



**Hiding in
plain sight.**

**Fisher's Ghost
Writing Prize 2021**

**Hiding in
plain sight.**



Published by WestWords Ltd
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HIDING IN PLAIN SIGHT.

Each of us is made of stories,
Some we've heard,
Some we hold close,
Some we long to share.



THE LEGEND. THE FESTIVAL. THE PRIZE.

Each November, the legendary Festival of Fisher's Ghost comes alive in Campbelltown. The Festival is steeped in history, dating back to 1956. It is named after Australia's most famous ghost, Frederick Fisher.

2021 marks the inaugural Fisher's Ghost Writing Prize to coincide with the Fisher's Ghost Festival. We received 98 entries across all the categories.

The works were judged on originality and creativity, the construction and use of language, (including creative expression, grammar, sentence structure, punctuation and spelling) and the way characters, atmosphere or setting was developed, and engagement with the theme, *Hiding in plain sight*.

The 2021 Fisher's Ghost Writing Prize was open to adults and children in Grade 4 and above, who live, or go to school, in Campbelltown City.

Entries could be in the form of short story, narrative non-fiction, memoir or poetry.

The Legend of Fisher's Ghost

On the evening of 17 June, 1826, a man by the name of Frederick Fisher, left his home in Campbelltown and was not seen again.

On a night almost four months later, a wealthy and respectable Campbelltown farmer, John Farley, stumbled into a local hotel in a state of shock, and claimed he had seen the ghost of Frederick Fisher.

The ghost according to John Farley, had been sitting on the rail of a bridge and had pointed to a paddock down the creek, then faded away.

The body of Fred Fisher was later discovered by police in the paddock where the ghost had pointed...

Many local residents believe the ghost of Fred Fisher haunts the Campbelltown Town Hall.

The legend of Fred Fisher has captured the imagination of

generations. The sequence of events leading up to the subsequent trial - the murder of Frederick Fisher, the appearance of his ghost, the arrest of five men and the eventual hanging of one.

Frederick George James Fisher was born on 28 August 1792. By his early twenties he was a shopkeeper, unmarried, but thought to be the father of two children. Either innocently or deliberately, Fred Fisher



obtained forged bank notes through his business for which he was arrested and tried at the Surrey Gaol Delivery on 26 July, 1815 and sentenced to fourteen years transportation to Australia.

By 1822 Fred Fisher has served half his sentence and applied for a ticket-of-leave and permission to purchase property. Among other properties, Fred Fisher secured a farm at Campbelltown. His neighbour was a man named William George Worrall, known to be an honest and industrious man.

In 1825 Fred Fisher and a local carpenter, William Brooker, had an argument over money, whereby Fisher pulled a knife. William Brooker

was not badly hurt, however Fred Fisher received a light prison sentence. Worried about his property, Fred Fisher gave George Worrell Power of Attorney during his imprisonment. Fisher served his sentence and returned to town a short time later.

On the evening of 17 June, 1826, Fred Fisher disappeared and George Worrell announced he had sailed for England because he was concerned about a forgery charge recently made against him. Three weeks later after Fred Fisher's disappearance, George Worrall sold Fisher's horse and personal belongings, claiming Fred Fisher had sold them to him before he set sail.





Several local townspeople became suspicious and on 17 September 1826, George Worrall was arrested on suspicion of Fred Fisher's murder.

Worrall claimed he had not murdered Fred Fisher, but that four other men had in fact committed the crime. All four men were then arrested.

One month later, 25 October, 1826, two young boys were returning home across Fisher's farm and noticed bloodstains on a fence. On closer investigation, a lock of hair and a tooth were also found.

A local constable searched the area to no avail and decided to call in an Aboriginal tracker from Liverpool. On testing the water from puddles in the area, the tracker announced 'white fellow's fat here.' Fred Fisher's remains were found laying in a shallow grave on George Worrall's land.

George Worrall sat for trial in a criminal court on 2 February, 1827.

He was found guilty and sentenced to death by hanging on 5 February, 1827.

On the scaffold, Worrall confessed he had murdered Fred Fisher by mistake, thinking him a horse in the wheat crop. However, this confession was never believed by the locals. It is thought George Worrall had assumed when he had been appointed Fred Fisher's agent, all Fisher's property belonged to him. On Fisher's release from prison, George Worrall murdered him to fully obtain his property.

What then of John Farley's ghost story? Why was it not used at the trial? Apparently any tales of the supernatural were not permitted in a Court of Law and could not be used as evidence against the accused.

Fred Fisher was buried in St Peters graveyard by his brother, Henry, however, no headstone was ever erected.

The legend of Fisher's Ghost

Frederick George James Fisher
A convict he had been
Arrived on the Atlas transport
In the year 1816.

Freedom soon was his
And Campbelltown showed much charm
That this was where he settled
On his thirty acre farm.

Disaster struck June 17
The year 1826
Fred Fisher had disappeared
So a twenty pound reward was fixed.

Then a ghost was seen pointing
To the banks along the creek
Blood was found on the bridge
From where the ghost did speak.

On the last day of October
Fred's body had been found
Black natives solved the mystery
Buried three feet underground.

George Worrall was arrested
Convicted by the Supreme Court
His life on earth was terminated
Justice had been bought.

Author Unknown

[Published on Campbelltown City Council's website](#)

First published as a brochure by the Communications Department of Campbelltown City Council

Bibliography

- Colonial days in Campbelltown : the legend of Fisher's ghost / by Verlie Fowler. (Campbelltown, N.S.W. : Campbelltown and Airs Historical Society, 1991). Copies of this book are available in the local studies collection, Campbelltown City Library. Click on the library catalogue link above to find out how to locate copies of this book.
- 'The Harrow: the Fisher's Ghost Pub' / by David Patick. Grist Mills, Volume 11 No 3, November 1998. Copies of this article are available in the local studies collection, Campbelltown City Library.



