



mosman  
**Youth  
awards**  
in literature  
**2020**

# Winning Entries

A collection of award winning short stories and poems from the 2020 Mosman Youth Awards in Literature



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As part of Mosman Council's Centenary Celebrations in 1993, the Mosman Youth Awards in Literature were inaugurated by Helen Egan, Marie Pitts and Cheryl Thomas, three friends who shared an interest and background in the education of young people.

These Awards, encouraging excellence in writing, have been made possible through profits from *Ferry to Mosman*, a book of black and white photographs and descriptive text, depicting the suburb of Mosman in the 1980s. This was a local bicentennial project. In recent years the Awards have been supported by sponsorships from local individuals and organisations.

The Ferry to Mosman Committee retired at the end of 2009 and handed over the organisation and running of the competition to Mosman Library Service.

Entry forms and information are available at the beginning of each school year through schools, libraries and Mosman Council's website at [www.mosman.nsw.gov.au/youthawards](http://www.mosman.nsw.gov.au/youthawards)

Two judging panels, whose members vary from year to year, generously give their time and expertise in deciding the winning entries. Certificates and monetary prizes are awarded at Presentation Night, held in August at the Mosman Youth Centre. All shortlisted entrants, families and friends are invited to attend.

Since its inauguration in 1993, this competition has become a fixture in Mosman Council's calendar of events. Entries are received from students attending local schools in Mosman, the North Shore, the Northern Beaches, as well as country regions in New South Wales. Its aim has always been to encourage young people to be interested in writing prose and poetry.

## Acknowledgments

2020 Judges  
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This contest is organised by Mosman Library Service.



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# Winning Entries

A collection of award winning  
short stories from the 2020 Mosman  
Youth Awards in Literature

# *The Gifts of our Home*

Mia Cai  
Winner – First Prize  
Primary Prose

The harbour used to be gleaming sapphire, as still as a single, pristine sheet of unbroken glass. The mountains used to be imposing, looming guardians, stoic and imperturbable, white capped summits reaching into heaven itself. The valleys used to be beautiful. Long, wild blades of grass swaying and dancing to the music of nature, a music never captured by human ears, human recordings.

The Earth used to be beautiful.

The Earth used to harbour peace. It used to be a safe haven for humans, the humans who thought they were the most sophisticated species of the world. But what they didn't know was that the world stretched far further than their Earth, far further even than their Milky Way. They didn't know that they were destroying themselves with technology and factories and the so-called Information Era. They didn't know that they had caused the war themselves.

They didn't know that they had created us.

\* \* \*

*The black hole is shrinking. I can feel it. The last black hole in our galaxy, almost exhausted. Although I am genetically engineered to feel nothing, I can almost make out a strangeness in my peripheral vision. Anxiety. In an hour, it will be gone. Our last hope for life. There will be nothing more. I march to the ruler, hoping to find some better news.*

*It is only now that I realise that the we should have died out. It was the better thing.*

*I find him hunched over a holographic image. I see the familiar ripple of spacetime, then the tear, of a wormhole. A portal through space, permitting you to travel faster than the speed of light. But there is something wrong. The tear widens, and a clunky, clumsy object passes through. Even for my genetically engineered mind, it takes me three solid minutes to actually figure out that the thing is supposed to be a ship. It is ugly.*

*But the rest of Earth is so beautiful...*

*The portal starts to collapse. The ship disappears.*

*But it is enough. It is the truth.*

*There is another world out there. There is hope to survive.*

\* \* \*

The first man-made wormhole failed utterly. They didn't know that the energy needed to form one was far, far more than they had thought. Far greater than the energy even the supermassive black hole in the middle of the Milky Way could offer. They failed to bend spacetime to their will. Instead, they bent it to ours.

We received a faint reception from them. A flickering mirage. We saw that there were different galaxies, containing more resources than we could ever imagine. Maybe one. Maybe billions. But they had useful elements. Uranium. Nitrogen. Hydrogen. Titanium. It was only for an instant. But it was enough, enough to prompt our greed for more. We had stripped our own galaxy of any useful substance, and now even all of the black holes had been exhausted.

Our 'home' was now no more than a wasteland of vacuum, dead stars and spheres of iron. We knew that we would die out in the next two centuries, unless we found something else to lay our hands on.

So then the Milky Way came in.

They had a galaxy that would last for billions of years more. And so the task begun.

The earthmen had created a rip in the very essence of the universe. So we slowly worked at it until it could fix a considerably sized space vessel through. But the humans fought back. They wanted the materials as well. They equaled our greed and ambition. They were selfish.

It is eons later that I realise that they were not the selfish ones, the greedy ones, the ambitious ones. It is eons later, when the Earth has long since been transformed into an unrecognisable chunk of rock that I realise that they might have been terrified. It is eons later that I realise they were real people too, loving and loved. And it is eons later that I realise they might not have been the hindrances, the black forces that kept down the greater good.

It is eons later that I realise that we might have been. But we cannot change the past.

\* \* \*

*I remember...*

*For I hear the screams of the wounded, so clearly that I almost believe that the war is still present. I taste the charcoal of human nuclear bombs, no more than water balloons to the rest of us. I remember ordering the pilot of my ship Exitium to activate the defence grid, though I know there is no need. Their pathetic missiles are so weak against the augmented titanium of my ship. And then my pilot fires the Exitium, and she serves her purpose. I hear the clear voice of my ruler, the ruler who I should've disobeyed.*

*"Take the lead."*

*And the Earth, the Eathmen, the Milky Way, all of it was destroyed by those three words.*

\* \* \*

Two hours later, it ended. The humans didn't stand a chance. With a mere population of 7.5 billion and less than a thousandth of our experience or materials, it was more of a massacre than a war.

Those waters, those crystal tourmaline waters, those lakes, they slowly dried up until there was nothing left. As thought even they could not bear what we had done.

The harbours are now no more that craters in the ground, a painful reminder of what had happened. The mountains are now no more than piles of dejected ash, a ghost of what they once were. And the valleys are now dotted with abandoned mining stations, the earth mined hollow, the grass dead and brown.

And the music of nature had been silenced long ago, never to be captured by any being.

*And let us pray that the cycle starts again. . .*

# *A Mans Best Friend*

Amber Kusano  
Winner – Second Prize  
Primary Prose

Bright bands of light lit the sky, followed by darkness. The dark grey, trembling clouds filled the sky as roaring thunder echoed throughout the darkness. Light droplets of milky water poured from the heavy clouds, as it splashed onto the soggy sand and dived into the water. As the rain continued falling, the loud thunder began to calm down and the beach was midnight dark.

Gradually, I found myself drifting asleep, after an exhausting day of searching, panicking, and worrying. I curled under a small palm tree, shivering into a tight circle. My body was shivering wet, with water dripping off my fur. My name is Kuma. I could hardly feel my tail, tucked under my hind legs, as I determinedly tried to sleep. It was hard to sleep when you're freezing cold in the middle of a beach, and all you can think about is if your best friend is okay.

