

JUDGE'S REPORT

I was amazed and delighted by the high standard of the poetry in this competition. Some poems were funny, some heartfelt or dramatic; some were like speech and some were like a song; but every poem had something brilliant and original in it.

I read the poems without knowing anyone's school or name. I looked for poems that seemed to me surprising, individual and memorable. There are lots of ways to write a brilliant poem. The poems that I have commended here seem to me ones in which the poet has thought about all the parts and how they fit together: not only which words and images to use but also how the lines work, the rhythms and the structure.

Please keep writing, whether you find your poem highly commended or not. I came across so many wonderful poems that I had to leave some out, though they seemed to me clearly the work of future poets.

Consider, for example, these fabulous lines: 'Only one thing could be so beautiful and so terrible...' 'The sky turns gold for hundreds of miles...' 'I smell smoke from the killing monsters./It's like dust but when you touch it, it faints...' 'The crocodile is deadly, gruesome and strong...' 'Superior, around the banal shrubs...' 'This gift was Athena's to bestow...' 'Wheels rolling on metal tracks,/ like cogs rotating in a clock...' 'Shrunken super cars with their wheels all gone in a deserted car yard...' 'Just simply look up at the stars...' 'It makes my heart full of crystals...' 'The piano is as magnificent as graceful black and white swans dancing...' 'He describes us as a new species of the night kookaburra...' Almost every poem had some such startling thing in it.

There is so much talent here, happily individual and various. Poetry has a brilliant future with you.

**2015 POETRY
OBJECT
JUDGE**

LISA GORTON

**THE
RED
ROOM
COMPANY**

POETRY IN UNUSUAL
AND USEFUL WAYS

JUDGE'S NOTE

All these installations celebrate poetry in an inclusive and original way, and deserve commendation. Albuera Street Primary School's installation stands out for me because I can imagine how the experience of working with wire might inform the poets' experience of working on a poem: bringing together words and objects, facts and representations, the look of things but also the feel of things. The linear wire itself can itself serve as an image of how syntax can work in poetry, turned and worked together to make something new. The decision to write the words of the poem in white on a black background draws out this comparison between working with wire and working with language.

The process of making these sculptures also serves as an image of the process of writing: working and reworking forms in a way at once free and careful. The wire sculptures are shapes that contain air; they are things that can be passed from hand to hand. They are beautiful, considered and tangible companions to the poems, and images of them.

**BEST
SCHOOL
INSTALLATION**

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2015

**ALBUERA
STREET
PRIMARY
SCHOOL, TAS**

THE GRASSLANDS

Striped like the dark of night.
Striped like the colour of the blaze,
bright as day.
He is the savanna hunter,
lurking in the grass.
Learning the ways of the hunt,
the prey unaware.
Sleeping soundly,
protecting its young.
Teaching the young,
My tiger, of the grasslands

**CHRISTOPHER
EDWARDS**
YEAR 6, DURACK
SCHOOL, NT

JUDGE'S NOTE

This poem reminds me of Blake's 'Tyger, tyger burning bright/ through the forests of the night', not only because it is about a tiger, but also because it has that poem's combination of musicality and memorable imagery.

This is a wonderful poem to read aloud. Its subtle use of repetition and its sudden short lines make it emphatic and exciting. And what a striking beginning! 'Striped like the dark of night./ Striped like the colour of the blaze': these similes work individually but they take their power from the way they also work together. This is one of those descriptions, alive with paradox and wonder, which make readers see something new. This is a poem of great confidence, control and flair.

**BEST
PRIMARY
POEM**

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UNDER THE COVERS

My bed takes me through the wonderlands
like a bullet train on a busy night. It disconnects me
from the world. What feels like 30 seconds
is actually 12 hours. Where I am
I know. Where I was
is a mystery. So I drive on,
drive on for tomorrow and wake up
at the beginning of it all.

