



2022

PRESENTATION BOOKLET



Dorothea Mackellar Poetry Awards



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

We've been paddling hard in the last three years to ensure the awards continue to flourish during these times of pandemic uncertainty.

And so far the tide has been with us!

Entries, while down on the last two years with the return to a semblance of "normality" after lockdowns, are still strong from across the country with some 6000 poems being entered.

Represented in the winners' list are familiar names from past triumphs plus some new entrants.

Bursting on the scene to take out the Primary Schools' Award for best overall standard was the Urbenville Public School which has a total enrolment of 25 students. The school at the heart of the NSW north coast village also won the David Maher award for the best poem from a school of less than 30 students. What an achievement!

It was wonderful to see poems from long time supporters such as Redeemer Baptist School, North Parramatta, NSW and St Michael's Collegiate, Hobart, TAS on the honour board again.

The committee has opted this year to return to a real presentation ceremony in the awards' home base of Gunnedah, NSW. This follows the last two years of virtual presentation ceremonies which were a lot of fun to produce and a re-think of the tyranny of distance.



Pip Murray, President.

We are excited to be able to host prizewinners, their families, teachers and judges in one big space and allow, once again, the chat to flow about the joys of creative writing.

A highlight reel of the ceremony will be available on our website www.dorothea.com.au so you can catch up on all the special moments.

Thank you to all the teachers across Australia who have nurtured the young poets in the making and to their parents who have also fostered that love of words. But the biggest vote of thanks is reserved for the students who opened their hearts and minds to this most rewarding form of creative writing. We salute you young poets!

OUR PATRONS

SUSAN DUNCAN

Susan is a strong supporter of the poetry awards and an advocate for Australia's literary heritage. After 25 years as a successful journalist and editor of *The Australian Women's Weekly* and *New Idea*, Susan turned her hand to writing best-selling fiction, including *Salvation Creek*. Several of her books are set in Pittwater, north of Sydney, where she formerly lived with her husband Bob at Tarrangaua, the house built by Dorothea Mackellar in 1925.



THE HONOURABLE MARK VAILE AO

During his 15-year parliamentary career, Mark served as Deputy Prime Minister and leader of the National Party, as well as minister for both Trade and Transport. As chair of Whitehaven Coal, he is a frequent visitor to Gunnedah and surrounding districts in north west NSW. Whitehaven has been a long-standing sponsor of the awards and is the custodian of the Mackellar family's homestead Kurrumbede near Gunnedah.



MORE MILESTONES

Poetry remains the centrepiece of our organisation but the past year has seen some important achievements chalked up by the Dorothea Mackellar Memorial Society.

SILO MURAL COMPLETED

The most visual of those was the completion of our magnificent silo mural in Gunnedah which has quickly become a highly popular tourist stopover. Melbourne artist Heesco Khosnaran returned late last year to add the finishing touches to the sepia toned mural featuring Dorothea, lines from her iconic poem My Country together with historic harvest scenes.

The mural sits proudly on the historic Brunton's mill and can be seen clearly from vantage points across the town. Specially constructed viewing boards tell the story of the artwork and the town's connection to Dorothea Mackellar whose family owned properties in the area.

To top it off the attraction was named the Best Mega Mural in the Australian Street Art Awards.



followed a persistent campaign by the society and a number of high profile supporters to ensure the homestead precinct is preserved for future generations. Dorothea Mackellar is known to have drawn inspiration for her poetry from the Gunnedah district, with her work including direct references to local landmarks.



President Pip Murray holds aloft the gazette.

HERITAGE LISTING

The homestead and outbuildings of Kurrumbede, the former Mackellar family property near Gunnedah, were recognised for their cultural and historic significance earlier this year when they were added to the NSW State Heritage Register. The property was nominated by the society almost four years ago and its placement on the register



SLAM POETRY

Slam poetry revisited Gunnedah earlier this year after the society was successful in winning a grant to bring master of the art Sydney-based Miles Merrill to town. Miles, who has performed at a presentation ceremony, gave workshops to local school students.

NEW SIGNAGE

Finally, visitors will find it easier to track us down! Federal government grant funding was obtained to improve signage around the Mackellar Centre in Gunnedah and also point the way to the hugely sought out Dorothea silo mural.

THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS



Australian Government
**Department of Education,
Skills and Employment**



OUR COMMITTEE

The Dorothea Mackellar Memorial Society is the administrative body of the poetry awards. A volunteer organisation based in the northern NSW town of Gunnedah, it was established in 1984. It comprises an eight member committee and is primarily funded by the Commonwealth Department of Education.

