

Ballarat Writers 2020 Competitions Report

Megan J Riedl

It has been my pleasure to undertake the competitions role in 2020. In a year that saw Ballarat writers retreat into their own homes, the monthly and annual competitions were a connection point for many of our members.

Ballarat Flash

At the beginning of 2020, we revamped the monthly 'Flash Fiction' into 'Ballarat Flash', expanding the acceptable genres to include poetry and non-fiction. Themes and parameters were generated from suggestions at online members' meetings.

A small group of members regularly enter most months, and on average 25 people vote for their favourite. Congratulations to 2020 winners Chris Burchett, Richenda Rudman, Karen Abramovich, Neville Hiatt and Fiona D'Silva, some of whom took out the prize several times!

December's Flash served as the Pamela Miller Prize and winners were Polly Musgrove (judges' choice) and Kirily McKellor (people's choice).

We hoped that the changes would encourage more members to enter and vote in the monthly competition, however the numbers did not reflect that. We have gathered some data from a survey and are working on new ways to engage our members around competitions in 2021.

Martha Richardson Memorial Poetry Prize

This year, we had a great response to our biennial poetry prize, despite some concerns we would see a significant decrease in entries due to COVID.

Our judge, Terry Jaensch, also noted his surprise that the entries were not dominated by pandemic themes.

We had 108 entries from 67 poets. Over half were from Victoria, with almost every state represented, and even an entry from Edinburgh! Most poets entered a single poem, however we did have poets with multiple entries of between two and five poems. Sixteen of the poets were members, with some of those having joined specifically to enter the contest.

The winners were announced on November 26 at a Members' Night held online via Zoom. The meeting was well attended, and two of the three winning poets were in attendance to read their pieces.

Judge Terry Jaensch was able to complete his duties remotely and provided a general commentary as well as comments for each of the three winners. Terry noted that "poetry... is a way to shut out the noise of the world, the din, a way to zero in on what is essential, what is necessary, what is true. Poetry is a centring force. These poets, each in their own individual way, have zeroed in on what is essential, necessary, true."

The winning poet was Ballarat writer Nathan Curnow with Claire Miranda Roberts (UK) and Colin Montfor (WA) taking second and third prizes respectively. Six Highly Recommended poets were also acknowledged. All details and links to the text of the winning poems is on the website.

<https://ballaratwriters.com/competitions/martha-richardson-memorial-poetry-prize-2020/>