JACK HUGHES
YEAR 7, CAROLINE
CHISHOLM
SCHOOL, ACT

JUDGE'S NOTE

I love the boldness of this poem, and its restraint too. There is not a word out of place, and not a clichéd word either. In its eight lines this poem covers a great distance. With great clarity, with familiar words, it brings home a sense of mystery and strangeness. It does so not least through its brilliant use of line breaks: 'Where I am/ I know. Where I was/ is a mystery.' Only a full stop stops that line reading: I know where I was. This is how subtly this poem works to disrupt our sense of familiar things: it puts that full stop in the middle of an ordinary phrase, and shows its mystery.

One of the advantages of using so many one-syllable words is that it allows for great rhythmic control and variation. This is a poem that controls pacing. Its short sentences and short lines not only allow those brilliant line breaks to do their work. They also allow the poem to open out emotionally as it ends. In keeping with this poem's rich sense of paradoxes and mysteries, it ends with a beginning. This is clearly the work of a gifted poet.

**BEST
SECONDARY
POEM**

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RUNAWAY

Janis Joplin cries a smoky goodbye
and I turn towards South Head
a wannabe neo-feminist montage
with fast car and wild hair
the red-lit city and the ocean's
deep maternal belly my new frontier.
I bought the necklace myself
a simulacrum for all girls who get out
before they lose their mind.
Years later I wear it and I'm back
on the road with nothing left to lose.

**ANNALISE
PIPPARD**
TEACHER,
CAROLINE
CHISHOLM
SCHOOL, ACT

JUDGE'S NOTE

I love this short, fierce poem, which keeps all the energy of demotic speech with not a wasted or extraneous word.

'A wannabe neo-feminist montage': this is brilliant phrase-making. In little, it reflects the dramatic play of intimacy and detachment in this poem: the speaker's way of seeing herself from outside even in the midst of the scene; the poem's way of making an old necklace speak of the interplay between the past and the future.

The metaphors, when they come, are at once strange and richly sensuous: 'the ocean's/ deep maternal belly my new frontier.' This poem keeps all these elements in play and yet keeps racing along like a fast car, and is exhilarating.

**BEST
TEACHER
POEM**

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MY CARDS

I have the show-goers: the cards are in the palm of my hand.
To some they are pieces of cardboard,
But to me they are magical.
I feel immortal with my dynamic cards
As they slide like rocks over a precipice,
Floating down to the table.
As I shuffle them they fuse together and then they divide.
I absorb the tricks
Yet they mesmerise the audience.
The Clubs are trees, swaying and blurring in the wind.
The Spades are miners, mining tricks out of the earth.
I am the card bearer:
I make the cards bend and twist in all kinds of ways.
What cards am I hiding in the middle of the deck?
I amaze the audience
Because I am the Magician.

JACK EMERY
YEAR 5, ALBUERA
STREET PRIMARY
SCHOOL, TAS

BOOK

You open its delicate pages, you look at the cover and you know
It's the beginning of an adventure, a whole new world
You're scared to open it, but you do

and see words strung together like silk
the world you're in fades away
and a new one appears

I can hear tiny quiet beats
like a tiny paper heart or
life running through it
like a paper factory, always alive

It hides not wanting to be seen just like a leopard
It defends itself like a leopard
Life blossoms through it and it continues to live, just like a leopard

APRIL HENRY
YEAR 3, NORTH
FITZROY PRIMARY
SCHOOL, VIC

JUDGE'S NOTE

One of the things I love about this poem is the way in which it changes dramatically, stanza by stanza. Some poems work with a really close argument or a tightly woven rhyme scheme but this poem is dreamlike, its connections are strange, and it is full of surprises.

This works partly because this poem has such musical phrases. Sometimes the simplest words build the most beautiful lines: 'You're scared to open it, but you do...'; 'I can hear tiny quiet beats...'

This poem also has some stunning, strange images and descriptions, which show great confidence and flair. The repetition of leopard at the end of the last three lines, for instance, emphasises how the similes get stranger and stranger, until they come to that remarkable phrase: 'life blossoms through it and continues to live...'