President: Philippa Murray
Vice President: Shirley Urquhart
Secretary: Owen Hasler
Treasurer: Peter Wills
Committee members: Glen Jones, Jenny Darley,
Susan Wilson, Kate McGrath, Alice McLean
Project Officer: Brittany Riley



ABOUT THE TROPHIES

It seemed only appropriate this year to feature the former Mackellar family homestead, Kurrumbede, near Gunnedah on trophies presented to this year's winners.

The house and outbuildings were added to the State Heritage Register of NSW in June after a four year campaign by the society to have it recognised.

Local artist Shirley Urquhart has painted a beautiful watercolour of the house which has been made into a limited edition of prints. The homestead was built in 1908 by Dorothea's father, Sir Charles Mackellar together with a suite of outbuildings on a small hill near the Namoi River.

The poet wrote fondly of her numerous visits to Kurrumbede and local landmarks feature in her work.

Shirley works primarily in watercolours, dabbles in acrylics and is also a keen printmaker. Primary school teaching has been another lifelong love and a career which she still pursues.

And, fittingly, she is also vice president of the Society and a staunch poetry advocate.

OUR JUDGES



MICHELLE TAYLOR

Michelle Taylor writes for children, young adults and the young at heart. She's published seven books of poetry including *100 Ways To Fly*, *If The World Belonged To Dogs*, *If Bees Rode Shiny Bicycles* and *The Angel Of Barbican High*, and is the recipient of numerous awards and grants. Michelle is a mum and an occupational therapist, and reckons being a writer makes her braver and more creative in all the other jobs she does. www.mudanca.com.au/author

ROSS CLARK

Ross Clark has had eight volumes of poetry and haiku published since 1983, and has won several national poetry prizes. A large body of published but uncollected poetry includes poems for children and teenagers, written as Ashley Clarkson (and he's continuing to work on his verse-novel trilogy for young adults, which begins with "Beautyooty-Ripparooty").

After a professional life as a secondary and tertiary teacher, and several stints as poet-in-schools, he has begun writing songs during his retirement, performing them solo or with a band. Recent songs include "Blue Eureka Skies" and "Looking for a Sunburnt Country".



SHERRYL CLARK

Sherryl Clark has been reading and writing and loving poetry for more than 30 years. She has two collections of poems for adults published, as well as five verse novels for children. Her latest verse novel is *Mina and the Whole Wide World* (UQP). Her verse novel, *Farm Kid*, won the 2005 NSW Premier's Award for children's books and *Sixth Grade Style Queen (Not!)* was a CBCA Honour Book in 2008. Sherryl teaches poetry writing to all ages and also edits and critiques poetry manuscripts. Her website is at www.sherrylclark.com

JUDGE'S REPORT: Michelle Taylor

LOWER PRIMARY

It's a rare and privileged position to be in, to have the opportunity to hear from thousands of the youngest members of our country via the medium of a poem.

What better way to understand the hopes and worries, the lives and values, essentially what matters to you, than through a poem. A poem does not judge what we bring to it. There are no right and wrong topics, dumb questions, good and bad emotions. A poem meets us where we are at; stops everything else just for a while; it listens and wonders with us. It invites us to mould what comes forth into words, to take time and care to craft these, to create a new way of seeing and being in the world.

I want to thank everyone who entered this year's competition. Your poems embraced such diversity of subjects – the natural world, your people, places, cultures, disasters and loss, the things that make you strong and the things you struggle with. You brought compassion, insight and hope, outrage and the outrageously funny and some wonderful imaginations!

When I judged I was looking for the poem to remember. When I come across one of these it's like finding a precious gemstone. I want to hold on to it and keep looking at it because it's so perfect. I found such poems and I will fondly carry with me some hauntingly beautiful lines and images.

I want to be woken up by the originality of your poem. I am looking for the lines that have never been uttered before. The topic could be the simplest everyday thing like a lunchbox but reimagined through poetic devices - similes, metaphors, symbols, imagery, rhythm, rhyme, alliteration, assonance in considered combinations.

I seek a poem that has been well edited. Poems say more by saying less. They work to crystallise, to find the essence of things. Some

“I want to be woken up by the originality of your poem. I am looking for the lines that have never been uttered before.”

of the poems awarded prizes are short and spare. It is essential to check for spelling and grammar, and to say the poem out loud to hear how the prosody and rhymes work. Your editing process is akin to the organising and cleaning of your room – a sometimes annoying but important task. You may have some beautiful items but what happens if these are hidden behind a pile of washing or sitting in the wrong place?

