

Poetry prize taps into life's mysteries

As a child and young adult, MTC Cronin was a voracious reader of novels but curiously stopped, several decades ago, when she started writing poetry. “All stories seemed to become the one story – narrative began to take second place to the idea of the mystery and I gravitated toward reading things I could not easily pin down or even understand”.

Cronin now reads poetry and non-fiction and looks for writing that ‘disturbs, challenges and extends my outlook and inlook’. This year she will judge the 2021 ACU Prize for Poetry, run by Australian Catholic University

Inspired by the Catholic Church’s long-standing tradition as a patron of the Arts, the ACU Prize for Poetry has established itself since its inception in 2013, as one of Australia’s most prized poetry awards. The Prize has as its aim the simple goal of supporting poetry as an artistic endeavour and foregrounding its importance in Australia..

The prize is open to any Australian resident for any unpublished poem of no more than 80 lines. Entries close on 19 July. Winners receive a first prize of \$10,000, second prize: of \$5,000 and third prize of \$3,000.

The theme for this year is Resilience, reflecting on Jaeda DeWalt’s insight, “When we learn how to become resilient, we learn how to embrace the beautifully broad spectrum of the human experience,” and Sharon Salzberg’s thesis, “Resilience is based on compassion for ourselves as well as compassion for others.” Cronin believes that “compassion, empathy and community provide us with the trust, security and courage to be imaginative, exciting, adventurous and kind. Real imagination allows us to ‘create’ a future that is both desired and survivable.”

Cronin’s advice for aspiring poets is to go outside themselves in approaching the topic.

“Don’t put your supposed epiphanies into poetry – epiphanies should come out the other side; they are for the reader. Paradoxically, you can only write from and for yourself so I guess the idea is to make that self big enough and broad enough to accommodate the universe. Everyone and everything should be able to be found there.”

“Poetry is not a panacea. Good poetry tries to make people think about the problems that can’t be solved, not to find a way through them but to find a way of thinking about them. There is as much resilience in dying as there is in living and our whole lives are infused with the mysterious mystery of death.”

Cronin believes poetry prizes have an important role in validating the experience of writing poetry, especially for young and emerging writers.

“People need to discover their motivation for writing, what they want to write and what they have to say. Above all, I encourage people who write poetry to read poetry. Other people’s poetry is your ‘conversation’.”

Then, she says, it is a case of being open to the uncertainty of the form. “When I sit down to write I don’t have a plan. I discover what I want to say as I write. It’s a way of engaging with the world and with other people and with our common condition. Process. This *and* that. Not this *or* that. Poetry is a pivot: on it you can swing and listen the sound made by paradox.”

[Information and entries](#) for the ACU Poetry Prize. Entries close 19 July 2021.

MTC Cronin is available for interview.

Media contact: Deborah Stone Deborah.stone@acu.edu.au or 0414 946 489