

Judge's Report – Joel McKerrow

Junior Secondary Poetry Category

Such a great collection of poems from our young writers. The best of them were able to bring together the reflective/thematic with some really vivid imagery and real-life observation.

First Prize – *Train Ticket*

A really beautiful, short, understated poem about memory and loss. A really large emotional and existential experience is squashed down into something so small and ordinary. The train ticket is not just a train ticket. It is the very embodiment of the connection the writer has to someone who is no longer there.

The brilliance is that the poet doesn't skitter away from this image trying to over-explain the meaning. They simply provide rich sensory details of the rain, the peeling seat, the streetlights, the tear-stained window. These details and the little story vignettes like '*You laughed so hard it filled my ears like morning birdsong*' are what draw the reader into a feeling of absence in a profound way.

The ending is somehow devastating in its simplicity. The ticket becomes the proof of their companionship, but even the proof is fading, even as the person's laughter is fading too. The poet touches heartache with such poignancy in these moments.

The writer allows the image to carry the grief rather than explaining it and this is what makes this a deserving winner. Well done.

Highly Commended – *Birth*

A thoughtful and creative expression of growing up. Fantastic structure through age as milestones charting the emotional journey alongside the physical one. The central concept of the linearity of life is upheld throughout and provides such a strong framework for the poem. As each stage builds there seems more emotional weight. It is not an easy growing up.

There is a depth of maturity in recognising these stages of growth into harder emotions like sorrow, responsibility and the things we can't control. Brilliant, thoughtful, well-structured and highly commended. Well done.

Senior Secondary Poetry Category

What a fantastic assortment of poems in the Senior Secondary category — a great range of writing. The winner and the high commended showing how to take an idea and to earth it.

First Prize – *The Object the Future Chose for Me*

Congratulation on this brilliant, imaginative piece of writing about the strange relationship we have with the person we are becoming. The central idea of an unknown object arriving from one's future self is, in and of itself, a unique, creative motif. It exemplifies the poetic imagination.

The object, almost magically appears, and from there the writer gives physical form to abstract ideas. The future can watch. Tomorrow is close enough to touch. The object can remember the hand that held it.

The most potent part of this piece is that it's never revealed what the future object actually is. It would have taken away from the poem to reveal it. Instead, the un-disclosure of it takes the poem into the universal space, encouraging the reader to wonder what their own future self would send back to them. It invites the reader into possibility. That is hugely powerful and shows great restraint on behalf of the writer.

The emotional movement of the poem is also profound. From 'the ghosts of who I used to be' through to the acceptance of 'my present self is a work in progress.' That line feels like it holds the heartbeat of the poem. Between the ghosts of the past and the future we become, there is the present. And this present is what matters.

The ending of 'The future felt close enough to touch' gave us resolution without an answer. No reveal of the object. Just the future calling the poet forward into who they are becoming.

A thoughtful, intelligent, and highly original concept. Very well executed. Deserving of the win!

Highly Commended – *Broken Tiles*

This was a short but intensely powerful poem. The central image of a breaking glass on tiles, becomes the poet's way of expressing conflict and fear. The opening that tells us such an occurrence was 'predictable' is telling, in that it names not the once-off nature, but an ongoing pattern.

The writer then continues to shape the rest of the poem around this one extended metaphor. Words like 'shard', 'bruises', 'cuts', 'pieces,' all hold an emotional reality inside the physical imagery. And, perhaps, the most devastating that though the floor is cleaned by morning, the damage still remains. In this way the whole poem draws us into conflict and fractured relationship all through the one singular, powerful symbol.

And then to end on the idea that, from here, there is a re-visioning of the authors past experiences. That even when they have felt safe, now they realise '*the floor was never really safe.*'

It's a raw, courageous piece of writing. Congratulations on being commended.