

THE MANAWATU (NEW ZEALAND) INTERNATIONAL POETRY FOR PERFORMANCE COMPETITION 2010

COMMENTS ON POEMS: KARLO MILA

1ST: ENDS AND BEGINNINGS: Elena De Roo

This was the poem that I liked the most. It was smooth, rhythmic, evocative and perfect. There was not a line I wished to be changed or a phrase that felt out of turn. It fit with the theme and also evoked this location, the Manawatu, very well. I felt happy as I read it, it was pure enjoyment. It felt grounded in the 'turangawaewae' of this place and yet open enough to have been written by anyone and related to by anyone. Particularly given the centrality of the river in Manawatu, it fit the theme for me. It was a very simple poem and rather short compared to other offerings, but it felt complete and whole and exactly as it was meant to be, just pure magic of a poem.

2ND: TAKEN BY THE TIDE: Robynanne Milford

I had to read this poem twice, because it is deceptively simple. When I read it the second time I was struck powerfully by how moving it was and it is fair to say that it delivers a real wallop. The images conveyed through the poem are unforgettable and moving. Out of all the poems I read, it was the one that stayed with me the longest. It is short but the images are exceptionally strong and beautiful. It manages to touch on the theme albeit in quite a poetic way. After reading it the second time, I thought this is in the top three.

3RD: CRUNCH: Janis Freegard

I very much appreciated this poem. There are many lovely turns of phrases, which appear to me to capture the dynamic of a relationship beautifully. The images used also really appealed to me. As a reader, I felt the poem in a very intuitive way. The sense of unease or the 'flaw' in the relationship was so cleverly crafted. It was a poem that stayed in my head and lingered after reading it and it's one of those poems that is satisfying to return to. It was clearly a winning poem.

HIGHLY COMMENDED: DEATH FOR SOPHISTICATES: Rex McGregor

This is one of the cleverest rhyme sequences I have seen for a long time and would be very fun performed. It meets the theme in a rather macabre way. I tend not to be a huge fan of rhyming poems, but I was charmed by this one. The humour and perfect rhythm and clever cadence lift it up to another level and I am very sure it will be wonderful performed and greatly enjoyed by the audience.

HIGHLY COMMENDED: CANCER VIEWS: Jim Lindsay

This was a very powerful and moving poem. Some of the four lined offerings are just killer. Other offerings are less strong. However, there is much that is beautiful and brilliantly wrought in this poem: "The sea always leaves / slower than it comes / clutching calves / regretfully" is just pure brilliance, for example. I am less convinced by phrases "cadaver on speed" but then it also evokes the odd sense of humour deployed by the person 'viewing cancer', the difficulty of coping, the odd ways one does cope, (unexpected). Occasionally I think this poem is let down by using phrases that are too easily found (fairies dancing to a desperate tune, for example, probably not the strongest choice of images, too easily found in a clichéd repertoire of images. It is a shame though, that this happens occasionally in this poem because there is much that is not hackneyed or clichéd in any way, but which is refreshing and interesting). Oxymoronically, the lines that work really well are those that are more unusual and those that are exceedingly simple and yet in this context, say more via less. In this particular context, while for obvious reasons it connects with the theme, the fact that the poet has not tried to make this connection ended up leaving it out of the winning line up for me. I wanted to comment on it because it is a worthy poem and had the competition been themed on something else it would have made the final three. It was very moving and a fine poem. Note to the poet: Had you managed to avoid some of

the clichés and had you attempted in the final verse to nail the poem back to the theme more cleverly I would have had no choice but to place it in the top three. I look forward to it being performed and hope that you may be open to it being reworked a little.

HIGHLY COMMENDED: SO THEY SAY: Sacha Norrie

This is a clever prose poem that packs a few punches. It has a lovely use of fonts which I appreciated. It has some very lovely turns of phrases and images that are not easily forgotten. This was one of my favourite poems and I found it very entertaining as well as wise, pithy and clever.

JUDGE'S DISTINCTION: WAR INTERRUPTED: Aleksandra Lane

As you start reading this poem, it immediately draws you in as interesting and unusual. Straight away, you get a sense that things are not what you would expect, and there is an unnerving kind of feeling of being "caught" by the poet. There are some very clever phrases and lines which jab. The very astute use of words and the ability to allude to something quite complex in a few words and yet leave it staying complex is quite a gift. Each time I read this poem I take something new from it and am left with an appreciation for the talents of the poet. What is left unsaid, unconnected, or is left ambiguous, works very well for the poem.

I feel out of all the other poems, this is the most hard-done-by for not making the shortlist for performance. There are two reasons why it did not. Firstly because I was a little less convinced by how it 'fit' to the theme and that it relied on an image outside of the poem to make this connection. Although, of course taking a poetic approach, there are convincing way the theme might apply but this link was not strongly established by the poet. There was no doubt to me that this was a winning poem as I read it, but I was less sure that it was 'a winner' in this context. Had it been a competition about war poetry, it would have easily knocked the others for dead.

The second reason why it was not shortlisted for performance (and I feel sad about this) is because a day or two later, after reading the poem, while it was striking and unusual, I could not remember exactly what it was about. There are lesser poems possibly (in terms of craft, a bit more simple, or even perhaps more clumsy in part) but which had imprinted clearly their message on my mind and I remained feeling moved about them. I feel I need to apologise to the poet (who is obviously talented), that for me it came down to these things and a personal preference for what moved me. I am sure that a different judge would have responded differently.

JUDGE'S DISTINCTION: DARK NIGHTS: Donna Banicevich Gera

I wanted to include this poem in the final list because it communicated its message so clearly and emotively. It is also incredibly evocative of Palmerston North, which I liked. A story of loneliness and isolation grounded in our local surrounds. It felt like a story that needed to be told. It was also an interesting take on the theme. There were some lines which were a little bit too clichéd which let it down a little. I think with some further work and editing this could have been the winning poem. There were many lines that haunted the reader powerfully. Despite the resort to some overly well worn phrases and images, I think this would be very powerful in performance and the strong components of the poem outweigh the weak parts. In some ways, I realise what doesn't work so successfully on the page, would be incredibly powerful in performance. I would like to see it in performance and it is a shame that there is only room for six poems to be performed. If the poet is open to considering the poem as 'open' and re-workable then I would recommend further revision. Thank you for sharing it.