2021

Successful Entrants

Congratulations to all our winners in the inaugural Fisher's Ghost Writing Award. It's always amazing to see the depth of creative talent we have in Campbelltown across so many artistic disciplines.

The Fisher's Ghost Writing Award was a new addition to our festival program this year and an enormous success, with 98 entries across all our categories, spanning many different age brackets. This is a remarkable achievement for the inaugural competition.

Campbelltown City Council is dedicated to fostering education and the pursuit of art within our community. The theme, Hiding in Plain Sight, was a challenge but it's fantastic to see the array of

short stories, memoirs, poetry and narrative non-fiction work that addressed the theme creatively.

For those in our community reading this booklet, we hope you are inspired to enter next year and challenge yourself.

We know it was a difficult decision for the judges to pick winners given the quality of entries that were received so we'd like to extend my congratulations to you all for your efforts and hope to see you all enter again next year.

Thank you to Westwords and all our library staff who were involved in creating and judging the award as well as all the teachers and parents who encouraged students and their kids to enter the competition.

Furqan Rahman	Grades 4-6	Poetry	Winner
Anabelle Federico	Grade 4-6	Poetry	Highly commended
Brenden Dias	Grade 4-6	Short Story/Non-Fiction/Memoir	Winner
Sue Nguyen	Grade 4-6	Short Story/Non-Fiction/Memoir	Highly commended
Maryam Muzammil	Grade 7-9	Poetry	Winner
Zoe Bonifacio	Grade 7-9	Poetry	Highly commended
Laeisa Kumar	Grade 7-9	Short Story/Non-Fiction/Memoir	Winner
Mary Nguyen	Grade 7-9	Short Story/Non-Fiction/Memoir	Highly commended
Tara Lau	Grade 10-12	Poetry	Winner
Lyna Le	Grade 10-12	Poetry	Highly commended
Emma Hughes	Grade 10-12	Short Story/Non-Fiction/Memoir	Winner
Angela Chau	Grade 10-12	Short Story/Non-Fiction/Memoir	Highly commended
Tiya Purohit	Grade 10-12	Short Story/Non-Fiction/Memoir	Highly commended
Marguerite Pulham	Adult	Poetry	Winner
Glenn McPherson	Adult	Poetry	Highly commended
Jan Neaves	Adult	Poetry	Highly commended
Blake Curran	Adult	Short Story/Non-Fiction/Memoir	Winner
Lee McKerracher	Adult	Short Story/Non-Fiction/Memoir	Highly commended

PRIZES

Adult: Winner \$300, Highly Commended \$100

School Students: In each category
(Grades 10-12, Grades 7-9, Grades 4-6)

Winner \$100, Highly Commended \$50.

Each student winner's school library will also receive \$100.

From the Judges

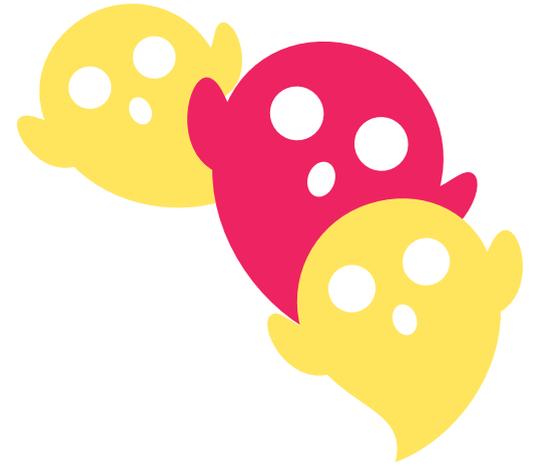
When this competition was in its planning stages, we were still walking around without masks planning grand, in-person seminars and presentations. Suddenly, what may have been a nervous possibility in the back of our minds, gained form in the forefront of our realities. We slid easily back into a routine of home-schooling, working from home, Zoom meetings and Zoom catch-ups, and this year's theme, Hidden in Plain Sight, took on layers of meaning that weren't there before.

As we read through over 190 entries, what crystallised was a broad range of nuance and darkness. Moods and landscapes emerged that were ever so fitting for a competition named for the ghost of Freddy Fisher. Homelessness and kidnappings, murders, battles, and relationships. There were meditations on love, losing love and the ever-present struggle to ascertain what exactly a feeling is. What was prevalent within both the poetry and prose categories in all age ranges, was a deep exploration of the interior and place—whether it be our homes, our mental health or the ghosts that never leave those haunted spaces. We were pleased to see that so many people accepted

the invitation to use the theme as a springboard, letting it project them into another world all of their own making.

The special mention from the judges must go to the high school students of Campbelltown LGA. Judging was particularly difficult as the level of originality, creativity and craft was extremely high. We were all very impressed and encourage you to continue to write and seek publishing in the future.

Congratulations to the winners and the highly commended writers and thank you to everyone who entered in this debut year of The Fisher's Ghost Creative Writing Competition. It is an act of bravery to both put your words down on paper (figuratively speaking), and to trust your work enough to put it into the hands of three adoring strangers. In that, we commend all of you. We will be back next year in 2022 with a brand-new theme. Hopefully next year we won't have such a wealth of inside time in which to write, and our fictional ghostly figures will be bushwalking and sunbathing, rather than cowering in front of a computer screen, stabbing at the stiff keys with their icy fingers.



Christina Donoghue

Chris is an Australian born African and Cherokee diasporic writer and multi-disciplinary artist living in Bradbury. She is a Junior Editor for Sydney Review of Books and manages a writing program for Western Sydney University. She is WestWords' Associate Producer.

Kate Liston-Mills

Kate is an Australian author, tutor, and mother. Inspired by her hometown, Pambula, on Yuin land on the far south coast of New South Wales. Kate is the author of *The Waterfowl Are Drunk!* (2015 ebook, 2016 illustrated collection of short stories) and *Dear Ibis* (illustrated collection of short stories released June 2021). She has also worked as a journalist for both regional and urban publications and has had short stories, reviews and poetry published in various Australian journals and anthologies.