Soon the sound of raindrops faded, and the grey clouds slowly danced away and left a colossal sheet of royal blue above. As the patches of grey departed, a subdued glow emerged, as it pleasingly reflected onto the now tranquil ocean. I eventually found myself resting, still shivering cold but managed to drift away into deep slumber. Listening to the now-relaxing sounds surrounding me, I tried not to think about my master. "Where are you right now?" I whined loudly and painfully, "I miss you Dave!"

I tried to recap every last moment I had seen Dave, starting with our weekly surf. We headed out early at sunrise and had a little splash in the bubbly water before I waited in the hot sand. I rolled around and let the sand stick all over my wet fur as I stared at him skimming across the water and rolling down the waves. I would get distracted and start jumping around in the wet sand and running away from the waves as they came bubbling towards me. It is a very fun game I used to play with Dave, but I discovered I could play by myself when he was surfing.

Eventually the sun was up, and I searched the surrounding waves for Dave. I could not spot him anywhere. The wind was getting stronger, the waves grew bigger, and more people left the water, but I stayed calm. After several minutes, I decided to walk along the beach to see if he had accidentally gone onto another section.

My worried mind dreamt about what could have happened to Dave, as I got distracted by all our loving memories. He is an excellent surfer who is very positive and warm hearted. He spends nearly all his time with me in his cosy old cottage, about five minutes from Manly beach. Every night we snuggle up in bed and stay there till breakfast. Last year, we backpacked around Australia, visiting famous landmarks in every state. We also travelled overseas a few times and visited his family and friends, who give me warm hugs and I look forward to seeing them.

Dave is the best person that has ever entered my life and I would never be able to understand anyone as much as him. Ever since he and his wife had a divorce, he's relied on me to keep him going. He sadly left his daughter and moved to Australia, although I still miss little Klara and his wife Anna. I could tell when he was sad because he did not hum his favourite old songs, did not eat his favourite cereal, slept in till lunchtime, and mostly because salty raindrops would scurry down his cheeks. I would always snuggle up close and lick the delicious tears before he could wipe them, and this always made him laugh. He was always there for me too, no matter what and we are practically brothers and I don't know what I would do without him.

The bright beams of light filtered through my eyelids as I woke up. Glancing around, I could not spot Dave anywhere. "Dave! Where are you!" I whined as loud as I could. I was starving and walked to the park to look for food. I felt small and helpless as eventually day by day, loneliness and guilt crept up on me. Daily visitors became concerned and glared at me.

I strolled around with a busy mind as - "Kuma! There you are, we've been looking everywhere for you!" Yelled a lady sprinting towards me. A young girl was next to her as she froze with her mouth wide open.

"Kuma!" The young girl trembled as teardrops ran down her face.

"Klara! Anna!" I barked as I jumped and licked them happily. Maybe they knew where Dave went? Are they going to take me to him? Tears continued falling off Anna and Klara and I licked them off, but they didn't laugh.

They led me to a car, and we all got in. I trusted them, until I realised, we were heading the wrong way, as the beach disappeared beneath the houses. I barked at them to tell them, but they didn't listen.

Soon the car stopped, and they led me on a leash which was very unusual. I excitedly followed Anna to a massive building. Two tall men that were dressed in black, opened heavy doors as they led us into a huge room with a ceiling as tall as trees. There were rows of wooden benches and a wooden stage with a big box on top of a table. I recognised many familiar faces that were Dave's family and friends, and everyone was strangely wearing black clothes. That's when I realised Anna and Klara were too. Some of them had tears which meant they weren't happy. I was uncomfortably leashed in the front row next to Anna. I furiously looked around for answers and listened to a formally dressed man speak on the stage.

Something smelled strangely familiar.

Was Dave here in this room?

But where was he?

# *The Future of Earth*

Cate Atkinson  
Winner – Highly Commended  
Primary Prose

I closed my eyes, the tranquil sound of rain pattering on the roof lulling me to sleep. The moon showed her ebony face, as I rested my tired body. I dreamt about a ruined earth, broken and unfixable, just crumbling apart waiting till the day it would finally die. Little had I known; this was foreshadowing my pivotal adventure to save the planet.

I rubbed my eyes, refreshed from my serene sleep. I wasn't in my home, and shock hit me like a bullet. Around me, an old chair lay broken and untouched, surrounded by walls made of splintery wood. I descried around; where was I?

Outside, all that was to be seen was harsh, barren land; empty. A red sun glowed violently in the distance. How do people survive here? I wondered. Two lone figures scampered towards me, like children on Christmas Day. As I opened the door, I felt the heat blast towards my cold, clammy face as I struggled to catch hold of what was going on. Was this the future?

I stared intently and curiously towards the people. A second later, I was a fighter jet, rapidly firing questions at them, left and right.

"Silence my young friend," a female voice purred. "All will be revealed in good time." It was.

I stared at my watch, my mouth a cavernous hole. I still couldn't believe it. My watch read: 2050. I was flabbergasted. This was 30 years later? My brain was like a propeller whirring, trying to figure out a way to get home, and spread this desperate message. The rest of the day was just a blur. I ate disgusting green blobs for breakfast, lunch and tea. I went to bed, uncertain how I would survive the next day.

I woke up, hesitating to open my eyes, for I feared that if I opened them too soon, I would be stuck there forever. I unfurled my eyelids. I was still here. This day was like none other I'd had before. The torrid weather was all that had happened for years, they told me. We walked around the planet for an hour, as my eyes grew wider than dinner plates as I saw the dryness and barren red sand they were surrounded by. Bottomless craters replaced where the oceans would've been. A single petite lake stood in the heart, disappearing before our eyes. I needed to get back, before it was too late.

We came across, after a couple more hours of walking, to the only lush area. A timeworn professor stood there, warned of my arrival. We discussed ways to get me back to your time, 2020. To me, the task was as impossible as flying was, until I realized, I'd got here somehow, I can get back somehow too. He showed me to an area at the very back of his musty home. Gadgets stood side by side, on makeshift benches. Maps of the old planet were strewn across clay walls. In the centre, an interesting machine, just the height of me, stared right through me.

"We've tried to go back in time, but we are never respected or believed. I even brought photos once, but they portrayed them as fakes. As well as them not believing us, I've grown too large for my precious machine to hold me." He explained, while he stared wistfully at the machine. "We believe that we can send you back too; you are the perfect fit and know what people are like back then."

Inside, I was rejoicing. Earlier, I'd nearly fainted at the idea of being stuck here forever. A grin spread across my face, almost as large as a split watermelon.

I clambered inside the enthralling machine. Cold metal sent goosebumps rippling down my spine. I could see buttons and knobs of all colours, shapes and sizes inside.