Many poems were a step away from being recognised for an award. They were incredibly moving, exquisitely written, memorable gems. I know some of these poems will mean a great deal to you and perhaps those you wrote them for. I encourage you to hold on to them, revisit them in time, share them. I encourage you to keep writing and reading poetry – for both these things will make you a better poet. And I hope that poetry will bring you a sense of wonder with the world. I can't say it better than the poet, Mary Oliver in her poem 'Sometimes'.

Pay attention.

Be astonished.

Tell about it.

JUDGE'S REPORT: Ross Clark

UPPER PRIMARY

So my long journey along the Via Poetica is done, and I pause to think about the views along the way.

I saw that young people, on being asked their opinion, express concerns about a range of issues that many adults still spend some time arguing about – the necessity of all of us living in this country to breathe as one, whether indigenous, native, immigrant or refugee; the necessity of us all to treat each other well (I was saddened to read poems of loneliness and bullying); and the urgency of living properly within our environment, rather than exploiting it to within an inch of our lives.

I also saw moments of joy at simply living, whether with pets and livestock, or with friends and family, or with a range of leisure (or rather, life-affirming) activities such as sport, reading, and hanging about in nature.

I also saw, below the surface, the efforts of their teachers to nurture these hearts and minds, to give them poetic tools to express themselves (with varying degrees of success), and I praise those efforts. (I myself laboured in the salt mine classrooms of this country for a couple of decades, and I know what a busy and distracting profession teaching is.) So thanks to all your teachers. And thanks again.

“Take the effort to write the poem YOU would like to read. Chances are, someone else would like to read it too.”

But what of the poems? There were thousands for me to read. So, for any poem to stand out, it will have been written, revised and reflected on and revised again. Is every word THE word for that sentence? Is every thought in the right sequence? Does the poem take the reader somewhere, or did I just stop here because I ran out of ideas or rhymes? So, if you've just dashed off a poem in order to enter the competition, don't bother. Take the effort to write the poem YOU would like to read. Chances are, someone else would like to read it too.

Many of you did take that care . . . my first selection was far too large, but every poem in it, even if flawed, gave some insight or delight.

You'll see the poems that did make it into this anthology use a variety of forms – rhymed stanzas, unrhymed stanzas, or free verse. Whichever you use, think carefully about each line, for the line (in tension with meaning) is the propellant of the poem, the bit that makes it a poem. So, choose a rhyme not just because it's there, but because it's right.

Also, capitalise the beginning of a line only if it would also be capitalised in prose – this helps the poem to flow more freely, from capital letter to full stop.

Notice also the use made of repetition by several of the poets published here. Yes, repetition.

And most importantly, leave a little bit out. As a songwriter, I find this is an effective approach to narration – leaving something for the reader/listener to fill in. It connects them more intimately with your poem if some of the smaller details, that they might trip over, are not there.

Congratulations to all of you in this anthology, and to many more of you who have written poems that appealed to me. May you continue to find an audience.

JUDGE'S REPORT: Sherryl Clark

SECONDARY

This was my second year of judging the awards for secondary students, so I was expecting a similarly high standard of poems and was not disappointed. What did surprise me this year was the number of entries that were rhyming poems, many of which were successful or close to it in terms of the use of rhythm and rhyme. Often a rhyming poem can end up with clunky rhythm or forced rhymes, or convoluted sentences to make the rhymes fit.

The best of these this year included ballads with 4-line stanzas, villanelles and sonnets, which were impressive in their range of subjects. Again, there were few poems about Covid-19, perhaps reflecting that nobody wanted to write about something still so close. However, the range of pieces about

“Poetry has always been the most emotive of the written arts.”

climate change were stunning. As I said in last year's report, if only we could gather up all of these poems and ensure that our politicians read them. Given that all of the secondary entrants will be of voting age within the next two elections, it might be worth it for our government representatives to see what the country's new voters have to say right now! I can't see the passion and anger abating anytime soon.

There were fewer poems about life in rural Australia this year, which I missed, having grown up on a farm myself. Those evocations of life distant from our cities show us a different perspective on the world, where to stop and really look for a few moments provides a unique landscape to imagine.

Some topics have, of course, been written

about many times. The theme of 'In My Opinion' didn't always work when included – the poem itself needs to be the opinion. But where a poet took a familiar subject and gave it a new twist, often it led to a surprising and pleasing poem.

What stood out to me more than anything was the way in which these young poets wrote about the pressures on them: pressures to succeed, to behave in certain ways, to do schoolwork without question, to excel no matter what. With that comes both anger and anxiety – these poems send a powerful message to parents, if they are willing to listen.