Tony Park

Originally from Campbelltown, Tony is the author of 19 novels set in Africa and six non-fiction biographies. Tony has worked as a reporter, a press secretary, a PR consultant, and a freelance writer. He also served 34 years in the Australian Army Reserve including six months in Afghanistan in 2002. Tony and his wife divide their time between Sydney and southern Africa where they own a home on the border of the Kruger National Park.

In Plain Sight

Furqan Rahman

Macquarie Fields Public School



Hiding In Plain Sight
Are so many things.
Uncountable
And hidden,
Out of the light.

Weeds hide among plants,
As bulls hide among cows.
Spams hide among mail,
As thieves hide among us.

Slugs hide with worms,
And dandelions with flowers.
Wasps are with bee-like forms,
But they hid within plain sight.

Fireflies have a very star-like,
But were never true stars at heart.

If you are hidden,
And won't do as bidden,
Hiding in plain sight
Will be more than an average bite.

Because cows are like bulls,
Bees like wasps,
Rivers like canals,
And china like glass.
All take great might
To hide in plain sight.

Judges' Comments:

'This is a well-structured and imaginatively thought-out poem that uses the explorations of the binary nature of the world to reveal what is hidden all around us—even in nature.'

Cats

Anabelle Federico

Our Lady Help of Christians
Rosemeadow



Purr all day sleep all night
Always chasing birds and mice
Like a sneaky fox that crawls all night
You pounce through the air and give us a fright
You're cute and cuddly with not much to say
You will always make my day.

Judges' Comments:

'Short and sweet this small narrative poem captures the constantly moving motivations of the household cat. Using clear imagery and economy of words it is very effective in its use of rhyme, capturing the dualistic nature of their beloved pet.'

The Toad Tale

Brenden Dias

Eschol Park Public School



'Tra la la la.' Jim sang as he was strolling around the Eagle Vale reserve and looking at Mother Nature when suddenly he heard a loud croaking sound. From the corner of his eye he saw a jade green toad lying majestically, as if waiting to be kissed. He was exhilarated to find a toad.

The toad had a slimy back, wet feet and ginormous jet-black eyes. Jim really wanted to take him. Curiosity got the better of him and he took the fascinating creature home. Jim was happily skipping home, running as fast as the wind towards his room. He prudently placed the toad in a glass box. Jim would feed it different insects every single day. He would show off the toad to his friends to make them jealous. He was on top of the world.

One day when Jim was about to feed the toad, it was nowhere to be found. In the box there were only leaves, pebbles and a rock in it. Jim was distraught and didn't know what to do. He searched frantically for the toad everywhere but all in vain. Jim was disappointed with himself for not being careful with the toad's upkeep. He went for a walk again to the reserve to possibly find him there or possibly another toad to replace the one he lost.

He was extremely gloomy and just decided to give up looking for a new toad. He stepped with melancholy back home and sat on his bed with the glass box on his lap. He shook the box in anger and then realized that the rock moved. Whoa it was the

toad itself. It was camouflaged with the green environment in the box. He just couldn't believe his eyes. Was it his majestic 'TOAD' he was looking all over for. He was just right in front of him but not actually visible with the naked eye. It was hidden in plain sight. Jim's happiness knew no bound to find it. He thought to himself that the toad was missing its actual habitat and he left it free back in the reserve.

Jim visits every day, watches and feeds the toad and guess what the toad too waits patiently on the same branch where he met Jim the first time. It turned out that the toad was a female and had a partner in the pond. Jim never got to name the toad and thus called her Tiffany, Tiffany-the toad. When Tiffany laid eggs,

she was very upset when Jim came near. Jim did his best to help Tiffany by bringing food and talking to it daily. Jim was the kindest hearted person to Mother Nature and her creatures. As he walked past the pond, a worm passed by which he was about to trample but he managed to just miss it. It fascinated him so much that, yes you guessed it, he took it home.

Judges' Comments:

'This narrative engages with the local environment and creates setting through the character and environment of the toad. Invoking the intellectual capital of the reader around toads and enchanted frogs, this story is heavy with connotation and plays with that to subvert the readers expectations. Without anthropomorphising the animal, the author still manages to create a clear bond between a boy and his toad.'

Metopia

Sue Nguyen

Our Lady Help of Christians
Rosemeadow



Your imagination is the most compelling and powerful thing that you hold, you are able to do anything you desire with it. As my parents fight over something they're both wrong about, I slam my bedroom door in hopes that I can drown all the noise out, but nothing happens so I tumble onto the floor. It's just not fair, why can't they just disappear and never return? It's so frustrating! I shut my eyes and take deep breaths, I must get rid of all the negative and gloomy energy before entering my world. My world is my place, where I can escape the chaos and violence of reality, Metopia! As my mind travels through the diverse dimensions, I remember what I created, a place with innocent creatures and tons and tons of fruit-flavoured jelly beans! I open my eyes and

observe the glorious landscape and the luscious view. My frown gets turned upside down and I skip along the path towards my hideout.

As I reach the same chocolate-brown tree, I cautiously tiptoe to the back and swing the door wide open. I hid my hideout in a tree so that when I go there I can be calm and alone with my thoughts. I freeze as I see a ghastly, hideous thing, a black, four-legged creature eating my jelly beans. I take a silent step forward, very cautiously in case I scare it. I examine the creature a bit more closely, it has twisted horns and its eyes shine in the light. It looks a bit like half a goat and half a human or a monstrous thing that came out of a horror movie. As I look into its eyes, it locks its stare at

me, never blinking or moving a muscle, just piercing my soul with its glare. The strange thing is, everything in Metopia was created by me and I never, ever created this, so how did it get here? Millions of thoughts and questions run through my mind as I try and try to remember if I ever made a creature that resembled this or looks similar, but nothing comes to mind.