"That man must be a genius!" I thought to myself. My eyes glistened like shining stars and tears rolled down my warm face; I didn't want to leave these great people, of this unfortunate generation.

"Well, goodbye, young madam," Spoke the old professor, with a glimmer of hope in his eyes. I was his only chance. I wouldn't fail.

"Farewell, my good friend," The two people murmured, presenting me with a small, brown package. "A present for you," It was an aged, leather journal, with a message inscribed on the cover. "May hope never die" It read. I didn't know how to react. Tears rolled carelessly down my cheeks, as I ran towards the group. My hands embraced the trio, unsure of what to say.

"Goodbye," I said, as I slowly climbed back into the interesting machine. The professor stood there; his finger prepared to push the minuscule button. I closed my eyes and inhaled. Seconds later, I opened them, to find my old disorderly bedroom, full of my mess. I glimpsed down at my watch: 9th May 2020. My shoulders relaxed, and I breathed deeply. I was back. I regained my cool and did what anyone would've done. I fell back onto my bed, sending ripples down my quilt. I was ecstatic to be home. I closed my eyes gently, as I fell into a long, tranquil sleep.

Two days later, here I was. Fingers furiously flew across the keyboard, typing the detrimental effect of global warming, and my adventure. The craters, barren sands, the petite lake. I needed to spread this message. Fast. I loaded it onto the webpage. Time slowed down. My finger hovered over the post button. Why did I hesitate? Did I think that people wouldn't believe me? I knew, deep inside my core, this was the right thing, and we needed to act fast. My heart beat rapidly, and my palms were sweaty. I hit post.

# *The Boy Who Couldn't Whisper*

Charlotte Waterland  
Winner – First Prize  
Junior Secondary Prose

Archie is a rather ordinary-looking bloke. If you were to pass him on the street and offer a polite “Good Morning,” he would bellow, “GOOD MORNING!” back at you. After recovering from the initial shock, you might look him up and down and wonder if his mother hadn't loved him enough as a child.

You see Archie is a rather ordinary-looking bloke, with messy brown hair, deep-set blue eyes and enough freckles to make the Milky Way envious. He looks as unremarkable as most, except for his one most distinguishing feature. His volume. This uncontrolled and amplified feature could give a rather rude impression. However, Archie is a gentle soul and his “GOOD MORNING!” reply was because of a serious problem. No, not a mental illness. In fact, the only thing wrong with Archie, other than a constant craving for peanut butter, is his voice box.

It had been a typical day when Archie was darting down the Pacific Highway on his motorbike when a car, driven by an incompetent tourist, collided with his trusty Yamaha. Whilst many tourists are curious, cultured and careful, some tourists are not. These tourists will climb atop Uluru solely for a selfie (before it was banned or indeed whilst it is banned), take meaningless photos of the pavement or indeed drive on the wrong side of the road. Unfortunately, Archie had met this type of tourist.

He was rushed to the nearest hospital, leaving the remains of his beloved bike on the roadside. The doctors found him, remarkably, still in one piece, but with a piece of motorbike wreckage lodged in his larynx. A remnant of his Yamaha had impaled his voice box and rendered Archie mute. Whilst he lay in the hospital ward in shock, but to all appearances much like his usual melancholic self, the medics decided that they would ‘delicately’ open his voice box and remove what they could inside. Following the surgery, however, it became evident that they had done too good a job. When doctors asked how he was feeling, Archie hoarsely but ear-splittingly replied, “I'M ALIVE, AREN'T I ?!” After the doctors had leapt out of their scrubs, they concluded that they had removed too much of his larynx in the process and the air had too much space to enter and exit, thus limiting his dynamic range to ‘Horror Movie Scream’ level. The medical staff consulted and decided the best outcome would be if Archie left the hospital. Quietly.

This incident severely impacted an 18-year-old's social life. Archie could still play soccer with his mates during lunch, but starting conversations with, “HEY HARRY, ANY PLANS ON FRIDAY?!” quickly ended them. In class, Archie became too embarrassed to raise his hand to participate. He found himself constantly, loudly, impersonated by his peers. Ironically, Archie soon became a ‘quiet student’ because of his increased volume.

However, one unfortunate day, Archie's life turned around. It began with an unknowingly final date with his girlfriend, Amber. They met in their French class (in pre-accident times) where from the cacophony of seductive, mispronounced words grew their relationship. Amber had stuck by him, but things had definitely cooled thanks to Archie's new-found voice. However, that windy day blew in a soon-to-be-ex-girlfriend who was tired of their reclusive dates. Amber wanted to go to restaurants, receive presents and feel excitement, not be bored in a relationship with someone whom she now pitied. So, she raised her voice to match his and screamed, “WE ARE DONE!” Then left as abruptly as she had entered.

Depressed and disconnected, Archie decided to head outside into the bitter wind to buy some peanut butter. He walked around his unusual block, passing the run-down florist shop that neighbored a flourishing garden, then something caught his eye. The Church. No, Archie wasn't religious, he was too sceptical for that. The reason he was drawn there wasn't the limp forms of miniature Christs coating the walls but a sign on the Church noticeboard, declaring a support group was inside. He stepped out of the wind into the Church hall where to his left there was an overly affectionate Down Syndrome teenager, to his right was a young man who was blind and directly facing him was the most beautiful girl he had ever seen. She had fair skin, an easy smile and raven-black hair that hid one of her dark brown eyes as if they were shying away from Archie's stare. This angelic figure was shyly beckoning to him like a lighthouse on a stormy night. Archie took the chair next to hers and from the care package found underneath the seat he pulled out a whiteboard. Since he wanted to avoid an aggressive introduction, he messily wrote on it,

"What's your name? Mine's Archie."

"I'm Bella," she wrote back.

They hit it right off from there, writing instead of talking, scribbling on each other's boards when they could. All the while, Archie wondered why she was here, surrounded by unfortunate people like him.

"Bella, can I ask you something?"

"Ask away."

"Why are you here?"

"I'm deaf, thought you were too."

You could see the realisation so clearly on his face, it was as if the god of epiphanies had just slapped him.

"I have to admit something...I'm not deaf."

"Judging from your reaction, I guessed as much."

After the session was finished, Archie told Bella everything that happened, from the accident to the breakup. She was a keen listener and even offered "with the help of Archie's stolen whiteboards," to teach him sign language. They 'talked' for ages and as the sun's blush faded into the horizon, they hugged each other goodbye. A month of texting and meetings later, Archie tried to ask if she would be his girlfriend using his rudimentary sign language. Despite the message being as jagged as broken glass, she happily accepted. It was that way they stayed together for the remainder of their lives, the silent girl and overly loud boy.

