

Judge's Report, Mundaring Poetry Competition 2021.

Firstly I'd like to thank KSP Writers' Centre and Shire of Mundaring Libraries for inviting me to judge this competition. Thanks too to the Mundaring Shire for supporting poetry as an art form in our communities.

As you can imagine, the task was much more difficult than it sounds. There is so much raw life, deep experience poured into poetry that it was difficult to value one poem over another. It was not lightly done.

The subject matter of the poems was varied, but with some common threads: Covid of course, and lockdown life, and essential workers. The theme World of Change naturally drew writers' attention to Climate Change, the seasons and weather. Even to the life cycle in the natural world, and of course the end of human life and the loss, absence and grief that brings. How names for children change. The relentless march of time across landscapes, in human lives and the jadedness that brings. So many ways the world changes.

This is a poetry competition however, and so I looked closely at the poetic skills of each poem, and they were my decision making aids. What was I looking for in a poem? I looked at the chosen form/shape of the poem and whether it suited the theme. Diction is also important to me: poetry uses language in a very conscious way – it's not just accidental. Every word carries tone, sound and rhythm to a line. Images are drawn. Clichés are tired words that have lost their impact. Poets find fresh, stronger ways of saying old stories.

Even the spaces in a poem are important. How much space is there between phrases, or is enjambment used? Is there a deliberate absence or use of punctuation?

I also learnt something about myself: that titles and last lines are important to me. A vague title or one that gave *everything* away somehow decreased the impact of a poem. And so too with endings. Some poems conclude with a resonance that stays ringing in your ear.

Other than these qualities, I was listening for a voice that stayed with me off the page, what makes a poem linger under your skin that makes you want to re-read it, not necessarily to understand it but to want to understand it. And if in the re-reading I found more layers of meaning beneath the words, it was satisfying.

Seriously, putting poems aside and holding on to others was a difficult task. Congratulations to all entries for entering the world of poetry and for putting your experience into words for others to share. I loved every poem I read.

I have chosen three poems for commendations: All three employ rich, rhythmic language that echoes the sound of the movement they are describing. The lineation is assured and deliberate.

Vale Vijecnia is full of images that linger with the reader, telling the terrible story of the destruction of the library in Sarajevo almost 20 years ago. The images are unforgettable: ashes flying like 'black birds', of 'twisted spines', 'sooty sentences' ... and I can't forget the decapitated letter T ...

Similarly **Limestone Coast** is full of strong verbs and rhythm that imitates the relentless washing of limestone by the sea: there is the movement, smell, feel of the coast: 'of sea-born shell and bone pestled to sand' ... 'remortared into stone.' Very sensual writing that allows the reader to really experience a place.

Pilgrimages of the short-finned eel was simply arresting writing. It made me curious to read and re-read it. Wonderful images like 'earthskin rupture', 'the tremble-tremble, The Great Shuddering'; somehow these phrases created a sense of the enormous energy of the life force that brings eels to our rivers and years later sends them back to the Coral sea to spawn, and there is much more meaning in that poem than I have time for here.

The winning poem has an element of unexpectedness to it that in the end, nudged it away from its peers. **Flood Delusion** describes a farmer's recurring dream of a flood and the poem travels across the farm with the floodwaters, counting objects, animals and lives that have been lost in the long slow struggle against drought. Once again strong verbs and images keep the poem moving and the reader along with it. Threaded through the narrative are italicised words, like a staccato chorus, with lots of watery auditory qualities: spurt, gush, spout, flow, run ... rush, surge. These gushing pauses bring us back again and again to the sight and sound of water which is, in reality, completely absent

Dry as bone. dry /as horns on a carcass skull going white out there ...

This is an unexpected telling of the story of drought. It is the wild ride through dream and reality, flood and dry, harsh land and human sensitivity that spins the reader into its vortex. We cannot stop ourselves from dreaming, from conjuring hope, but are we deluding ourselves? At a time when hope seems scarce, especially in rural communities, there is an irony to this poem too. Like the best of poems, there is more than one way to read and enjoy it.

Congratulations everyone. Thank you for your words.

Josephine Clarke.