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PRIMARY**

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**Poems
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BEARDED DRAGON

Spiky squishy in the dark
Under wood sand and bark
Rough and dry with a crooked tail
Tummy red but sometimes pale
Crawling up from underneath
Up above now from beneath
In the sun with back and all
Standing high and standing tall
Big red eyes and pointy nose
And little tiny small red toes

MAITE DECHERING
YEAR 6, PUKETAPU
SCHOOL, NEW
ZEALAND

JUDGE'S NOTE

This is a wonderfully accomplished poem. Even within its tightly ordered form, the language and turns of thought remain surprising and feel free. Also, this poet has a great sense of rhythm. This means that the rhyme scheme does not control the whole poem and make its only music; there is always another music at work within the lines: the melody of the phrases as well as the drum beat of the rhymes. The last line is so effective partly because all those quick syllables in a row give such a sense of the Bearded Dragon's toes.

This poem is also remarkable for how it builds action into its description. Take, for instant, that beautifully economical use of prepositions: 'up above now from beneath'. Here is the bearded dragon's movement in five words. There is admirable boldness in such restraint. To understand what those five words mean, the reader has to picture the bearded dragon moving. At once, the poem is alive in the reader's mind, and unforgettable.

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DEADLY HAT BRAH

A hill covered in blood
Flat as frozen concrete
Its button is white cotton
Headpiece as red as the kangaroo
The sun's worst enemy
defeating it all day long
My shield that reflects the sun
Tastes like Christmas in my mind
Brim's as white as a piece of paper
I love it with all my smiles
The smiles that reflect the sun
It's like Christmas from my mum

CHACE OATES
YEAR 4,
TOOWOOMBA
GRAMMAR
SCHOOL, QLD

JUDGE'S NOTE

This poem is built of paradoxes, sudden shifts, and mesmerising synaesthesia. If it is on one hand angular and strikingly original, it is also alive with feeling. This poem shows how it is sometimes possible to use a sequence of images to suggest a whole landscape, a whole way of seeing. The scale of these images is bigger than the hat which they describe: 'A hill covered in blood', for instance, or a 'Headpiece as red as the kangaroo'.

This poem is a new experience: its images replace each other the way events do in dreams, easily and strangely. The ending is artfully done, as the last two lines take up the words 'smiles' and 'sun' and 'Christmas' from earlier in the poem, and bring them together in a suddenly tender image.

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**Poems
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WILDCAT

standing, still, watching.

I catch a glimpse of a rippling tabby pelt,
small paws, glinting claws.
a dark figure,
wandering majestically through the undergrowth.

as soundless as a wispy cobweb
caught up by the wind,
he stalks a leaf like it's a delicate mouse.

I wonder if he will catch it.

I watch as the light breeze plucks up the leaf.

his muscles bunch up under his skin,
and he makes a leap, so high,
that it seems like he is trying to grab the very edge of the universe.

he bats the leaf out of the sky,
pins it down.
head held high, he is a true wildcat.
sights like these are truly magnificent,
and you can see why he is so special.

**LOUISE
MCWHINNEY**
YEAR 5,
BALGOWLAH
HEIGHTS PUBLIC
SCHOOL, NSW

JUDGE'S NOTE

This poem is remarkable both for its exact descriptions and for the originality of its images. It is also remarkable for how it advances as the cat does. The poem is slow and delicate when the cat is stalking; it leaps forward boldly as the cat leaps. Even the structure of the poem fits this sense of the cat's movement. We start with stillness, small lines and stanzas, and then the poem has a sudden expansiveness.

It is wonderful to have thought through all these parts of the poem – description, pacing, rhythm, structure – so that they all work together. It means that every part of this poem works to make us feel as though we are watching the cat move. For the leap, there is that memorable sudden image: 'it seems like he is trying to grab the very edge of the universe'.

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AGELESS

You sit there staring, cold,
a memory made still,
your eyes in line with mine
but yet,
you do not move nor speak.

You remind me of a past moment.
As things grow, change, you do not –
ageless, motionless –
a second gone but not gone,
stuck behind glass,

a reflection of my younger self.

SARAH GALEA
YEAR 10,
SHOALHAVEN HIGH
SCHOOL, NSW

JUDGE'S NOTE

This poem shows a remarkably sophisticated sense of poetic structure: not only how the structure of a poem can work as a pattern on the page, but also how it can control pace and embody the relationship between different parts of a poem. With great concision, the poem sets up a dramatic situation: here is someone looking at a self-portrait. Each short line marks a break between what that self-portrait is and what it cannot be, what it does and what it cannot do. It is as though the two parts of each stanza face each other, across that short line, just as the speaker and the speaker's self-portrait do in this poem.