As I'm staring into space and asking myself questions, the creature screeches a deafening scream. I tumble backwards onto the ground, heart pounding and eyes wide open. 'Me is Problo, who you are?' the creature's scratchy, screechy voice can make anyone want to rip their ears out. 'I'm the creator of Metopia, who made you?' I answer in a shaky voice as I pick

myself up off the floor. I listen silently as it continues to slit my ears as it answers my questions, 'Me is your problem monster, you have more problems than I get big!' I soon befriend the monster and find out that the creature does no harm at all, it only ate jelly beans. Maybe my problems aren't that bad, I had a great time with them!

Judges' Comments:

'Birthed from the place of escapism this author has created a fantasy world inside their bedroom. Exercising an impressive range of creativity, one world morphs into another all through the power of imagination. The scribing of those visions is well paced and well edited, so that the reader can sit back and enjoy the ride.'

The Rose and the Thorn

Maryam Muzammil

Al-Faisal College
Campbelltown

Stare past the filtered window,
continuously pondering in my thoughts,
Longing to leave my cave,
but cannot disregard what I've been taught.

Wonder whether the walls keep me in,
or if they keep the world out,
Drunk on never-ending boredom,
anxiety, sadness, and doubt.

Faint memories of the places I visited,
the scents I smelt, the noise I heard, the people I
met,
The memories tease and tempt me,

Still, I do as I'm told, in fear of the lurking threat.
In midst of all the chaos around me,
I believed I'd lost any reason to smile,
Didn't consider the hidden blessings around me,
now I'm grateful, although it took me a while.

This experience was like a mirror,
unearthed a new side of me, enabled me to explore myself,
Understood the beauty of the rose and the thorn,
and stressing the importance of resilience to oneself.

Rather than imagining reality as a tragedy,
View this lockdown as an opportunity instead,
A chance to spend time with you family,
Finding merriment in your home, so this virus doesn't spread.

Judges' Comments:

"The Rose and the Thorn' is an optimistic analysis of the recent lockdown and the impact on the individual. Structured into traditional four-line stanzas, the poem moves with grace, accompanying the reader through the myriad of emotions that occur when our lives are limited to the inside of our homes."



Dear Child, Look Up

Zoe Bonifacio

Hurlstone Agricultural High School



What do you see...?

The monotony of life concaving under the sun,
Leaching through the purest of souls.
Lifeless is the moon upon our horizon...
An ancient beauty loss amongst modern predicaments.

Dear child, look up.

There are supernatural forces beyond the walls of your bedroom,
So don't sit and worry if the sun will rise.
Go frolic in the fields of green while the fruits are still ripe.
Beauty is there to be felt.

Dear child, look up.

You cannot control the tide,
Or manipulate the coming of spring...
Yet all the forces of nature work intertwined,

So the children may explore without a single worry in mind.

Dear child, look up.

The world has a broken facade.
The wrath of humanity must not be tolerated,
But the wrath of the wind must be respected.
For the wind knows its place and purpose.

Dear child, look up.

Your soul is craving authenticity.
An authenticity lost when we altered the world only for our kind.
Your soul knows how to search...
So look up.

Judges' Comments:

'There is a grappling with the greatness of the unknown throughout this piece that has an interesting interaction with the repeated line, "Dear child, look up." The voice almost comes from outside the world of the poem. The use of repetition acknowledges and instructs the reader, propelling them to action. It has a hopeful nuance that communicates an understanding that the reader of the poem doesn't see the greatness of the world around them, but that the "I" within the poem does.'

The Lead Detective

Laeisa Kumar

Macquarie Fields High School



Over the past two weeks there has been a series of ghastly murders occurring in the Upper East Side of Manhattan. Every single victim we found, was found with a smiley face painted on their face out of their own blood. I'd say it was the serial killer's sick sort of 'signature'. Thankfully I got the honour of being the lead detective on this investigation.

My wife and I have been having complications recently. She claims I've been giving too much attention to work and not enough to our family. 'I'm just saying Michael!' my wife yells at me from across the living room. 'You have been acting strange and distant for the past two weeks, I know this has something

to do with work. What's going on with you?' 'Nothing Lorraine, just leave it alone.' I shout back while grabbing my things from the coffee table. "I'll be home late tonight. Don't wait up." and with that I storm out of the front door.

I arrive at yet another crime scene and see police tape surrounding a female body lying lifeless on the carpet, surrounded by a pool of blood. I duck under the tape and walk over to our victim. I'm not surprised when I look at her face and see a smiley face painted on face with her crimson blood. The forensic photographers capture photos of the scene around me while the investigators question the civilians around us. I suddenly stumble upon a short black

strand of hair lying a foot away from the body. I quickly grab my gloves out of my hands to pick up the piece of hair and bag it in an evidence bag. 'Detective Lopez.' I call out 'Take this into forensic labs for testing. I think we finally got our perp.'

The lab results came back in less than three hours, although it felt like we were waiting an eternity. We finally caught our killer. Phillip Kazew, Caucasian male aged 27, married with 2 kids. In our custody as we speak. We matched the DNA found at the crime scene with his, and thankfully it came back positive.

'Will the defendant please stand.' The judge echoes loudly throughout the courtroom.

Phillip slowly rises from his seat, tears rolling down his pale face. 'In the matter of the state of New York, as to all accounts of manslaughter of first degree. The jury finds the defendant guilty. I sentence you to life in prison.'

'I'm innocent I swear.' he cries as I shut the jail cell door. 'I know.' I smirked. 'You don't know how easy it is to frame someone and get away with murder when you're hiding in plain sight.'

Judges' Comments:

'This narrative plunges the reader into the middle of the action. It successfully layers the professional, personal, and interior motivations of the protagonist into this small allotment of words. Including within the story only what is needed, this narrative uses tension well by hiding the identity of the serial killer to the very last line.'