# *One Memory, Two Worlds*

Indy Brock  
Winner – Second Prize  
Junior Secondary Prose

Hailstones beat down on my descending plane. We soared through the sky, over Berlin. The convoy, staying in the triangle formation, turned and began the flyback over Berlin. This time, going in for the raid. 'James, your medicine for today is ready!' I glanced down at my youthful hands and I pushed the plane down. I yelled an order for the hatch to be opened for the life-destroying parcels to be dropped. 'James, put that toy away please and take your medicine.' My head spun confused with two different realities. Suddenly, I lost control of my Boeing B-29 and the plane was being lifted out of the sky by some unseen force. A cool hand rested on my shoulder. 'James, please. I'll give you back your toy plane after you take your medicine.'

Once again, I found myself lying confused in a white room. Did we crash? Surely not. A nurse, dressed from top to toe in a white gown, stepped out from behind the breeze swept curtain. 'Ah James, you're awake!' What on earth did she mean? Awake from what? Who is this nurse? I glanced down at my wrinkled hands and pushed myself up. To my surprise, I fell straight back down into the indent of my body in the bed, my ancient, weak body not being able to hold itself. The nurse sighed as if she had repeated the same sentence every day; 'Hello James, I am your nurse. You are in the hospital!' Recognising the familiarity in her voice, I racked my brain for how I could have ended up here. The nurse smiled gently down at me and passed me a glass of refreshing water and a small capsule, covered in a hard yellow lining.

My plane was nowhere to be seen. My thoughts conclusive in the fact I must have crashed, I tried to look for the remains amongst the burning city of Berlin. Buildings gave into the unsympathetic force of gravity as they collapsed under the weight of themselves. I turned my head slightly to look at the nurse. My whole body ached, my lethargic demeanour exerting the uncompromising force of fatigue over my body. Once again, I melted into a new abyss.

This time I stayed in the white room. I gazed through the window and out into the swaying green trees, lost in thought. An eternity had passed before I heard the sharp knock on the wooden door. It creaked open and a little head with tight ringlets of golden curls and ocean eyes as big as saucers peered around the corner. 'Grandpa!' She yelled excitedly causing rather a big shock to my ears. A man wearing a pristine white coat and a stethoscope came along after her with another lady, the spitting image of the little girl. The man whispered into the lady's ear and pulled out a rough piece of paper from his large coat pocket and handed it to her. Tears pricked in her eyes and found their way down her face, resting in the crevice around her fake smile. Who were these people and why were they crying?

'Hey Dad, how are you feeling?' the lady smiled down at me. Vague memories began to swim around my mind. The consciousness of past joyous laughter. Of a family. My own family? No, surely not. I could not be this lady's father. What about the war? And my plane? I squeezed my grey, distant eyes shut, as though this could force these vague stirrings into a concrete memory. I tried my hardest to remember what had happened to me. Every now and then I'd lock a new memory into place but still, nothing added up. The lady spoke again, softer this time. 'The doctor said you only had a week before...' She trailed off and choked back her tears. 'So we've come to keep you company until then.' Gentle crystal droplets began to trickle down her face again. 'Only a few weeks to live?'. How I was confused! But out of the kindness of my heart, I decided to play along. The little girl looked at me in interest. To my surprise, she reached out and placed her delicate unlined hand into my rough, leathery one. I smiled at her, realising I remembered her from somewhere and squeezed my hand around hers. She squeezed back.

The next few weeks went by in a blur. People would come and play cards with me or talk about their lives. The little girl would hold my hand as I showed her the intricate, authentic paintwork on my plane. They would sit around my bed as I told them tales of the war and my bombing missions with my crew. But that's all I could remember about my life. Everything else was as a faded canvas. The outline faint and the details smudged like a small child's drawing. The memories remained outside my mind's grasp no matter how hard I reached out. Sometimes I would return to my plane and crew as we released the bombs over the destroyed, fiery city of Berlin. But despite those moments, I was never lonely - I sensed I was surrounded by people who loved me.

The day clarity came, I was lying in bed, surrounded by people who had become family. Every single one of them had tears glistening in their eyes. I smiled at them, and laughed as I whispered; 'There's nothing to cry about!' The little girl knelt down beside me and squeezed my aged hand hard as I felt myself drift away. Echoes from the past. Faded memories parading through my mind in a flash of colour. Rough etchings become a clearly defined graphic. Lucidity to my canvas. Floods of memory. I finally had a recollection of myself, the war, my children, my family. I closed my eyes and drew in a final breath, content with life. Then, without another sign, I let go.

# *It Starts With a Promise*

Megan Vinalon  
Winner – Highly Commended  
Junior Secondary Prose

I have heard the stories. About Earth, but in a different time. A time not so different from now yet ever so alien. They faced the same problem as us, one that has been passed down through generations, yet still plagues us today. For them, the problem was less than half of what it is today, but they were the ones who managed to make things take a turn for worse. From what I've gathered, a century ago they were at the peak of discoveries. Each invention served a functional purpose, convenience, except, as with everything, it came with a cost. And the price that was paid was oh so dear.

\* \* \*

Creeping cautiously, my feet glide soundlessly across the cushiony carpet. My hands slide aside the right door of the closet, revealing a set of drawers and hanging clothes. Flipping through the hangers, I finally reach what I've been searching for, a fleecy turquoise robe adorned with white hearts. Lately, the temperature has been fluctuating more dramatically, steaming by day, bone-chilling at night. Hence, I've been needing to wear an extra layer to bed, inconveniently having to slip it on at the dead of night when the cold properly sets in, like tonight. As I reach for the door to slide it back into place, I slip on the loose tie of my robe and grasp the left door to save myself, accidentally dragging it with me.

With my curiosity piqued, it's too difficult for me to ignore the unknown, so I decide to snoop around. I've never really bothered to check this side of the closet, as this is the room I stay in at Granny's house, and I'd always assumed she stored off-season clothing or manchester in there. I was mistaken because these things have accumulated plenty of grime over the years they've spent untouched. Pulling out a medium white box from the top, I choke a little when a plume of dust tickles my face.

As soon as I lift the lid, I know that these are relics from the time before. It isn't as if we aren't taught about it at school, but people with personal experiences from that time prefer not to discuss those painful memories. Many of them, like Granny, feel guilty and responsible for the devastation that has been brought upon us. Inside, I discover a slim, rectangular object with the familiar Apple logo on the back, a phone I presume from what I've been taught; people used them before Holo-Glasses. Of course, it has no charge, but beneath it is a photo printed on glossy paper, the colours barely faded, despite it being more than 50 years old. Turning it over in my hand, I find an inscription which reads: Sydney Harbour, 2020

Looking at the panoramic view of the harbour that my window offers, I can't see the Sydney in the picture. Maybe it's because of the shrinking coastline, but it's simply not there. In the photo, they have tall buildings, but none rise as high as ours today. I also recognise the Harbour Bridge and the Opera House, which have both been swallowed up by the ever-shrinking coastline. Their sky was a brilliant blue in stark contrast to our blazing orange-red sky that turns deep purple at night. But most shockingly of all is the copious amounts of lush greenery. So. Much. Greenery. It Starts With a Promise.