How different the poem might have been if the poet had started with the line, 'a reflection of my younger self!' The way it is now, with this line at the end, the whole poem depends on its ending. That ending changes the meaning of what has come before. In this way, the structure of this poem dramatises the relationship between the past and the present, which is at the heart of this poem. Such insight into structure is rare, and shows that this poem is the work of a gifted poet.

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ERASER

You come in different shapes and sizes
Following me like a mysterious thief
Hiding in the shadows, watching my every move
Everything slips away, so easily, so silent

I try to follow my destiny
It feels as if I'm moving backwards
You steal my dreams, memory and feelings
I feel no emotion as I drink your potion

Do I even exist?
I walk along the path but no one sees me
I stumble forward only to be taken back to my beginning
You are my past, present and future

You decide when I start and when I stop
You change my story, erasing my footsteps
Do I have family? Friends?
Only you can decide

I am your prisoner
You devour anything you please
I am the puppet!
You are the puppet master.

EMILY SMITH
YEAR 7,
APPLECROSS
SENIOR HIGH
SCHOOL, WA

JUDGE'S NOTE

This mysterious poem sets up a powerful relationship with its audience. You, I: these pronouns set up a stark drama in the poem. We speak a poem and we read a poem: we are both its 'I' and its 'You'; inside its world and outside it, too. This poem works because of the way the poet emphasises this dramatic relationship.

First, the poet uses short questions, which makes the reader conscious of silence. Also, the poet works brilliantly with the pattern of 'You' and 'I' at the start of the lines. As the poem advances, 'I' and 'You' come closer to each other. It is as though the white space of the page is a landscape marked with these shadows, paths and footsteps. The poem works as a philosophical thriller. This poet's ability to make a suspenseful drama out of existential questions is rare and impressive.

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NOTHING

A 20c coin is nothing,
it helps nobody.

But it's rounded like my eye, its face
feverish and hot from the touch
of our world and I envy it.

The coin that knows more about
humans than I do,
the coin that knows about
loyalty, love, greed, hatred, faith,
temptation.

The coin that has seen the flaws
and beauty of your life, my life
and look – 1994 –
it's even older than me as well.

Suppose it's not the coin that's precious but
the people that have touched it, those
wonderful, destructive fingers, our world,
my imagination.

JENNY PANG
YEAR 10,
MERIDEN, NSW

JUDGE'S NOTE

This poem feels immediate, like someone thinking aloud. The thought is supple and surprising: this poem moves easily between startling images, arguments, feelings, lists and details.

From its first 'But...!', this poem keeps changing direction, questioning itself, noticing more. Even the line breaks work with this same suppleness, building in pauses and sudden leaps, rhythms of thought. Rather than recording a conclusion that someone has reached, this poem records the experience of something thinking. This makes the poem intimate and alive.

However many times we read it, the poem seems each time to be happening now, in the instant of our reading. 'And look,' the poet writes, with such easy directness we feel as though we are there, inside the experience, able to see the date on the coin. This poem is remarkable for the dramatic quality of its thought, and for a combination of suppleness and precision, which makes it come alive for the reader. This is a poet to watch.

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THE BLACK UPRIGHT

My ebony upright piano,
88 keys, 3 golden pedals, and 2 hands.
It's the years of arms aching, hands cramping, and the contemplation of quitting.
Yet it's the sunlight on a Saturday morning hitting the keys,
As your fingers fly, and your spirit soars through a score, breathtaking and dynamic.

An array of strings, hammers, keys and screws,
Is what makes a piano, but truly what a piano is;
An indulgence; your feelings poured into a single song,
Self-expression in a musical story,
Being swept into your own small world in just a few hours of playing,
As in those few hours, does music transcend words.

My upright piano is a soft mellow voice,
A thunderous crack, and a tinkle of bells,
It's the foreboding boom of a sinister low,
And the obscure pitch of a gentle high,
Gliding your hands across a sea of black and white,
The adrenaline of a solo performance,

To play as one with the black upright is a rare blessing,
If I wish hard enough, the piano will respond to me.
The music must ring, let it ring, and let my music reach them.