The Toy Store

Mary Nguyen

Hurlstone Agricultural High School



After the death of both her three-month-old daughter and husband in the Vile Plague, Mrs Eleanor Wheatly was sent to a community home, in where she was locked inside her one-bedroom attic for the majority for her day. She was given two tranquilisers every night but often found herself stuffing her pockets with the oblong cyan pills when the people in white uniform weren't paying attention to her. The pills warmed up her perished body and scraped away the horrors that were her very own thoughts and emotions. For the first few months at the community home, Mrs Wheatly had slept very little, the constant buzzing of helicopters lapping around the neighbourhood keeping her conscious. She lied there, trying to block out memories

of her daughter, until discovering she could very easily slip through the firmly steel barred window and jump down, landing perfectly at the camera's blind spot. It was precisely 1:17 in the morning and Mrs Wheatly had snuck out for the third time that week. The houses along the silenced, vanished streets recited the stories of their former tenants, vandalised and toppled with posters of a middle-aged man with thick framed glasses. This time she wasn't taking the usual path, however, ending up at an unfamiliar cemetery. She creaked open the dented rusty gate, gazing at each headstone, marking dwellings in which nobody is home. She spent the next few weeks, coming back to the same cemetery, reading and learning the stories behind these children, whose lives

were abandoned and forgotten. She became fond of some of a few of the girls, whom Mrs Eleanor Wheatly had imagined dancing around like her own. There was one night in particular, she had forced ten bright blue pills down the pulsing pipes of her throat. The jarred footpath felt like the tension of radio waves. She had the consuming urge she had never felt before. Mrs Wheatly knelt to the ground. And had begun viciously digging at the crumpled dirt. The satisfaction of their cold, frail bodies pressing against her own. Their bones carved dry, and their hair matted into the soil. This was the only way to cope, the only way to keep her from replaying her daughter's death over and over like a malfunctioning cassette tape. She brought them back with her,

their heads scraping against the concrete path. She felt like a child. A jubilant child who had returned with a new doll from the toy store. The mere sight of another human, other than those she was familiar with, fascinating her. It felt so right. Once managing to fit them through to the attic, she had set their preserved bodies just as the dollhouse she had always wanted for her daughter. It was the only thing she had left; the barricades shielding her from the emotional trauma within.

Judges' Comments:

'This beautifully written gothic tale is successfully macabre and pays homage to the memory of so many women whose realities split on the death of a child. The carefully chosen telling details and sensory impressions included within the text, place the reader firmly inside this twisted nostalgic milieu.'

I am but myself

Tara Lau

Hurlstone Agricultural High School



I am but uncharted terrain.
Unseen and unexplored.
Though roadmaps claim to chart
My own topography,
It is none but a fraud.
I am but uncharted terrain.

I am but a pale piece of skin.
Cloaked and out of sight.
Though the rest of the skin bears
the evidence of a life lived,
It's an artifice.

I am but a pale piece of skin.

I am but a mythical creature.
Lurking and misunderstood.
Though bedtime stories outline
the nature of my being,
They are pitiful falsehoods.

I am but a mythical creature.

I am but myself.
Shrouded and afraid.
For not a soul knows of
my very existence,
I fear I will fade.
I am but myself.

Judges' Comments:

'This text expresses a knowing of the "I" within the poem that disagrees with the world outside the poem. It is an intriguing exploration of theme that personalises ideas around the self that is seen and unseen. Well-structured and economical in its word use, this piece grows upon repeated reading.'

Before I Fall

Lyna Le

Saint Patricks College
Campbelltown



The anger that rushes through my veins,
Is like a wildfire that knows no shame,
Here, in the dusk, I perish in the flames,
Here, at nightfall, I leap into the lanes,

The lanes,
Of cars,
Of trains,
The trains of never-ending pain,
Of the endless thoughts rushing through my brain.

The past is never gone but it's over, they said,
But I can't help but wonder, would it be gone if I were dead?
Here, in the headlights I stood and collapsed,
To cry, to fall,
To shudder and crawl,
Would I crumble and disappear till I'm nothing at all?

Yet, there behind the debris, behind the headlights,
I saw you standing, hidden in plain sight,
Warm as the sun, sweet as honey,
Your eyes like the waters of the sea,
You were only my reason to be.

Before I Fall

continued

Lyna Le

Saint Patricks College
Campbelltown



Rare roses of the forest, the scent of your hair,
And when you walk into the room - like a breath of fresh air,
Your hands, rough and cold yet warm and right,
Touching me in a way that I could only imagine celestial beings could feel
like.

Seldom had I thought it'd be anyone,
A reward I did not deserve for being so ruthless and cruel,
Yet, as I looked into those eyes, I questioned, could it be untrue?
As I looked into those eyes and the galaxies arised,
And twinkled did the stars in the shimmering skies,
You folded my thoughts into a neat blanket and put them on a tall shelf far
out of my reach,
Your dark hazel bronze streaks fluttered in the wind and they were the only
treasure which for I beseeched,

You have always, and always will be a rush through my veins,
The butterflies in the pit of my stomach, when I was held back by
shackles and reins,
Of my mind, of my life, of what made me insane,
So, for the last time, as I look into those eyes, I question, could it be
true?

So as the air escaped my lungs and my head fell through,
And I looked into those eyes one last time, that's when I knew,
That all along, right in front of me, all I needed was you.

Judges' Comments:

'The interaction between environments as a conduit of relational value is intriguing within this piece. As is the heaviness of the self, juxtaposed with the lightness and hope of the other, within the world of this poem. The rhyme schema serves to lead the reader through this world of self-disgust and into lightness and optimism. This is a multilayered work that reveals its different landscapes depending on which angle you look at it.'

