Poetica Christi Press

2016 Annual Poetry Competition

Judge’s Report

**by Andrew Lansdown**

I was honoured to be entrusted with the task of judging the Poetica Christi Press 2016 Annual Poetry Competition. There was an excellent response to the Competition, with 190 poems entered.

While the quality of the entries was uneven, many fine poems were submitted. The poems were wide-ranging in subject and theme, touching on family relationships, the natural world, international terrorism, biblical characters, and personal experiences. There were love poems and nature poems, laments and narratives, dramatic monologues and personal lyrics. While the majority of the poems were free form, many included rhyme, and some included regular rhyming couplets or quatrains. It was pleasing to see poets experimenting with some traditional European and Japanese forms: sonnets, villanelles, rondeaux and haiku. While these experiments were not always successful, the poets are to be commended for their endeavours to understand and master the poetic craft.

It was also pleasing to note that most of the poems were cogent and accessible. There were very few poems that were confused or, worse, deliberately ambiguous.

I noticed that two flaws kept recurring and it may be helpful to mention these.

The first problem concerns cliché. A cliché is a phrase, expression, image or aphorism that has become commonplace. Expressions such as (to cite just two examples) “take time to smell the roses” and “you blow my mind” are commonplace and hackneyed. They are easy to write and just as easy to forget. There is no freshness or vividness in clichés and that is why they have no place in poetry.

The second problem concerns the overuse of adjectives. Adjectives are often unnecessary. Certainly, it is a mistake to think that you can write a poem by piling on adjectives. In some poems, virtually every noun was qualified by an adjective. And some of these adjective-noun combinations were themselves clichés—for example, “silken hair”, “salty tears”, “golden sun”. Thousands of years ago, the first person to describe hair as “silken” or tears as “salty” or sunlight as “golden” did something original and impactful. But since then, the descriptions have been used again and again, tens of thousands of times, so they are now totally lacking in originality and their only impact is to create a sense of overwriting and under-thinking.

Even when they are not clichéd, adjectives can often be *overly* poetic, making the poem feel sentimental and twee. Talk of “noble trees”, “barefoot joy” and “ebony-satin shadows”, for example, are the poetic equivalents of purple prose. In fact, the problem with such adjectives is twofold: They are melodramatic, and hence off-putting; and they are deceptive, convincing the poet that sharing emotion is the same as, and as simple as, declaring emotion. Like clichés, adjectives seem like poetic shortcuts, but in reality they are often poetic dead-ends.

Well, I offer these comments with kind intentions and I hope they will prove beneficial to the poets who read them.

I commend the entrants in general and the winner and the runner-up in particular.

The winning poem, “Eternity”, is an assured exploration of the subject/theme of eternity in the light of the life of Arthur Stace, a Christian man who wrote the word “Eternity” in chalk in copperplate font on footpaths around Sydney during the first half of last century. In addition to its logical and developmental tightness, the poem is notable for its form. It consists of nine rhyming quatrains—rhyming (and sometimes half-rhyming) in an ABAB pattern—with an underlying iambic pentameter. Believing, as I do, in the sure and certain hope of the resurrection for those who trust in Jesus, I do not share the poet’s view that “For each of us such questions [about eternity] have no answers”. Nonetheless, I do acknowledge the masterful structure of the poem and the insightful exploration of the subject of Stace and the theme of eternity.

The runner-up is “Radicalised”, a poem which is written in the form of a villanelle. The poet handles this traditional European form with skill. The two repeat-lines (the first and third lines of the opening stanza) are strong and their repetition throughout the poem is effected naturally and serves to intensify the emotional impact of the poem. Without betraying the innocent victims of the bombings of Islamic extremists, the poet manages to deal sympathetically with a female suicide bomber who is being forced by her ideological handlers to commit what she knows is a monstrous evil. “Radicalised” is a cogent and well-crafted poem and is well-deserving of the runner-up prize.

**Andrew Lansdown**

Judge

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**RESULTS**

**WINNER**

# 157, “Eternity”

**RUNNER-UP**

# 148, “Radicalised”

**23 ANTHOLOGY PLACE-GETTERS**

# 7,    “Wharf 3 Moama”

# 12,  “the purpling”

# 13,  “Patchwork”

# 32,  “Way-Finding”

# 38,  “Kiss in a Dark Street”

# 42,  “Dear Mum”

# 47,  “Threads”

# 49,  “Lamplight”

# 51,  “And a Great Portend Appeared in Heaven”

# 55,  “Tell me when”

# 56,  “Waiting”

# 59,  “Among the Vicious Threads”

# 61,  “Haiku for Daniel and Miriam”

# 65,  “Hope”

# 66,  “Up for Grabs”

# 68,  “Beyond Blue”

# 91,  “Not an Ordinary Day”

# 96,  “A Loaf of Bread”

# 102, “The Light”

# 137, “The Load”

# 145, “Search for Freedom”

# 177, “After Atrocity”

# 178, “The Word: Mount Ossa, Tasmania”