

Eastwood/Hills FAW 2016 Annual Literary Competition

Poetry Judges' Report

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When judging a poetry competition, it is always a good starting point to remember what poetry is about. Many definitions exist, but American poet Mary Oliver is a reliable voice in the world of modern poetry. She writes:

“Poetry is a life-cherishing force...poems are not words, after all, but fires for the cold, ropes let down to the lost, something as necessary as bread in the pockets of the hungry.” (Oliver, Mary. *A Poetry Handbook*. Harcourt 1994 p.122).

This is a true poet's definition: even in theorising, she employs metaphor and musicality in her language and casts a linguistic spell on the reader to provoke that aesthetic frisson we expect from poetry. With our ears primed for this sort of magic, we read the submitted poems.

The 87 entries in this year's poetry competition favoured the usual range of topics: war, Indigenous themes, animal life, death and ageing, nature and the environment, relationships, nature and the environment and human rights. Some did so creatively.

With a few exceptions, it was apparent that the poets wrote from conviction and passion on their topic. Some were able to do so in original language and colourful imagery; in some instances, good writing was spoilt by a weak ending or a confusion in the actual concept being communicated. A few too many poems were spoilt by an overstatement of a “message”, underestimating the readers' ability to receive a concept and explore it without having it spelled out word for word, or worse, being read a moral tale. Most entries were presented professionally, although a few were submitted with poets' names covered over with white-out and some with spelling errors. Seven entries were disqualified for being outside the specified line length.

The winning entries all went beyond the banal to reflect upon subjects in a way which reached a satisfying conclusion.

These winning entries all demonstrated deliberation in their creation and a sense that the poet was in control of the writing process. They employed language and imagery in a way that was integral to the whole poem. Some were quite lengthy, some much more concise, some quite graphic. What they shared was the ability to convey original insights in a fresh way on their given theme. At the same time, each of the winning poets allowed space to the reader to explore some of what the poem meant beyond the physical words on the page. These poets knew when to stop and showed proof of the capacity for that kind of tough editing that is essential in the crafting of a quality poem. They each demonstrated that the writing of a poem goes well beyond the feeling of a poetic sentiment. In particular, the winning poem evoked a mood that was distinctive; had a pleasing shape and a subtle use of repetition, that contrasted from verse to verse.

Commended	The Memory Castle – Damen O'Brien
Commended	Harley – Jules Leigh Koch
Second Place	War – E. Speers
First Place	Night-stepping – Beverley George