In those times, they could actually afford to use large open spaces to put grass, trees and benches where people could relax instead of using it to construct towering buildings. I never actually realised that Sydney used to look so unlike it does now, so alien. Squinting and turning, I try to visualise the photo lining up with the view outside, and I gasp in delight when it does. I can see it now. The photo is of the area harbour which got swallowed by the shrunken coastline. Scientists have assured us that they have found a way to control it as they recently discovered a technology that's helping to re-form the polar caps, but seeing this with my own eyes makes me realise just how dire our situation really has become.

With a sinking feeling of melancholy, I retreat to the warmth of my bed, putting the box and phone back in the closet and tucking the photo beneath my pillow. Even so, I can't help but glance out the window one more time. Forcing myself to stop and keep my eyelids shut, I simply can't ignore the ache of knowing what version of Earth I could be living in. I feel no resentment towards those from the past generation, but I wish that I had seen the problem for what it really is earlier on and started working towards making my world a more liveable, less polluted environment.

It starts with a promise, to myself, to do everything in my power to fix this before the effects become permanently irreversible. Because I know what kind of Earth I want for my future descendants; a place that is more like the old Sydney, but not exactly. There are some things I know that I absolutely can't change, like the skyscraper apartments, but maybe someday, one day, Sydney will flourish again. It starts with a promise. A promise to myself.

# Invisible

Leilani Nyman  
Winner – First Prize  
Senior Secondary Prose

3rd of October, 2013

I was in fourth grade, nine years old at the time. It was around this time that boys and girls started to show interest in one another, beyond just being friends. There was lots of giggling, and whispering, and secrets. The girls liked the boys, and the boys liked the girls although most were too cool to admit it. I never really understood the banter, pencil stealing, poking, and more whispering. Of course that was all it was, we were still young. Sometimes a boy and girl would hold hands twice and share a cookie, but it never went any further. I was already confused. I just wanted to play football, or tag, and had no interest in holding hands with any girl, most of whom seemed to believe boys had cooties or something. This should have been the first sign.

12th of March, 2016

We had only recently started seventh grade, when a good friend of mine got a girlfriend. Like, a proper girlfriend. They held hands all the time, and sat with their arms around each other. They even kissed sometimes. It didn't bother me initially, but as he spent more and more time with his newfound girlfriend, and considerably less with us I became, well, jealous. I wasn't jealous of him for having a girlfriend, but of the girl who was getting all this time and attention from my friend, whilst the rest of us were left behind.

7th of April 2016

They didn't last very long, my friend and his girlfriend, not even a month when they broke up over some silly little argument. I failed to see what the point of any of it had been, but was sure glad it was over now. Finally we could go back to just being us, hanging out and talking together. Except, we had started to talk a lot about girls. Who was hot, who we would go out with if we could. Not wanting to miss out I picked a girl from my maths class, whom I had never talked to, and promptly decided she would be my crush. This I told my friends so they would stop bugging me about it. I told them I thought she was good looking, and smart, and hoped that would be the end of it.

13th of April 2016

Not even a week after another one of my friends got a girlfriend. Was that all people did nowadays? Another one of my friends suggested I asked the girl from my maths class out, to which I was shocked. Having a crush was one thing, asking her out was a completely different thing. I didn't want to actually date this girl, she was just *nice*. But that was all. I had never even spoken to her, why on earth would I ask her out?

3rd of November 2018

I felt so different. Alienated. Why wasn't I like everyone else? It just didn't make sense. 9th grade, so far, had been horrendous. It was all about girlfriends, boyfriends, and sex. Who was dating who. What they were doing. What they wanted to do. And so on, and so forth. I kept waiting, hoping, that I was just a late bloomer. Any day now, my sex drive would kick in, and I would finally be able to participate in all these discussions. I would finally be normal, and then it would all be good again.

8th of June 2019

So far, no luck. If anything, I've had the opposite of luck. Evening had fallen outside, dyeing the sky a dark midnight blue. I sit by my desk with my computer, head in my hands. Today had been especially bad, rubbing my hands over my face, I tried not to think about it.

If I could just be *normal* for once. Raising my head I pull my laptop towards me, and hesitating a second, before opening a new window. *You have gone Incognito*. The light from my computer hurt my eyes, used to the darkness of my room, and I gingerly turn down the brightness. Uncertainly I begin typing, barely knowing what I'm searching for. *'What's wrong with me?'* A whole bunch of resources pop up, just positive websites full of happiness and "you're just unique!" type of stuff. Not what I was looking for. Letting out an agitated sigh I try again, attempting to be more specific. *'I don't fit in, what can I do.'* Again, google was largely unhelpful. I pause, rubbing my thumbs against my finger. I had...a hunch. But I didn't want to google it. I didn't want to know if it was true.

Taking a deep breath I try a third time. *'How to know if I'm asexual.'* Trying not to shake, I open the first resource. *Asexuality- the lack of sexual attraction to others, or low or absent interest in or desire for sexual activity*. I didn't want to read more. I didn't want to know I was different. But, at the same time it was hugely relieving. After such a long time, finding other people with the same experiences, it made me feel a bit better. I spent hours reading that night, absorbing others' stories, how they dealt with it, how they told friends, how they were perfectly capable of living normal lives. The more I read, the better I felt. Over and over, website after website, the words *'You're not alone. Nothing is wrong with you'* followed me.

But, something still didn't feel quite right. It was all correct, but missing something. On one of the websites another word caught my eye. *Aromantic- having no interest or desire for romantic relationships*.

It was well past midnight by the time I finally went to bed, my mind still swirling. What I would do tomorrow I didn't know, but for today I was content. I didn't feel good exactly, but I felt more at peace at least, and thus closed my eyes.

# Your Choice

Sunny Zhou  
Winner – Second Prize  
Senior Secondary Prose

The scent of raw, white paint envelops your nostrils as you step through the transparent, automated doors and into the grand chamber of the decision hall.

It's frigid floor is antiquated, white parquet with a blend of wear and tear within its tiles -- on it are countless adolescents aligned row after row in order.

The lofty walls surrounding you stand still like motionless giants -- supporting the security camera filled ceilings with its iron grip. The cameras like pitch black eyes beam in all directions. Interrogating the room for anything out of place. Anything not up to their standards.

Silence...

The room is filled with silence. Silence so deafening and obnoxious you question your competency to perceive sound.

You feel the beating of your pulsating heart -- every tap, every beat, every pound. It echoes in your ear as the palpable tension slowly but steadily gets on your nerves. All rational contemplation prior to this disappears leaving you with an excess amount of unnecessary adrenaline and your primitive instincts.

Your thoughts turn to your forthcoming choice. The biggest decision of your natural life. Join the upper class or remain as you are. Money or the ability to feel.