Poetry has always been the most emotive of the written arts, yet you will find poems in this collection where the imagery and control of language serve to heighten the emotions rather than over-dramatise them, the mark of successful poetry. If you read poems here that stir and engage you on a deeper level (and I am sure you will if you read and re-read), know that this is how poetry works, why it is such a wonderful way to express the inexpressible.

So many of the poems entered deserved an award – it was my hardest job, to select contenders for further judging and thus to leave the others behind. I would strongly urge every school that entered to collect the poems from their students and produce a book of some kind for all of their students to enjoy and talk about. So many good poems! Which surely means so many great teachers who have encouraged the writing of them.

Once I had my long list of contenders, then began the process of third and fourth and fifth readings, with many notes and lots of pondering and (inevitably) comparing. In the end, it came down to selecting those poems that pushed their ideas and language and imagery just that bit further, in a way that created layers and deeper meanings. And never forget the bonus of a great title.

SCHOOLS' AWARD

PRIMARY

PRIMARY SCHOOLS' AWARD WINNER:

Urbenville Public School, Urbenville NSW

COMMENDED

Ravenswood School for Girls, Gordon NSW

Redeemer Baptist School, North Parramatta NSW

SCHOOLS' AWARD

SECONDARY

SECONDARY SCHOOLS' AWARD WINNER:

St Michael's Collegiate, Hobart TAS

COMMENDED:

Darwin Middle School, The Gardens NT

Northern Beaches Secondary College,
Mackellar Girls' Campus, Manly Vale NSW

North Sydney Girls' High School, Crows Nest NSW

South Oakleigh College, Oakleigh South VIC

St Thomas More College, Sunnybank QLD

LOWER PRIMARY WINNER

Sarah Savage, 8. St Elizabeth's Primary School, Tarragindi QLD

Clash!

Who's the best percussion instrument in the band?
The very best across the land?

Oooh that's me! shouted Tall Timpani.
I can be tuned and come in pairs.
Play me loud if you dare!
Boing! Bong!

Silly timpani! yelled Big Bass Drum.
I'm the loudest - can't you see?
Everyone is afraid of me!
Boom!

Enough bragging, bass! Ugh – so typical! sighed sassy Glimmering Glockenspiel.
Obviously I'm the very best,
And way more magical than the rest!
Ting!

Hahaha I'm way more sassy than you! smirked Twinkling Triangle.
I'm named after my shape and my sound is sweet.
I'm so high-pitched, just tap to the beat!
Ping!

You're so simple and monotone! stated Sly Snare.
I keep the rhythm to keep us all in time.
I'm the best even though you shine!
Rat tat!

You're all unique in your own way! declared Conductor Clough.
Together you sound as beautiful as a diamond in the rough!
I know who's the best and it's none of you.
It's the marvellous musicians, that's who!

JUDGE'S COMMENT

Unique poem giving voice to the instruments in the percussion with astute observations and an excellent use of dialogue, rhymes and onomatopoeia.

LOWER PRIMARY RUNNER-UP

Lindee Casayas, 9. St Anne's School, Harvey WA

How to Make a Bully

Find,
The anonymous noises,
The deepest cave,
For their voice.

Find,
The traditional clothes,
The people dancing on roads,
For their coat.

Find,
The revealing insecurities,
The grins from a chimpanzee,
For their teeth.

Find,
The red bloodshot eyes,
The blood moon,
For their eyes.

Find,
The thickness from a body builder's muscles,
The titanium,
For their claws.

JUDGE'S COMMENT

Excellent use of metaphors and repetition to paint a unique and memorable portrait of a bully.



UPPER PRIMARY WINNER

Catherine Rong, 11. Laguna Street Public School, Caringbah South NSW

Taints of Black

Blank pages of naked wood
No splatter of colour, no words or paragraphs
Blank, no personality, thoughts or actions
No laughter, or interesting chronicles of life

You drop ink
Racing to the end of the page
You tattered it, you tattered it black
The blank page black, black with ink, neglect, melancholy

Fix the story, I said
But you cover it with tissues, tissues of white
White that absorbs the black, the black of neglect
And so you tattered the tissue with black, the black of
neglect and melancholy

Now the tissue is black, so is the page
So you grab a pair of scissors
Scissors of pain, a memorizing pain
Then you cut the page, the page you wrote, treasured
You cut it, the black page

In the trash you go
You'll never be good like pink or blue, no matter how you try
Black is black and can't be fixed
But I tell you the truth
And you still don't listen –
The one who tattered the page black
Was you

JUDGE'S COMMENT

This reads aloud very successfully – it employs rhythm, repetition, and accumulation to cry into our hearts, but always retains the richness of ambiguity. It is language at its most cunning and inviting.

