The SaveAs Writers’ International Prose Prize sponsored by Dr Geralyn Pinto

The Canterbury Christ Church University Poetry Prize

Amazing standard of entries, found it very difficult to choose between entries, to choose a longlist, to choose a shortlist…

First Place: Refugium, Mara Adamitz Scrupe

This poem uses a range of innovative devices, with sonic play and exquisite formatting as the author writes themselves into knowledge, into consciousness, into spaces that are surreal and sublime in their rendering. The research is embedded delicately, requiring the reader to enquire beyond it and to be responsible for the channel of meaning. There is a real sophistication in the register slips, with repetitions and iterations that are delivered with a lightness of touch that is truly admirable and nuanced. There are notes of psycho-geography, hinting at both an intimacy and disconnection with the environment, and these are conveyed via the anchoring presence of the first person, which locates the reader in the embodied experience.

Second Place: Christmas 2049, Joao Curti

I was taken by this memorable, gritty, emotionally nuanced poem that was rendered with innovative constructions and formatting. The form is hybrid and rebels against convention pointing toward a world that is also structured with a similar chaotic energy. We have narrative- a child is rescued from a squat, and the focus is on the emotional physical and psychic experience of living in a future that is flooded, under the guidance of two fathers, and again the poet disrupts our heteronormative expectations of the familial set up. The voice is strong, full of imagery and playful even as it depicts an apocalyptic world and I particularly enjoyed the final lines ‘One thing I knew is that everything and everyone dies. Tonight I will know cold’.

Third place: On Significant Endings, Mike Ferguson

This sequence gives us nuanced reflections on time, the capacity for it to suspend, to be upended, to be other. It incorporates playful registers of science and technical language which garner new resonance alongside the intertextual references used. Technology is contrasted with the human condition and these themes clash against each other with a cynical and philosophical lens that performs a gut punch time and time again with lines like ’sacrifice is the same in any language’. It reads as though a confident and urgent diatribe, but when you look- or listen- closely, every thought has been carefully considered and mediated over with unexpected constructions that engender a range of unsettling questions on the experience of living.

Shortlisted poems

Patrick Deeley- Aftermath

I admired this poet’s ability to sustain and develop an idea, to hold it up to the light to see its numerous angles, all the while delighting the reader by bringing in new observations and images with brilliant control e.g. ‘It has burned. It had rained. The world was winter, a worked out quarry, gouged dells of shale glimmering in the blear everywhere without the least tempering of clay or vegetation’. Every word has been considered for musicality, pace and rhythm and the result is immersive.

Jennifer Harrison- Echo-voicif

In this poem we are introduced to a strange world, difficult to grasp. Inside the dome city, we have observations that are cinematic, futuristic scenes, and these are underpinned by a development of language that seems to have evolved so far that meaning has become indiscernible. Society is so advanced it has left the personal behind, as it questions the need for contact whilst life can operate perfectly well virtually.

Christopher M James- Immaculate

I admired this poem for its subtle and concise rendering of the complexities of an unstable relationship and the poet’s ability to shift time without labour, confusion or artifice. The poet locates us in the place and time via the lens of domesticity, emotions that are articulated and shown through image rather than with abstracted nouns. The immediacy of the events are then unravelled by the poem’s final lines, which contextualise the experience as a distant memory: a reverie that still, forty years on, requires organising.

Robert Keeler -Quality of Longing

I was drawn to this poem on account of its celestial preoccupations, the notion of an endless universe and the concept of eternity, that reassures us that there is always another galaxy to turn to, a comforting intergalactic mother observing all. There is a sensation of humankind having little impact, and this is delivered via a lens that is in constant motion, perspectives from constellations that observe with ambivalence as if they contain some secret knowledge of the future.

Greta Ross- Boggy groun

I particularly liked this poem on account of it ambition and vision, its rich imagery and organic language. There is an inevitability of death, innocence lost, but the bog becomes a sanctuary too, preserving the last state of the victim, telling their tale backwards as if a diary entry, a record of their demise.

Derek Sellen, The angels of Ararat:

This is a poem that makes the reader consider what will survive, what can be salvaged from the earth. It is crafted so precisely, with a wide and varied vocabulary that lends the poem a biblical tone. It has a grasp of musicality and rhythm, the poet knows exactly how to use pace, when to slow the piece, plumbing the depths of a moment and when to move on. Complex ideas are placed next to simple ideas that are delivered with a flat tone e.g. ‘The numbers are terrible. We do not intervene’ demonstrating a real control of the material. I particularly loved the line ‘Our gossip sounds to them like the wind’.