Dave Wrote a Poem

Emma Hughes

William Carey Christian School



Dave wrote a poem. It was a nice poem, lilting and softly dismal, one of those flowery pieces that I don't read but I am willing to listen to for the sake of a friend. He read it to me, his voice filled with the timbre of an old man. Told with authority, his voice followed the waves of inflection, intimately caressing every word with such a thorough understanding that it would absolve any doubt, if I even had any, about the authorship. He knew the poem. Like a father to a son, like a God to a man, like a writer to his pen.

Dave has written more recently, he's been writing like a dying man attending to his will, constantly writing, like his brain is a river rushing to the page. I suppose the fancies of lady inspiration have finally turned attention to him, fluttering

her chocolate eyes at his whimsical imagination. If I didn't know better I'd say he was in love, for what else could play a man like a lute, only to have him holed up in a room, scribbling notes and typing verses for an art form that for the majority is dead.

He writes about an inky blackness, which seems a little on the nose to me. For all the metaphors he could have used, the literal comparison to ink is obvious, even to the untrained eye. I guess writing has taken a toll on him, if he is going to write in the meta tense. So many playwrights have attempted to capture the feeling of putting pen to paper, so few have achieved that sense of... I don't know... Creativity. I'm not that much of a writer myself.

We went out for brunch, Dave and I, out in a little pavilion to the side of a quaint but secluded restaurant. It was a picturesque tableau, a stone building the colour of cream, whipped into the shape of a cottage, all wooden signs and thatched roofs. There was a cheerful pop song drifting through the rafters like a cool breeze, settling over us in a quiet sort of content. We sat at a corner table and just talked, in a way that is uncommon for us now as adults. He said something or other, it might have been profound. I thought so, at least, but I was very drunk.

He swayed into me and I remember weeping, or vomiting, and ordering the check. We might have been sobbing at this point, I remember telling him I loved him, in the over-exaggerated way I am wont to do

when absolutely pissed. He was smashed too. It was a good night.

Dave is dead.

Dave is dead, and I don't remember what he told me in the quiet corner of a stone pavilion when we were considerably inebriated, the day before he died. Dave is dead and I don't know why. Dave is dead and he told me he was going to do it.

Judges' Comments:

'This piece is a tribute and example that meaning, and intelligence need not be wordy or flowery in expression. An almost poetic engagement with the prose form, this author captures the character of both the protagonist through the embedded voice, and the piece's namesake "Dave" through the narrator's first person engagement with him. Telling the story of Dave through the sceptical critique of his poem is genius. This is such an intelligent and well-crafted narrative, that is both heart-breaking and #relatable.'

Her Last Meal

Angela Chau

Hurlstone Agricultural High School



She must have known that she could never bring herself to leave her wailing children when she chose to board the plane in the middle of the night. There were too many things she knew she would miss. Her family. Her home. The buzz of cicadas in the rice fields and the hum of the village. The smell of open fires and plates of food. It was on the tip of her tongue. But the warmth she craved from the lick of flames never tasted quite the same with an electric stovetop and stainless-steel pan.

Som tam. Khao pad. Guay teow. They were still sweet in the way in which her mother taught her. She knew the steps and measurements and the rhythm of thumping the dough like a soothing lullaby and yet every meal alone felt like another meal wasted.

Work finished in the dead of night so she could barely afford to let the oil splutter. Less noise. Less laughter. Less everything.

It was quite a small room after all. Tucked away from where polite neighbours would not have to see the maid shuffling around the house. Still, there was a cupboard above the sink about the size of her head which she could store the few spices she recognised in supermarkets like tamarind and lemongrass, some paper and her paycheck until she sent it home.

Some months into stable employment, the man who owned the house told her to find a way to get rid of the smell. It rubbed off onto the laundry.

Then they told her that those hands were too meaty. Too wide and tough from years upon years of labour in the fields and in the house, stripping meat off bones and chopping hard vegetables.

So she came into the habit of tucking her hands behind her back.

They told her she was useless if she could not drown out her accent with something more palatable to the ears.

So she came into the habit of silence until her own language felt wrong and sour.

They told her to stop slouching and shuffling around the house, especially in front of esteemed guests. Was she a slave? She should stand up and walk in graceful strides, but her legs were too short and her back was too sore and there was little she could do except bury herself further into the recesses of the house where no one need look for her.

But that wasn't true.

I wish she knew that before I could read her letters, I found her in the way she used to organise the kitchen cabinets or how dad would try and replicate her cooking or how the buzz of the town felt a little less

complete without her.

'But don't worry. She'll be back soon.'

And she did. After 54 years.

Now, she sits in the opposite room. She never talks. She refuses to look at us in the eyes.

Where are you Mum?

Why are you still hiding?

Judges' Comments:

'The sensory building blocks delivered from the very first moment serve to draw the reader deep into the protagonist's world. The sounds, the smells and feelings delivered here serve to give the reader what home feels like; in contrast we are given the cold, tasteless, quiet of cultural isolation. This piece is artfully constructed and tells a story that is so gripping and important.'

A Veiled Throne

Tiya Purohit

Hurlstone Agricultural High School



The courtyard is flooded with crowds of commoners, silenced by the presence of royalty. Their weary faces barely mask their hatred for the king as his gravelly voice resounds around the stone fort. Like the people, hatred bubbles beneath my calm façade, contained only by the anticipation of what is to come. This will be over soon.

'I have reason to believe that Sephron, in the south, is planning to take control of a large portion of land. We have long known our kingdom to be one of the most desirable lands to reside in and we must protect ourselves from our neighbours.

'In order to do this, I am increasing the number of soldiers we have employed. This decision will protect our land, provide steady income to many and prove your pride for

country. Those aged 16 to 30 will be drafted immediately and must report to the military barracks at 9am tomorrow. Failure to adhere to this conscription will lead to imprisonment.'

Too many years of battle has made my father weak and paranoid. Even after years of peace, he believes the bordering nations to be jealous of our kingdom's prosperity. Now he will send millions of innocents to 'protect' the land and threaten the other countries. I can see the outcome – war torn countries and thousands of deaths.