UPPER PRIMARY RUNNER-UP

Sam Ma, 11. Redeemer Baptist School, North Parramatta NSW

Rain

Rain near my bedroom,
I love to hear it fall!
When I am cosy on my bed
Blanket and all.
With little toys on the table,
And a reading book or two.
The rain rumbling a pretty song,
Through everything I do.

Rain in the city,
I love to hear it fall!
When the buildings are slanted
Raindrops and all.
With umbrellas there
And umbrellas here,
With the rain rumbling a pretty song,
Through everything I hear.

JUDGE'S COMMENT

This is a melodious old-school lyric poem, full of delight to share with the readers. How wonderful to encounter amidst our world's seriousness!





ASSISTED LEARNING PRIMARY WINNER

Aaryan Mehta, 9. Redeemer Baptist School, North Parramatta NSW

Jelly Fish

Floating umbrellas
In a wet water world,
With tentacles whooshing, washing,
Throbbing, pulsing through the waves.
Boneless, brainless, bloodless bodies
With silent stinging cells.
Beware the jellyfish.

JUDGE'S COMMENT

Use of metaphor, vibrant imagery, alliteration and rhythms to bring to life the world and wonderment of the jellyfish.

ASSISTED LEARNING PRIMARY RUNNER-UP

Vaishvi Patel, 10. Griffith Public School, Griffith NSW

The Banyan Tree

On our farm in India was a banyan tree
The most famous tree for all to see
With a huge canopy of leaves
A state of art for all to see

Picnic days were fun days
It gave us shade throughout the day
An amazing place for all to stay
Shading us from the stinging sun's ray

Our home-made swing was ready to go
Dad pushed me to and fro
Such memories still glow
It stays in my heart like a bow

Its tower of strength stood the test of time
Monsoons, floods, mud and slime
But India's heritage will always shine
The banyan tree is still their rhyme

JUDGE'S COMMENT

Rhyme and repetition are used to good effect in a poem brimming with life and love for the Banyan Tree.

Best individual entry from a small school with 25 students or less

DAVID MAHER AWARD WINNER

Liam Dau, 10. Urbenville Public School, Urbenville NSW

The Brumbies

The brumbies are majestic, they are wild and untamed
Intelligent, brave of Snowy River fame
Watching them as they gallop through the mountain snow
The stallion moves them to the water hole he knows
Always alert, he protects his herd, his foals and all his mares
Never stopping, ears are pricked, constantly aware
They amble from the water hole with matted manes and tangled tails
Through the eucalypts, the wattle and up the rocky trails
The stallion whinnies loudly and the herd it starts to move
This seems to signal danger or just a kangaroo
The herd moves in unison like a choreographed dance
Down the hill, across the river, they gallop the expanse
Of grassy plains and craggy knolls, they negotiate the land
These nimble beasts are mesmerising as they canter through the sand
And into the horizon I stand and watch them disappear
Their hoofprints all that is left behind of the beauty that was here
My heart it starts to wonder, where they all have gone
And how is it that we cannot give the brumbies a safe home?



JUDGE'S COMMENT

A poem which employs rhyme, meter and visual imagery to great effect, leaving the reader with a vivid picture of a creature and a place and the question which accompanies these.

Best entry from a school within 100km radius of Gunnedah

KURRUMBEDE AWARD WINNER

Quinn Eyre, 9. Gunnedah South Public School, Gunnedah NSW

Oh, Beautiful Garden

Open the gate,
And walk past the many benches,
And along the freshly cut grass,
Past the blossoms,
Along the pebbles,
I'm waiting.

JUDGE'S COMMENT

An invitation from the garden; concise use of language and assonance creates a lulling whisper calling us to venture further in toward all that awaits.

JUNIOR SECONDARY WINNER

Matthew Gu, 14. Sydney Grammar School, Darlinghurst NSW

Planet #52764

Planet #52674 is a tarnished marble
rusty blue jewelled with the languid green
of continental jigsaws afloat seas,
buried in a corner of an arm of a spiral
with seven brothers and a mourning mother
still shedding igneous tears for her lost kin.

