique capital city, and its region. Deserving winner.



Runner Up, Centenary of Canberra Award

Jack Burnham

Caloundra Christian College, CALOUNDRA QLD

Kambarra!

Day dawns over the forest primeval
Fragrant zephyrs caress the granite shoulders
Of the lofty Brindabellas before
Rippling through grassy valleys
Cupped in the mountains' stony embrace.
Eucalypts stretch towards the sky as
Banksia gowned in colours bright
Turn faces to the morning light.
The silver ribbon of the Molonglo meanders languidly
Merging and melding with cheerful gurgling creeks
Leaving swampy reminders of their passing.
Kambarra! Meeting place of rivers.

Fire cavorts and capers, leaping skyward
Insatiable hunger checked by barricades of stone.
Bullroarer whines and calls dancers
Who slip from the sheltering arms of night
Pulled inexorably toward the light
By the rhythmic click of clap sticks.
Didgeridoo thrums and throbs
Matching heartbeats in perfect synchronicity.
Voices rise in counterpoint, chanting celebration.
Rainbow serpent encircles the land
Turning ancient eyes towards her people.
Kambarra! Meeting place of tribes.

Buildings radiate from a central watery axis
Lining the spokes of an architectural wheel -
Burley Griffin's dream of planned perfection.
Mighty Molonglo tamed and dammed
Forms a serene centrepiece,
Its mirrored perfection broken by a handful of isles.
Across the lake in lofty halls
The voice of power rises and falls
Spouting political rhetoric.
Museums and memorials rub shoulders
With Embassies and Consulates.
Kambarra! Meeting place of nations.

JUDGES COMMENTS

This poem, too, displays a sophisticated poetic sensibility as two cultures, millennia apart, are cleverly contrasted. While the language here is a little more consciously 'poetic' than in the winning poem, Jack still enables the reader to imagine, even feel, the pristine lifestyle of the past. Repetition is used to good effect. Fine effort, and an equally deserving runner-up.

Winner, Community Relations Commission (NSW) Award

Jack Burnham

Caloundra Christian College, CALOUNDRA QLD

Lost and Found

July evening in Ikebukuro
Spartan simplicity of sushi bars overshadowed
By the salty allure of fast food franchises.
The tinny tinkle of karaoke harmonises
With the dull underfoot rumbling
Of trains navigating their subterranean maze.
Wrapped in humidity's blanket
I stand – an immovable object
Buffeted by the milling throng.
Head and shoulders above the stream
A craggy atoll rising above an ocean
Of students and businessmen flowing past
Caught in the lure of an unseen siren current.
I am lost – adrift – astray
Stranger in a strange land
Bereft of compass and sextant
Unable to find my way.
As self control threatens to slip
And hot tears prick swollen eyelids
I feel a gentle tap on the shoulder.
Lifeline thrown by a total stranger,
"May I be of assistance?"

December evening in Mooloolaba
Designer surf stores and juice bars
Jostle for space on the busy esplanade.
The thunder and crash of surf a counterpoint
To the hum of myriad conversations
Punctuated by sudden arpeggio of laughter.
Enervated by summer's heat
I sprawl – indolent, content
Passively observing the passing parade
That swirls round and past a frozen figure.
Defeat and terror ooze from every pore
Tourist map clutched convulsively
Between white knuckled fists,
Eyes that beg – beseech - implore.
I am roused from lethargy by a quiver of recognition
Having owned that fear, known that trepidation.
The bond of kinship connects us,
Blood calls to blood
No stranger this - my brother under the skin.
An invisible cord reels me closer step by step
Until I gently tap his shoulder and bow,
"Hajime Mashite".

JUDGES COMMENTS

Lovely in true Burnham style. The poetic style draws the reader into the narrative. The judges commented on the commonality of experience; helplessness, assistance and relief; woven across time, place and culture.

School's Award

Winner Katherine School of the Air
Katherine NT

Runner Up St Anthony's School
Wanneroo WA

Special mention to the following schools for the quality of their submissions:

Canley Vale High School, NSW
Fintona Girl's School, VIC
St Michael's Collegiate School, TAS
Paracombe Primary School, SA
Redeemer Baptist School, NSW
Queenwood School for Girls, NSW
Bradshaw Primary School, NT

2009 Project Officer's Report

2009 has proved to be a landmark year in the history of the Dorothea Mackellar Poetry Awards. For the first time our competition accepted only those entries submitted on the website at www.dorothea.com.au.