'My daughter, Morana, will oversee this enlistment.' He gestures to me and I step forward, pulled out of my thoughts. I paste a faux smile on my face as I wave to the wary faces, moving ever so slightly towards my father. Now.

My fingers reach for the sword fixed in his belt and he turns, still smiling, as my fingers close around the handle. His face falls and the betrayal on his face empowers me. I smile broadly as his eyes widen in fear and surprise. The king can only watch, fixed in place, as I swing the sword in a neat arc towards him.

His body collapses in a fluid motion, red blood pooling around him in stark contrast to the pale stone and I pluck the crown from where it rests, careful to avoid his blood from staining my clothes. I place it onto my own head, smiling at the sound of a thousand gasps echoing from below.

My father put too much faith in his subjects and his family, remaining ignorant of the buildup of hatred towards him and his reign. He scoured the lands for his enemies all

the while they were hiding in plain sight.

I glance towards the courtyard, still crowded by the kingdom's people. Excitement, relief, confusion, horror is painted on every face, their indifferent facades discarded with surprise. And beneath, I can sense hope. Hope.

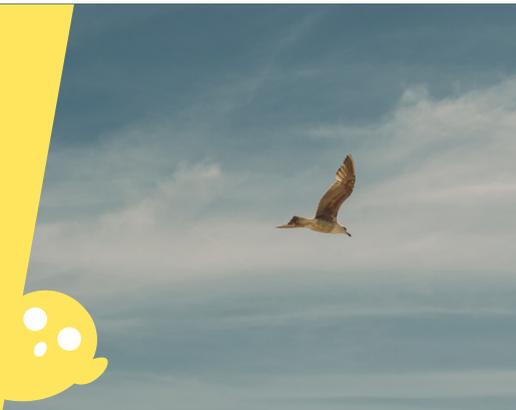
How I will enjoy breaking this kingdom.

Judges' Comments:

'From the first line this fantasy world is built quite skilfully. The language used serves to move the story forward, employing dialogue to reveal the hubris of this patriarchal paternalistic character of the father. The silence of the protagonist creates and sustains the internal tension that only slightly released at the climax of the story, with the last line revealing something of the narrator's true character that is held back from the subjects in the story world. Almost an analogy for world politics this is a well-crafted exploration of the lust for power and the promise of false gods.'

Palimpsest

Marguerite Pulham



We exist in palimpsest
Black roofed suburbia – exploiters' dreams
Squeezing as many blocks out
Crowding out our spaces at the seams
Blistering bitumen, ash hot asphalt
Billabong parklands to cool the kids' heels
Footpaths and roads and carparks
And high rise apartment deals
We cover, and cover, and cover the truth
Like old paper poster bills
But under all our layers (and not so very far)
Is the sacred land which is sacred still
Land which is always here,
has always been here

Has always known its will.
We walk on that land every day,
We make our way.
Settlers
Who need to be unsettled by the truth
Of what is hidden in plain sight
That Country has much to teach us, much that is clear
If we have the ears and the heart
and the courage to hear
and to act on what is right.

Judges' Comments:

'The title, "Palimpsest", sets the expectation for the remainder of the poem: a piece of writing or painting that is layered and still bears the marks of what lies beneath. Exploring the local area through the lens of palimpsest, as a stark alignment with the term becomes clear; time and "development" covers over what is still here. This piece engages with the local area with such precision and economy of words, using the space of the poem as protest, a space of questioning, and acknowledgement for the land that always was and always will be.'

Tolstoy

Glenn McPherson

Two blocks from the overpass I see Tolstoy.
We will have a crooked finger of dawn soon. Signs of it harbour
In the cradle of foiling wind rising now in the penitence
Of rosary-beads from the white cedar.
And there he is. The frock-coat, a slight deference
In the way he holds himself back there against the wall. It is unusual
I'll grant you that. He has a bag of tip-top sunblest white bread
Like small discs of memory foam holding their previous pose.
Under the bent spoke of a street light is a Polak
Who could be the translucent green glass smashed on the sidewalk
Now materialised as he passes. I guess maybe late 50's
On his way home, who knows?
Thin ruts of a substance (let's leave it at that) are either a scansion
Or morse-code, as a trolley loaded with blankets
And fists of mould comes to a stop in the gutter. A giant
Macedonian man shrugs into the flame of a lighter.

His only answer to the mounting dawn.
Say I didn't have to get the early train.
Say there was no assembly line waiting on me
And no foreman with those raving black eyes,
Bruised and burnt out as the Spanish pueblo his father
Or grandfather took flight from. Say Tolstoy is alive
And lets that tobacco addle his mind
And I do not walk on, lifting my eyes just enough
To see him off? What then?

Judges' Comments:

'The employ of classical language here works so well in transforming the classical figure of Tolstoy into everyman and thereby employing a kind of magical realism that is not destroyed but amplified by placing a bag of Tip-Top Sunblest in his hand. What this poem does so well is use the images of the everyday and subverts them so as to reveal their magical possibilities; it acknowledges not only what is, but what may be—if the author didn't have to catch the early train that is.'

Hiding in Plain Sight – Our History and Natural Environment

Jan Neaves

I am the Bull Cave, hidden deep in the bush.
The rocks by the river that sheltered the folk.
Humble stone houses great grandfathers made.
The Court House, the Theatre, the old buildings saved.

Tall columns, fine facades. We can all recall
Their history; the ghosts of the past great and small.
Shattered gravestones are witness to those long ago.
They were our family, research let us know.

The gums and the wattles, bright birds in the bush
Are all here beside us, we just need to look.
While virus has chained us, not daring to roam –
Search local and find us. We're here, near your home.

Judges' Comments:

'Anthropomorphising the environment in the first two stanzas helps create the living presence and sense of the timelessness of the living and built environment which this piece is grounded. There is a nostalgia or an invitation here from the living environment, the "I" of the poem, for the readers to come join them.'