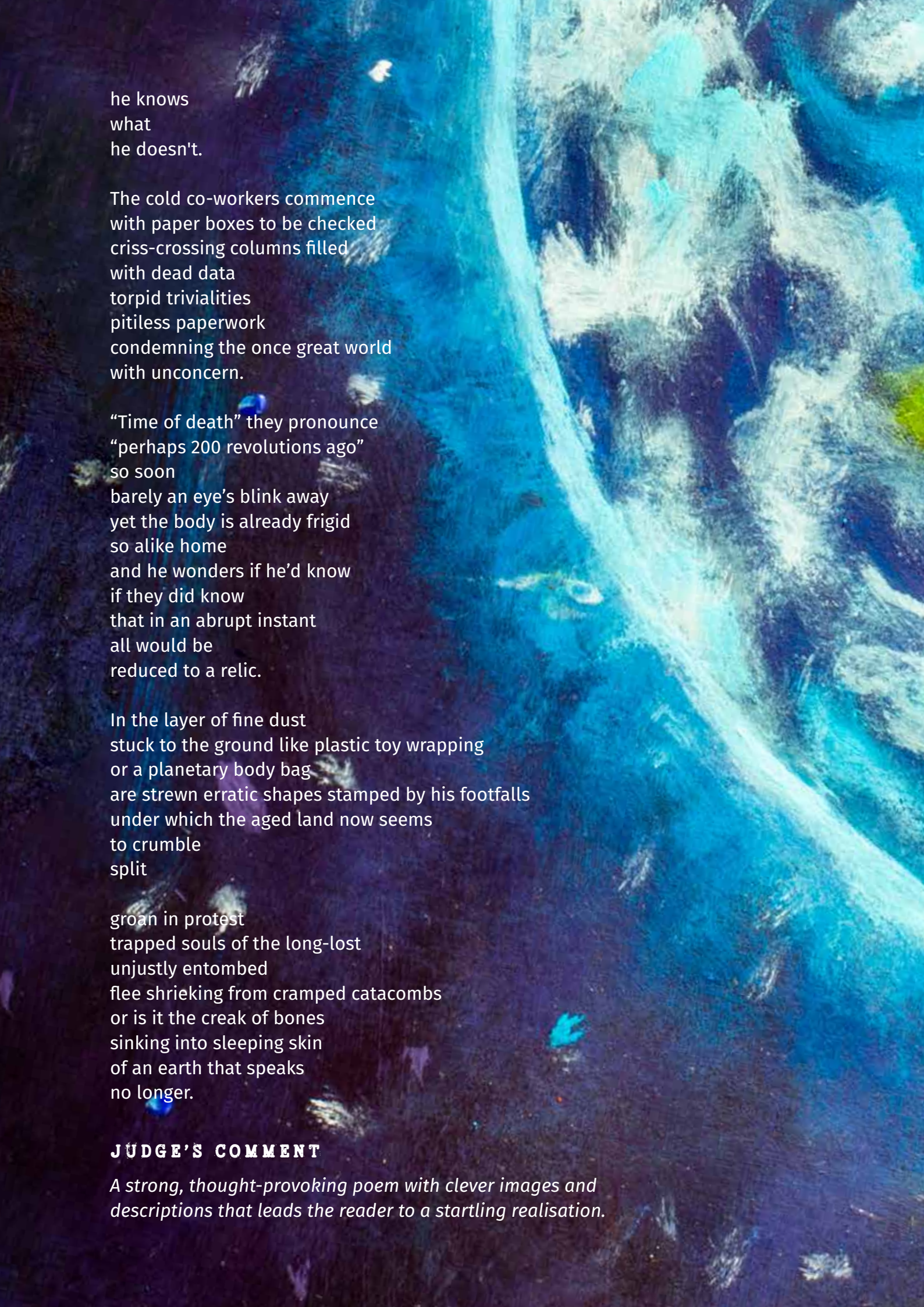
He is enveloped by the solidity of ground
his feet borne up by the weight of a world
bureaucratic eyes slide across the skyline
yet the mask on his face soon breaks
and the weariness streams in
like a river.

Walk.

They've been walking for seventeen star-passes
the days dragging longer than at home
sun lethargic through honey-thick sky
the pull weaker than at home
and with each step they are lifted by the hand of above blue
and dropped down
again.

At last, a graveyard juts from monotony
a charcoal smudge of a city smeared grey
across the landscape
no fires, no signals, no life
as they entwine themselves in a faded web of roadway
a hooded shadow accompanying,
admiring his work.

Corpses line the wayside
hollow shells of sky-soaring structures
now sagging spindles in rubble ruins
symbols scarring their stone surfaces
cryptic clots of coloured blood
mean something



he knows
what
he doesn't.

The cold co-workers commence
with paper boxes to be checked
criss-crossing columns filled
with dead data
torpid trivialities
pitiless paperwork
condemning the once great world
with unconcern.

