

Thank you Geelong Writers. I have to say I was delighted to see such experimentation and creativity in this shortlist. I'm a big fan of this genre, it's challenging and it was refreshing to find a combination of poetry, fiction and creative non-fiction and some mash-ups of different genres.

You might like to know what I was looking for in critiquing these pieces. I have to admit it was agonizing initially because each piece deserved to be on this list. I had to whittle them down over several rereads and I made my selection over very fine points. I was looking for connection with the topic *Remnants*. It didn't have to be obvious. I was reading for fresh and original approaches. I was looking for mastery of language, genuine emotional engagement and with that comes a kind of integrity and consistency. In such short pieces I was looking for strong beginnings and endings and the arc or shift in the narrative. Again, it could be subtle. After much deliberation, and I mean much, I came up with two commended pieces and three place-getters and here they are...

The first commended piece goes to Guenter Sahr for *St Francis at the Field of Mars*. This work gives us windows into the blighted life and imagined voice of one of our greatest yet underappreciated poets Francis Webb. Guenter takes aspects of Webb's life in the asylum, suffering episodes of schizophrenia, and revives him in journal form so we have an insight into the poet's mundane daily life culminating in the Electrotherapy he was forced to endure. It made me read Webb's poetry and marvel at the man's skill and scope.

The second commendation goes to Jenny Macauley for *On the Rim of a Wheelie Bin*. This reads as memoir or fiction and crafted surprisingly into a haibun incorporating prose and haiku. Jenny captures a memory of those passed on, of childhood, a discovery, a discarding. It reads like an elegy or a tribute. Simply written, as required by the genre, this was an affecting piece.

Third prize goes to by Kerstin Lindros for *The Last Bottle*. This ticked all boxes as a piece of flash fiction as murder-mystery. It jumps right into the narrative from the opening dialogue. A married couple sharing a dinner to celebrate their break-up was credible, the dialogue very real and funny. A thread of humour was woven through the piece. The ending was surprising; a double twist. I felt highly entertained and satisfied by the end of this well-crafted vignette.

Second Prize goes to Alana Kelsall. 'When I heard *Reckless* come on'. We can all relate to memories triggered by music. I liked the response in the form of a contemporary poem in fragments of memory and thought. It reads like a stream

of consciousness – poetic and dynamic. It harks back to another time, of being young, of decisions made, regrets and longings, those life questions. I enjoyed the energy in the poem and the drive to the end. It makes reference to lines in the song but it stands alone without the music. It reads like a confessional poem and the stand-out to me was the poetic language, urgent and powerful.

Ist Prize goes to Jo Curtain for *The Part Leftover*. This is another piece about the failure of a marriage but with a potent sense of confusion and deep loss. This is a creative piece of prose and poetry. Jo captures the immediacy of lost love and life as it was in poetic form but then it shifts to prose and the pared back description of a key place in the past, a powerful metaphor for the doomed marriage. We read of a place often fog bound and shipwrecks littering the coast, a place where lives are lost. It's the kind of piece, like Alana's, that you can read several times and find something new each time. There is hope at the end, a shifting, you can feel a new beginning.

Congratulations to all. I would encourage you to keep experimenting and loving language as you do. Write your passions and be bold, don't be afraid and don't be afraid to cut cut cut. And don't forget to read.

Julie Maclean, October 2023