The Infinite Sky

Blake Curran

Friday night's entertainment: beer and shouting and adrenaline and more beer and more shouting. Until it becomes physical. Violent. Insults shower down like rain, strength wielded like the relentless sun on a summer's long afternoon. Bruises blossom like flowers erupting from the soil.

A wife cowers beneath her husband's raised arm. Her world about to shatter.

Saved by a knock on the door.

The husband growls. 'No funny business.'

A neighbourly smile, threaded through with concern, shines in the dimness of dusk.

A whispered offer of help, but what good is an old woman against the way things are? The way things have always been and will always be? The wife is angry at her neighbour for even suggesting such an idea. And who is she anyway to go meddling in other people's lives?

The door shuts, not quite a slam.

For whatever reason, he's glued to the footy on the TV now and by the time she has a quick smoke out the back, he's asleep in the armchair, still clutching a nearly empty bottle of beer in a loose fist.

*

Taking the bins out one night, she stops to stare at the sky, stars barely twinkling through the

The Infinite Sky – *continued*

Blake Curran

light-polluted haze of towering streetlights and the yellow light from front windows and the occasional sweeping headlights of passing traffic. Still, the sheer infinity of it all is enough to take her breath away momentarily.

She's so small. So small she feels like no one will ever see her. Ever miss her if she just...disappeared. Stopped existing.

But that's not quite true: her husband sees her. She wishes he didn't.

Walking back inside, a stray glance next-door reminds her that he's not the only person who sees her.

*

Later. The morning after her world splits apart.

He walks away and goes to work the next morning like nothing happened. She has trouble sitting up in bed. The room spins. Her right eye is swollen shut and her chest hurts when she breathes in.

At first, she'd taken the beating like she'd somehow earned it, like it was her fault.

But with the fist that nearly broke the woman's back, he'd finally split her apart. And in that fissure—a fracture that started small and grew wider with every hit she bore—her mind revealed what had been there all along, had she ever thought

to look for it, glimmering in the darkness like a beacon winking in the vast depths of space.

Courage.

The courage to get away, to at least try to save herself.

She knows she can't do it on her own.

*

As her neighbour opens the door, the words fall from her mouth like shooting stars, as if having waited so long to be heard they've rusted loose from the iron sky of her mind and arc downwards in blazing trails of light. The words are beautiful and strong and dazzling. They burn so very bright.

'Please help me.'

Judges' Comments:

'This is an airy and almost elegant, gentle dissection of the violent masculine, domestic abuse, and hope. So well-crafted, this piece weaves an organza-like narrative that would be oppressive but for the stars in the sky and the interference of a good neighbour. The lack of sensationalism in this story and the choice to describe the masculine through feminine descriptors is both perplexing and transformative, othering what would otherwise be a familiar tale.'

Lunch in Queen St

Lee McKerracher



A movement to my right. I shift and look over the top of my sunglasses to see a man, shuffling, bent and crumpled, slowly approaching lunching office workers enjoying a quick break in the sun. He proffers a small plastic cup, shakes it and with his head down avoiding eye contact, seeks acknowledgement in the form of a gold coin.

One sculpted and fastidious man backs away in distaste, another, not so easily offended, searches his pocket for spare change and adds to the cup, immediately turning away. With a small nod of thanks, the man trudges towards a woman sitting on a bench. She is absently sipping coffee, immersed in her phone, then senses a presence before her. Slowly she looks up slightly,

focusing only on his legs, she winces and returns to her texts.

His jacket is large with dirty sleeves rolled up to allow his hands to protrude, trousers ragged and hanging off his wasted frame seem to try and pull him into the pavement and hide his detestable presence. He looks at her, uncertain as to whether he will be reviled or tolerated, he is never accepted or really noticed.

Ever so slowly, she leans forward, her brown curls tumbling over her forehead while she forages in her handbag. She finds some coins and adds them to his cup without moving her gaze from the phone. I detect a small smile of gratitude for her offering.

With a wince of pain, he turns and I see him coming in my

direction. His step is unsure and uneven. I notice his mismatched shoes; one sneaker and one sandal, emphasising his limp, making his stride unsteady. As he approaches I sense his odour, sharp but not unpleasant, more like a room of old books undisturbed and unloved for years.

Our eyes meet. I am struck by the deep sense of wisdom that lies behind his bloodshot, tired, scraggy expression. 'Ma'am, could you spare a few coins?' he whispered. I am struck that he is much younger than I thought; his bent disposition makes him much much older. 'How long since you've had a real meal?' I prompt. He looks at his feet, silent, I wait. 'Oh maybe a month...maybe two'.

His blood-stained shirt speaks of the cruelty of his existence, how society just wants him to disappear, fade into the background once he has his few coins. "How about we go to that cafe just over there and I buy you lunch? We can sit outside, where it's shaded."

He stands a little straighter, a small smile, a dip of his dishevelled head and looks at me fully: 'Well, I would be honoured'.

Judges' Comments:

'This story is an unassuming and almost documentary approach that is heavy with the acceptance of how people are in this place of Queen Street. Without art this author transforms the reader into an observer of human nature, and witness to the narrator's interior monologue.'



WestWords is Western Sydney's Literature Development Organisation. We provide pathways of opportunity for the development of Western Sydney voices through innovative literature and related arts programs. We believe literacy, self-expression and creativity changes lives and communities. WestWords is committed to providing an environment where the stories of the communities of Western Sydney and the places they come from are celebrated. The guiding philosophy of WestWords is a belief that the unique perspectives and stories of the Western Sydney area deserve to

be developed in literature and shared with a wider audience.

We believe that engagement with reading and writing allows young people in particular to develop their imagination, gives voice to their stories and experiences, hones skills in written expression and illustration, and sets them on a trajectory for life. With a focus on literature, we deliver residencies, fellowships, workshops, performances, presentations and publications. Our partners include teachers, schools, universities, community and arts organisations.

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Greg Percival Library,

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