JACQUI GOPILAN
YEAR 8,
THE FOREST HIGH
SCHOOL, NSW

JUDGE'S NOTE

This poem works in an expansive style, with its long musical lines and its varied, striking metaphors for sound and feeling. It takes much of its energy from the opposition that it sets up between 'what makes a piano' and 'what a piano is'. Its metaphors work so well partly because they work in concert with this sense of truth: not only the detail of the '88 keys, three golden pedals, and two hands'; but also the wry truth of 'arms aching, hands cramping, and the contemplation of quitting'. It is often the case that when poets write about feelings, those feelings have most effect on a reader when they appear to arise out of real circumstances, with the limits and contradictions these bring. This is the key to the power of this poem: its combination of great rhetorical energy and wry truthfulness. Also, it works subtly with alliteration, assonance and rhythm to set up complicated patterns of sound. Take that last line: 'The music must ring, let it ring, and let my music reach them.' The warm sound of 'music must' makes the word 'ring' really ring out. The pattern of 'ring, let' and then 'ring, and let' opens the phrase out; this poem ends with a great sense of delight.

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AN INEVITABLE THING

Then it was Christmas Eve and at the doctor's
they longed to be rid of me;
ushered through a sticky Sydney road clinic by a coat
with tie stains and errant nose hair,
it had always been "we'd better keep an eye on that," but
with lashings of blood at my temples,
and Tie-Stain's furious keyboard taps –

Then it was April and at radiology with
suffocatingly buzzy expectants,
"is it a boy?" I ask the coffee-sipper,
stabbing me with a turkey baster's wrong end,
"well isn't your kidneys."

And July at the gaudy discount chemist,
with brow raised, "Thomas?"
Seems I'm too young
for this off-
sunset pill,
this albatross,
my neck, this
thing.

TOM KRISTOF
TEACHER,
NORTH FITZROY
PRIMARY SCHOOL,
VIC

JUDGE'S NOTE

This poem works with narrative in an impressively economical way, creating vivid dramatic scenes with just a detail or two, and fragments of dialogue. Its details have an almost hallucinatory vividness: 'tie-stains and errant nose hair'.

The pace of this poem is part of its power: it goes so fast it is frightening. It is impressive how the poem uses structure to control and vary its pace: breaking up the lines, coming to a stop on that obdurate word, 'thing.' Such craft helps to realise the emotional effect of this poem, which is considerable.

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TEACHER**

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INFINITE ENDINGS

I kept all of the things you gave me, over time. A pewter jewellery box, a necklace of Indian silver inside it, a woollen scarf you started (that I never finished), your letters, written on sheets of sturdy paper that folded into their own envelopes, bordered with little diagonal blue lines which made it seem like

they were from very far away. That trick you did when we were little, folding your whole ear into itself until it sprung open again, which you pretended was on your command, the smell of the bread you would make when we came to stay, plaited into pretty little rolls. The way you filled the room - laughingly, insistently, and beautifully.

The last time I saw you, a bony white goat, with newbornlike eyes, legs rusted stiff with age, overwhelmed by the chair you sat in, you recognised the sound of love in my voice, and smiled, and held my hand, and said, approximately, the right things. Like mine, your neurons are endlessly unfolding, hollowing, dissolving. Our goodbyes are meaningless, and infinite.

JO LONGBOTTOM
TEACHER,
MONTROSE BAY
HIGH SCHOOL, TAS

JUDGE'S NOTE

This poem is full of things that fold up into other things: a necklace in a box, letters in their envelopes, bread plaited into rolls, and even an ear that folds up into itself. This poem has folded images of memory and forgetting subtly into its narrative, prompting the reader repeatedly to open images out and close them up again.

This is what gives such power to the ending: 'Like mine, your neurons are endlessly/ unfolding, hollowing, dissolving. Our goodbyes are meaningless, and infinite.' This poem fits images and narrative and phrases together; in poetry such craft reflects a mature and coherent vision.

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