This departure from the traditions of a postal entry system is a major step forward in embracing the technology now available across school communities throughout Australia and will prove to be a cost effective and time saving and alternative, particularly with the computer skills of today's students in mind.

While entry numbers were down this year due to the format change, the quality of entries and enthusiasm of teaching staff remains very high.

I am again delighted to play a part in bringing together this wonderful annual competition. My personal thanks to an enthusiastic team of volunteers behind the scenes and our dedicated panel of judges, Sue Gough from Brisbane and Dr Robert Kimber from Adelaide.

Special thanks also to our funding partners and corporate supporters for their continued assistance in making the annual Dorothea Mackellar Poetry Awards the success it remains.

Congratulations to our winners and runners up this year. As you can see they have done a wonderful job. Congratulations also to the talented and committed teaching staff who so confidently inspire our young people to take up a challenge and expand their minds.

The 2009 Dorothea Mackellar Poetry Awards theme was 'Searching for Stars'. Without doubt all the students who entered our competition this year are 'stars' in their own right. Well done everyone and see you all next year.

Helen Green

Judges Comments - Senior

When students are given a suggested topic, it results in an avalanche of poems that are very predictable.

However it is also in response to the topic that the real stars come out: the poets who think a little more deeply and originally, who in addressing the topic of "Searching for Stars," avoid clichés about diamonds and words such as 'twinkling.'

Our most talented poets this year took a lateral approach and explored far afield to write about celebrities, starfish, black holes and the space-time continuum. It is interesting to note that many of our winners did not need the prompting of an imposed topic and followed their own inspiration.

As a judge, I am looking for those entries that show evidence the writer has understood the emotional and intellectual potential of poetry. The power of good poetry is very different from that of prose. Poetry crystallises, rather than describes, a moment, a feeling, a vision or a concept. Its rhythms forge a link between the words, the emotions and memory.

A good poem does not preach but has the persuasive ability to make one see something in a totally new way, enriching and expanding the experience of the reader. A good poem also contains some complexity. It may not reveal all its riches immediately but invites the reader to explore its possibilities and interpret its mysteries.

When it came to the senior school participation, I have to wonder what is in the water in Tasmania? Many of the best entries were from a number of different schools in the Apple Isle and demonstrated that there are inspiring teachers in that State.

Perhaps the most outstanding entries of all in terms of their number, quality and range were from the class of Patsy Graham of St Michael's Collegiate School in Hobart. I would also like to congratulate Katriona Bailey from Redeemer Baptist School at North Parramatta and Athanasia Keferis of Canley Vale High for the high standard of their students' entries in the senior section.

Judges Comments - Primary

The best work in the Primary category stands out because it gives a convincing sense of the writer's voice. There is spontaneity and energy in the expression, with a flow that suggests the subject is close to the writer's heart.

Poetry has to be personal to be alive, "words with heartbeats", one great poet once remarked. As I read a poem and, frequently I stress, as I read a poem aloud, I hear the voice of the writer. The fall of the words, the very choice of the words, the phrasing, the use of speech rhythms and the sound patterns chosen to elaborate on the ideas, give me a sense of what the writer is thinking and feeling. That very selection and the way the parts come together in a good poem, give a rich sense of the poet as an individual.

This means that the poetry is working. It is not prose I am hearing, not a calculated description of events and processes, not mere word play. Rather, it is emotion, deliberately given shape in the writer's acute observations upon a theme which is very special to that writer at the time of writing.

There is virtue in such work because it demands that the writer understands the topic and has a close personal relationship with it. Anything less and the true potential in writing poetry at all remains unfulfilled.

Among the winners we have samples of what is best in Australian young poets... and that is very good indeed.

Robert Kimber



Paul Ramsay Foundation

2009 Entries Statistics

Total Entries	6,660
Total Schools Participating	462
New South Wales	3,85
Victoria	2,212
Queensland	421
ACT	365
South Australia	319
Tasmania	280
Western Australia	273
Northern Territory	96
Lower Primary	1,459
Upper Primary	3,467
Learning Assistance Primary	92
Junior Secondary	1,128
Senior Secondary	481
Learning Assistance Secondary	16
Centenary of Canberra Award (High school students only)	17

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