After what seems like an eternity of waiting, movement in the room finally occurs as numbers in numerical order start emerging on the monitor in the front of the hall indicating people's departure from the chamber.

34137692 -- an eight digit number; that is all you are. Insignificant numbers in the vast intricate system exploited by the government for labour -- replaceable and disposable once productivity diminishes.

You enter through a door just left of the chamber, inside there is a woman holding a form of technology you have never seen before. Her opaque, dark hair matches her charcoal, black eyes which are so perilously deep they could swallow galaxies.

"Would you like to see your potential futures?"

You nod slowly and precisely, the standard procedure when dealing with someone from the upper class. Placing her hand on the futuristic device sitting in her palm, the room began to shift. Vivid, oddly realistic phantasmagoria of possible futures flash in front of your eyes -- these hallucinations so terrifying and magnificent, familiar yet so utterly foreign. Darkness consumes the space around you, you feel weightless, your mindscapes become cloudy and then...

\* \* \*

Delicate, incandescent rays of sunlight gleam effortlessly on the rich soil of the elegant, lush meadows. The melodious symphony of grasshoppers and reverberating bees inhale life amongst the dazzling flora -- which dances with ravishing grace, taking the breath away from anyone that speculates.

In the centre of the meadow stand a sweet, timber flat not too big in size. Its exterior walls which were once as white as snow now weathered and exhausted revealing slivers of brown. Holding up the walls are four jittery beams which rattle marginally whenever a gentle breeze visits the house.

Inside the house you see a familiar figure -- its frame, stature and appearance reminds you of yourself, but everything else about him seems so alien.

There are others in the room, a woman around five-foot seven with a face cut right out of a magazine; her silky, amber hair rests flawlessly on her shoulders and her piercing eyes of green are painfully beautiful like the meadow outside. And two children -- ecstatic and euphoric about life.

Laughter and joy echoing within the walls of the flat can be heard. The wholesome smiles of youth can be witnessed. And unconditional, unwavering love can be felt.

This is the lower class. This happiness -- something that cannot be bought.

\* \* \*

The house looks as if it came straight out of a designer's imagination -- enormous and aesthetically pleasing but lacking humanity. It's an unapologetically perfect figure of geometrical shapes of rectangles, triangles and semicircles, which impeccably form the exterior of the house. Its soaring ceilings are held up by wall to wall windows looking over the exquisite Sydney Harbour bridge and its mahogany hardwood floors hug your feet. A paradise by the sea.

Inside you see yourself again but this time his presence is different. He seems taller, better built and the benevolent eyes from before are replaced with emotionless ones. Lines across his forehead and bags under his eyes indicate severe fatigue, rapid aging and endless mountains of work needing to be accomplished -- but he does not care, he does not falter nor does he hesitate. This is what is expected from him. This is what he is. This is all he has. A mindless, almost robotic member of the upper class fueled primarily by pride, money and sheer egoism. Sitting upright, hands securely on his keyboard and feet planted firmly on the solid ground beneath him, he works at optimum efficiency for hours.

No bathroom breaks, no time to eat and definitely no time for socialisation. Just him, his computer and his numbers.

This brings him joy, his pride and ego the source of all his pain but also the source of all his happiness. Knowing his contributions to the world he finds satisfaction in working inhumanely for years. Even the emotionless can feel once in a while This is the upper class -- the superior class. Where happiness is not given, it is earned.

\* \* \*

Opening your eyes you find yourself back in the decision hall. In front of you are two doors lodged next to each other leading to separate directions. This is it. The moment you have been waiting for.

"Are you ready to make your decision"

You take one step and then another. You know this is the right decision.

# Orion's Belt

Isabella Baker  
Winner – Highly Commended  
Senior Secondary Prose

Hannah sat motionless in the spacecraft that had been her home for the past three years and stared at the stars. Luminous bodies of spheroid plasma dotted the inky vastness around her. She remembered her mission with nostalgia. The samples of interstellar dust that she had collected would reveal secrets about the origins of humanity. She had sailed past celestial bodies of golden grandeur and soared through decadent kingdoms of supernova galaxies. Drifting through time and relativity, she entered dimensions of continuums unknown to humanity. Yet as she completed the day's log, she was filled with unease. She shook the feeling and gazed out the window. Orion's belt glittered in the darkness. Soon she would be home.

Earth hung in the inky blackness below her. Yarns of electric light spun themselves around the continents. Clouds hovered in white wisps and oceans wrapped the land in their ancient arms. Africa emerged from beneath the haze and Hannah pictured the deserts and plains where humanity had first emerged to reach for the stars. Her eyes drifted upwards and she imagined civilisations rising and falling beneath the same moon that shone in the distance. She thought of her husband and days at the park. She thought of her parents who had taught her everything she knew about space and she longed for home.

Outside Orion's belt sparkled in the darkness. That vast blackness which had engulfed entire planets and galaxies in supernova explosions since the beginning of time. The room was suffused in a fiery heat and it seemed all the magnetic forces in the universe were converging around her, creating a pressure so strong she could barely move. It will pass, she told herself. Suddenly the spacecraft jolted sharply, throwing Hannah to the floor.

CONTROL: "Hannah do you read?" The fragmented voice began urgently. "We are detecting exponential hydrogen flows."

Blood dripped down Hannah's mouth and pain seared up her torso. The control board flashed warning lights and shook fiercely. The spaceship reverberated as the sound of metal parts grinding against one another in a metallic tumult echoed through the cabin.

CONTROL: "Hannah we are losing you. Do you read?" The voice continued. "Oxygen is erratic and we have a failed sensor." The voice was sharp and disjointed.

Thoughts circulated around Hannah's skull like pieces of wet woollen string. She collapsed over the radio transmitter and began to shake uncontrollably. She took a deep breath, steadied her shaking hands and replied:

HANNAH: "There was a technical malfunction but I can fix it."

CONTROL: "Thanks Hannah. Your mission is being broadcast around the world and we have the Prime Minister here with us now waiting for your re-entry."

Hannah fell to the floor as sirens pierced the cabin. The monitor flashed violently: Cell 2 was leaking oxygen into space. She needed to begin an emergency landing immediately. But as she moved towards the control panel, hazy light surrounded her. She blinked and watched the stars of Orion's Belt become a luminescent string of pearls strung across the cosmos.

"Hey mum," a voice whisper next to her. Hannah turned to see her five year old daughter Emma, who had drowned almost a decade ago, sitting next to her.

Emma wore a white dress and around her neck hung the gold cross Hannah had given her on her fifth birthday. It glittered and glowed iridescently, stronger than any star she had ever seen.

Happiness swelled through Hannah's chest as she kissed her daughter.

"I missed you so much!" She sobbed.

She stroked her daughter's hair and held her tightly.

"You're wearing the dress I bought you," Hannah said and traced her fingers along the lace hem. Emma nodded and rested her head on her mother's shoulder.