“Time of death” they pronounce
“perhaps 200 revolutions ago”
so soon
barely an eye’s blink away
yet the body is already frigid
so alike home
and he wonders if he’d know
if they did know
that in an abrupt instant
all would be
reduced to a relic.

In the layer of fine dust
stuck to the ground like plastic toy wrapping
or a planetary body bag
are strewn erratic shapes stamped by his footfalls
under which the aged land now seems
to crumble
split

groan in protest
trapped souls of the long-lost
unjustly entombed
flee shrieking from cramped catacombs
or is it the creak of bones
sinking into sleeping skin
of an earth that speaks
no longer.

JUDGE’S COMMENT

A strong, thought-provoking poem with clever images and descriptions that leads the reader to a startling realisation.

JUNIOR SECONDARY RUNNER-UP

Caitlin Hallett, 14. St Thomas More College, Sunnybank QLD

This Body is Made of Metal, and the Joints are Oiled Gears

It's okay
You're human
You bleed and bruise
Crack under pressure
And sometimes it can feel as though the world
Well, the world wants to destroy you
But it's okay
It's okay to mess up
To fail a test and not come first
Take a break to regain your strength

You don't have to be perfect
You don't have to be the best
You don't need a gold medal hanging from your neck
You don't need to know the textbook answers
Like the back of your hand
Or understand everything to a T

You can struggle, mess up, burn out


But me?
I can't

The sympathy I have for myself is running out
And the ties of string
That prevent me from breaking
That keep me upright
Are loosening

My heart knows I don't have to be the best
Understands that humans fail
Acknowledges that anxiety and stress
Can take hold of my every move

But my brain dismisses the flesh and cartilage holding my
body together





In favour of believing my body is made of metal and my joints are gears
Because to my mind, I'm a machine
No mistakes

I've been engraved with the ultimatum
That failure isn't an option
Pushing back a goal due to things I can't control
Isn't even on my agenda
Losing isn't a word found in my limited vocabulary
And giving up, even when things turn bad
Isn't something I do

Five words tattooed on the skin behind my eyelids
Are the only words my mind processes: you can always do better

Walking away isn't an option
Taking a break isn't an option
My mental health isn't a priority
Not when assignments are piling up
And state titles are just around the corner
Not when I have expectations to uphold

Trying to keep my grades at a steady A
And pretending it is effortless
Acting as if the skin on my lip hasn't been ripped off
From hours spent trying to understand
The things everyone else seems to understand
—That's a priority

If extra hours of training where every part of my
body screams in pain
Is what it takes to keep a ribbon of blue and a circle
of gold hanging from my neck
To make cheers of congratulations the only thing I hear
To make smiles where the skin around someone's eyes
crinkles the only thing I see
To make arms squeezing me tight the only thing I feel
So be it

Why would anything less be an option
If I'm still trying to prove to myself
That everyone who ever believed in me
Hasn't wasted their time?

JUDGE'S COMMENT

A stirring poem with a powerful voice that portrays the pressure and expectations that crowd a teen's life and mind.

SENIOR SECONDARY WINNER

Zara Perry, 16. Ravenswood School for Girls, Gordon NSW

Here We Are (in pieces)

She's a pair of wide eyes over stacks of old books
in stone bunker shrouded in night.
He's a cracked screen protector on bus rides from school
to a house under orange streetlights.
She's a set of old pens on a laminate desk
when all of her colleagues have gone out and bled.
They're some teardrops on cheekbones when lightbulbs have blown,
and they're left with just candles instead.
He's the "dance with me darling" when his feet are still burning
with blisters from boots by the door.
She's dirt-crusting hair that hasn't been washed
because there's crying she just can't ignore.
He's a knee in the grass on a sunset lit hill
as his world stretches wider than him.
They're a handful of hands holding tight to each other,
without a clue where to begin.
He's fingers on ivory keys by the arch
to a train station crumbling down.
And that song is all that the people there have
besides pain, so they cling to the sound.
Because how does she start
and where does he go
and what do they do in the silence?
How can some eyes or a hand or a heart
sway the world from its sprint toward violence?

JUDGE'S COMMENT

Excellent use of repetition and form to create a poem that grabs us with its imagery and ideas in every line and has a powerful ending.