"I've thought about you every day," Hannah said. Emma nodded and squeezed her mother's hand.

"I know you have," she replied and Hannah smiled.

"I'm so proud of you mum," Emma began, "but you've got to wake up. They are all waiting for you." Hannah sighed.

"Mum if you don't wake up you're going to die. Please mum, you've got to wake up."

Hannah gazed at the glittering crucifix on her daughter's necklace. She watched it grow until she was no longer in the spacecraft, but surrounded by pools of golden light. Her daughter had disappeared and Hannah was standing on the banks of the river Ganges.

The first rays of sunlight bathed the river in an ethereal glow. It shone like liquid gold and lapped gently in preparation for the souls that would be liberated for their next reincarnation. Hannah watched her rippled reflection in the water and stared around her. Market stalls laid out spices and silks for the day ahead. Children rode bicycles down lane ways. The smell of incense drifted through the air. Hannah closed her eyes and darkness enveloped her. She knew it was time to return.

The sirens ceased and a deep silence filled the spacecraft. Her daughter's voice echoed through her head as a fierce strength grew within her. She would fight to the end. She pushed the re-boot button and began repairing the fuel cells. Hannah compounded ions and calculated aerodynamic velocity but it was too late. There wasn't enough fuel left to return to Earth with the pilot module and cargo hold full of interstellar samples. She would have to choose.

An overwhelming sense of peace filled Hannah. She would give humanity what it needed to solve the mystery of its origins and transcend the bounds of Earth. Eventually her ashes would sail through time and space and return to where life had begun. Soon her husband would join her and they would soar through the universe as one, dancing on ecliptic lines for eternity. Hannah wiped away her tears as she pressed the button that would land humanity's precious cargo and destroy the pilot module. She smiled and whispered "do I dare disturb the universe?" before gazing longingly at the stars around her.

"Yes I do," she answered.



# Winning Entries

A collection of award winning  
poems from the 2020 Mosman  
Youth Awards in Literature

# Cities

Sarina Cai  
Winner – First Prize  
Junior Secondary Poetry

Parade of hot air balloons transcending through the mist  
A smattering of raindrops, buoyant on the beams  
Of sunlight, high on FeliCity

Idiosyncrasy colouring the lips of the sky  
Where it splits in half to meet its people  
Incrementally assembling their stairwells to EccentriCity, yearning

A black hole swallowing everything in its path  
Destruction is alive, and profanity lives inside  
The souls who are only mere children of AtroCity

Starlit heavens in the blackness of the night  
We rise and collapse, like the waves, sinuous  
Like the sun and the moon in SimpliCity, unfathomable

Blue fire carrying wisps of smoke, exhaling against the winds  
Hunger merging into knots of kinetic energy that drives us into  
AudiCity, and the gates are thrown open, wires of widening arms, welcoming

The silence is deafening, tangled with the chords that dangle  
The proximity impossibly close to the hanging lights  
Replicas of wishing stars in ElectriCity

Brittle hearts that are caged like guileless animals, and then exploited  
Slaves committing to your indifferent purposes, yet they faintly pursue  
The pendulous bodies of bark and bone, both bowing at your feet, on the avenues of DupliCity

A deluge of discourse, futile sense playing an intransigent game  
Weaving tissues of lies and fabrication like satin and silk sheets, spun  
Underneath the ridges of MendaCity

Meandering through an endless labyrinth without an egress  
The noxious fumes that engulf our consciousness before pulling apart our limbs, our skin  
Piece by piece, one by one; a layer of impenetrable corrosion covering SeptiCity

Cracks dancing to their own sound of music, leaving marks in the walls, coated with dust  
Everything is ominously still; calm before the storm  
Before these walls of CaudiCity, composed of broken brick, undo and give away

But we breathe in motionless air of somewhere else,  
Somewhere in the hinterland, with intoxication and exhilaration  
Lying at our fingertips; lying at the mouth of AntiCity

# *Imprisonment*

Oscar Pearce  
Winner – Second Prize  
Junior Secondary Poetry

I am the weight that pulls you down,  
I am the voice that stops you,  
I am a sorrow in which you drown,  
I am a trap that needs no crew.

Now life is long, but I feel longer,  
You can't escape the trap I am,  
For life is long, but I am longer,  
You will quickly learn I am no sham.

Only truth shall set thee free,  
The weapon that can end all fights,  
Unseen to you and me,  
But brighter than a thousand lights.

I am a chain that is stronger with time,  
Bars woven out of iron and thought,  
Built for you to relive a crime,  
Of something you once sought.

I am like a god in power,  
An endless weight of guilt,  
I am the thing at which you cower,  
Over ruins of the tower you once built.

I am cage you try to escape,  
I am made for your own punishment,  
An endless metal landscape,  
I am Imprisonment.

# Home

Esther Schroeter  
Winner – Highly Commended  
Junior Secondary Poetry

## **My house**

I sink into your steady rhythm  
my feet tracing the imprints I've made before  
Familiarity cushions my senses  
Your walls stand as barriers  
Pieces of me I leave stringed  
around you  
I can almost smell  
my 11th birthday  
filled with chocolate cake  
and dried apricots  
Ecstatic parents,  
Blowing out the candles  
Or all those times i was alone  
dancing in the kitchen  
to the songs only i enjoyed  
Singing to the world  
and it sung back at me  
Laughing until the sky stopped  
You are always there for me

## **Arcadia**

Pulsing cicadas resonate through the wind  
Creaking frogs sound the night  
We walk for hours  
until we reach hidden valleys,  
clothed in green vines  
We slide down to creek  
tumbling through ferns and eucalyptus  
Crawling across a fallen tree  
heights above the ground we stop  
feet dangling in the breeze  
The soft pitter patter of rain plunging  
swells the damp air  
Slowly we climb the cliffs  
that circle your banks  
Soon we have a view that spans the world  
All that crowds the horizon is bush  
Finally the fast pace race against the sun  
winding through familiar trees  
screaming with giggles  
We run to the dam  
and dive into its never-ending depths

*continues on next page*

### **Inverell**

Rolling plains open before me  
and cattle roar past  
Pounding heat crawls against the dry air  
But soon clouds begin to sweep the sky  
They tumble and roll  
swallowing the once empty atmosphere  
Throbbing energy cracks  
as thunder drums the heavens  
We bounce to the music  
as the rain pelts down  
Pure joy  
We wring out our clothes as we play games  
beneath the tin roof  
and the drizzle plays a melody  
only we know  
The night never ends  
and summer keeps us warm

### **Bilpin**

Autumn leaves scatter the ground  
We run through rows upon rows of trees  
picking apples from the branches  
Horses glide across meadows to meet us  
eating the fruit from our hands  
Laughter swarms the air  
Green paddocks lie either side of us  
Family crowds the expansive garden  
while Easter spirit flocks the wind  
Blue hills stretch across the horizon  
as run to the dam  
We lie across the barge in the sun  
and laugh until the night erupts  
Together we bound back across the grass  
listening as the starry night opens above us  
Back to the house  
where chestnuts now crack in the fire

### **Kioloa**

The cadence in the radio consumes us  
Joy envelopes the air  
We sing, with berry stained lips  
and wet hair soaked with river  
Back we drive,  
To the extensive beaches  
with glassy water  
and rolling waves  
gliding surfboards  
Hurling rain swallows us up  
and we dance on the muddy lawn  
Clothed in wet swimmers  
and as the sky dries up  
We ride through twilight  
drifting across empty roads  
midnight air surrounding us  
As we bike out into the night

### **Mountains**

Open air unfolds around me  
And the breeze kisses my frosted lips  
The sky that never ends  
And the clouds that freckle it  
with the brumbies  
That tumble past the lowlands  
roaring up to the  
mountain tops and beyond  
and the stars that blanket the silent ether  
My feet pound across the landscape  
It's Just me and the world  
Crickets jump at my feet  
As Lakes unfurl from the horizon  
deep blues and greens arise from the ground  
and Ragged cliffs cover the mountain tops  
Lying above the world  
stretched across the grass  
sprawled between the freckled boulders  
I gaze to the familiar landscape

# Brasileira

Bruna Gomes  
Winner – First Prize  
Senior Secondary Poetry

Half of me lives  
On the other side of the globe  
In a plate of papaya,  
A kitchen  
Knife lodged into my shoulder,  
As I get older  
My grandmother's withered  
Hand loses its grip,  
A reminder that three aeroplanes can take me  
To her living room but  
Never her home—

Death is a cruel payment  
For intimacy, heaven  
A jewel, rainforest green  
Blurred by a mosquito screen

Torn by my father's warped vowels,  
His slanted English pulling me closer  
To myself, wraps me in sandy towels  
Used on the beaches of Bahia,  
A pre-teen me shaded  
By coconut trees, the jubilee of colourful  
Blood splattered on sepia  
Memories, nostalgia my second most-felt emotion  
After *saudades*,  
Cured briefly by dancing

Samba in the dark.

Some days  
The most Brazilian thing about me is the  
Mosquito, humming  
In my bedroom, I tap my feet along  
To its buzz, it's bite  
The closest thing I have to a family  
Reunion—

For now, I practice my Portuguese  
Silently waiting for it  
To come in handy,  
Scouring supermarkets for  
A ripe papaya.

# Beauty

Isabella Tan  
Winner – Second Prize  
Senior Secondary Poetry

You're not the kind of beautiful  
That stops people's hearts in a Hollywood film;  
Where eyes lock and breaths quicken-  
Gazes raking down each other's hollow forms and deciding  
"I'm in love"  
Beliefs and values are unnecessary  
Compared to  
The fleeting appearance of two strangers in a moment of time.

You're not the feminine beauty ideal-  
Luxuriant locks of hair that tumble down  
A paper-thin waist  
With smooth, hairless  
Limbs  
A gorgeous, symmetrical face that complements  
A smile perfect enough to  
Fill every billboard.

You don't fit the mould of modern beautiful;  
No flawless body  
That suits every swimsuit-  
Every piece of clothing  
That clings to your body  
Suffocates you; the feeling similar  
To how the words  
'You're ugly'  
Make you feel.

"You're beautiful", I tell you  
You ask me,  
How can I be beautiful  
With disproportioned features;  
Uneven teeth  
Acne scars  
Stomach fat-  
When did you allow yourself to believe  
That these things  
Define beauty?

*continues on next page*

You're the type of beautiful  
Who fits the Google definition;  
"pleasing the senses or mind aesthetically."  
And yet your smile  
The way your laugh rings in my ears  
The scent of your trust  
The taste of your tears  
The feel of your hand is mine  
Pleases not just eyes, but the soul.

You're the type of beautiful  
Who challenges  
Love at first sight;  
For when sight begins to fade  
Alongside appearances that created attraction,  
Some will find a substitute for the 'love' they once felt  
Is unable to be found;  
Whereas the beauty  
That attracts people to you  
Is eternal; through thoughts and feelings.

You're the type of beautiful  
Who doesn't need  
Hundreds of  
Comments  
Likes  
Shares  
You give compliments  
Much deeper than  
Calling the skin-deep cloak one wears  
'pretty'

Your beauty is in  
The songs you sing in the shower  
The colour of your words  
The tears you shed watching movies  
The way you feel when your favourite song comes on  
The lines when you smile  
The encouragement you give  
The look in your eyes when you see someone you love  
The deeds you do that go unnoticed  
The way you live your life

You're beautiful;  
And yet the size of your kindness  
You discredit behind the size of your stomach;  
The constant comparison to the person  
Who poses on your phone screen  
Is pointless;  
Hasn't Twitter yet told you  
"Flowers and Christmas lights  
are beautiful  
but they look nothing alike"?

Your beauty doesn't need magnetic forces  
Like book covers who hold the power of passing attraction  
Those who can look further than skin will see  
You hold beauty  
That is more than your disproportioned features  
Uneven teeth  
Acne scars  
Stomach fat-  
After all, your beauty pleases not just the senses  
But the soul.

# *Burnt Country*

Elliot Connor  
Winner – Highly Commended  
Senior Secondary Poetry

The love of verdant forests,  
Of creamy jaded loams,  
Of silvered woods and mountains  
Is riven through your bones.  
Strong love of dew-drops' glisten,  
Bird screams in dawn-grey skies I knew,  
but cannot share it,  
My love now slowly dies.

I love a burning country,  
A land of scorching flames,  
Of ravaged mourning faces,  
Of dark and charred remains.  
I love her fierce horizons,  
I love her cruel breeze,  
Her beauty and her terror-  
The wild burnt land I see!

The blight of rain-parched forests,  
All tragic to the moon,  
The choking smoke-veiled mountains,  
The heated golden plumes.  
Grey ashes 'midst the corpses  
Where lush lantanas grew,  
And torches lit the tree-tops:  
Ashen confetti flew.

Core of my heart, my country!  
Her bilious sprue sky,  
When, aged by sun-scoured summers  
We watch the wombats die.  
But then the seed pods scatter,  
And we can bless again  
The sprouting of a stubble,  
The hale Aussie grain.

Core of my heart, my country!  
Land of the broken mould;  
For tree-blood 'midst the tannin  
She yearned yet was controlled.  
Across the ragged landscape,  
Watch, after many days,  
The Pompei casts of blackboys  
That turn to life again...

An iron-hearted country,  
A woeful, anguished land-  
All you who have not loved her,  
You will not understand.  
Though Earth holds many splendours,  
Wherever I may lie,  
I know to what brown country  
My homing thoughts will fly.