SENIOR SECONDARY RUNNER-UP

Indie Sarma, 17. St Michael's Collegiate, Hobart TAS

Dementia in a Nursing Home

Do not close your eyes, do not rest your head
Now brittle boned, once dragon tongued, some
Four years lying in your bed

Do not waste your life, you said
The end too soon will come
Do not close your eyes, do not rest your head

Your opened mouth for each spoon I fed,
Grimaced. Empty red raw gum
Four years lying in your bed

It was from this jail of jailers I fled
Escaping a future, bleak and numb.
Do not close your eyes, do not rest your head

But you left first, hollow, unfed,
Your wrist so gaunt and frail, eyes lifeless and glum
Four years lying in your bed

Her mind killed her. My oma's dead.
Ash scattered with the rain.
Do not close your eyes, do not rest your head
Four empty, godforsaken years lying in your bed.

JUDGE'S COMMENT

An extremely effective use of the villanelle form - the emotional pain in the poem resonates behind every line. Lovely echoes of Dylan Thomas.



ASSISTED LEARNING SECONDARY WINNER

Bach (Nathan) Nguyen, 17. Cavendish Road State High School, Holland Park QLD

Fantome Thoughts

Think of the Lock Hospital.
Dilapidated. Desolate.
Dry stones and coral walls
broken and stacked into piles.
Timber building stamps
pungent with the smell of mould.
Concrete stairs
drenched by haunting screams of the dead.
Stove. Bed. Bath tub.
There. But all gone.

Think of the St Mary's Catholic Church.
Eerie. Evocative.
The rectangular plinth at its centre
worn by the hands of time.
The shallow arched recess
featured a Christian cross.
When nothing else is viable,
people look up to the omnipotent God,
begging for Redemption.
Patients. Missionaries. Staff.
There. But all gone.

Think of the grotto.
Dull. Dark.
The large shrine,
constructed on mounds of sleepless gravel,
The concrete altar,
marked with shallow recesses.
A dwelling place of divinity.
There. But all gone.
Think of the cemetery.
Death. Rebirth.
Marked and unmarked graves
lined by fading stones
eroded by water from the nearby creek.



How naïve must you have been
thinking you could finally rest when you died.
There. But all gone.

Think of the single and married quarters.
Think of the dining hut.
Think of the central ridge.

But all is gone.
This place – once a site of
health-screening stations, leprosarium, penitentiary.
This place – once
targeted Indigenous communities,
who were deemed to perpetuate venereal diseases.
All to maintain a 'pure' population.
All to preserve a white Australia.

Patients were treated like flora and fauna.
Segregation. Starvation.

There.
The rise of the human spirit,
of freedom,
of democracy,
against discrimination and prejudice.

Think of the Australia you live in today.
Think of the Fantome Island.
Be grateful and sorry.
Then let your thoughts go.

JUDGE'S COMMENT

A stirring poem, with succinct imagery that takes the reader into place and time, with an interesting last line.

ASSISTED LEARNING SECONDARY RUNNER-UP

Emu Class: Hugo Young, Lucy Enks, Angus Hare, Cooper Seach, Angus Jansen, Nathan Dawe, Charlotte Gander. GS Kidd Memorial School, Gunnedah NSW

Dhinawan

Faster than a sprinter,
Running on a track.
Bolting, blasting, bounding,
Not looking back.

Tall native bird,
With beady blinking eyes.
Sneaking, slinking, seeking,
Emu never flies.

Big protective father,
Sitting on the eggs.
Watching, waiting, wondering,
Resting on his legs.

Emu looking forward,
On the Coat of Arms.
Standing, staring, serving,
A nation filled with charms.

Indigenous creation story,
Tells of Emu in the sky.
Sprinting, sitting, standing,
As the seasons pass on by.

Dhinawan creator spirit,
Guarding the land below.
Peering, peeking, protecting,
Everything we know.

JUDGE'S COMMENT

A lively, active poem that is fun to read and has great rhythm.



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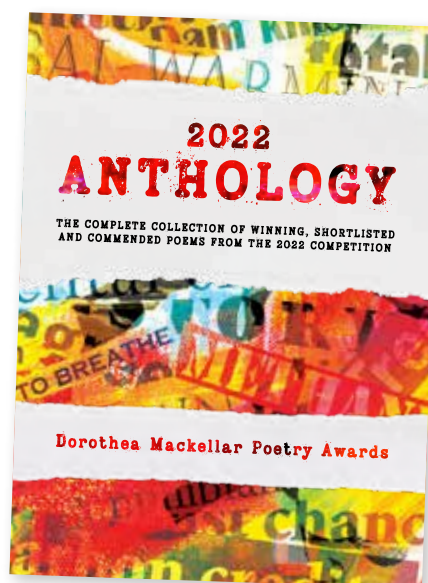
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*Where ragged mountain ranges
frame the sweeping plains
and splendid art creations
adorn the shaded lanes*



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