

## **Embargoed to 6pm Monday 6 September** **Poetry Prize winner an inspiration for late starters**

In winning Australia's richest poetry prize, Anna Murchison will be an inspiration to late starters in many fields. The prize-winning poet did not even start writing poetry until she was 50.

Murchison, who has been awarded the \$10,000 ACU Prize for Poetry for her poem *Child of Gath-hepher*, is now 54 and still considers herself a "new and unschooled" writer.

For the Hobart-based poet, winning the prize is confirmation that she is right to take the courageous step of becoming a writer.

"We poets inhabit quiet spaces wherein we turn the wheel of our aspirations with hopes of fashioning some small article of truth, some modicum of the essential. While the writing act is solitary, the ACU Prize endows us with a collective moment in which to unite to create an instrument of hope," she said.

The theme of this year's prize was resilience. Murchison's winning poem explores her feelings during a recent experience when her son Jonah needed urgent surgery, and she suddenly had to fly from Tasmania to Melbourne between lockdowns to be with him. The name *Child of Gath-hepher* is a reference to the birthplace of the Biblical Jonah.

Murchison has always been aware that she has a creative side, but she had not explored it until she wrote her first poems in 2017. One of those early works was shortlisted for the Montreal Prize, which gave her a boost to keep going.

"I think poetry allows us to access our emotions in deep and subterranean ways. Poetry allowed me to recapture the trauma and uncertainty of that time in a way that I think is different from what prose can do. It's a completely authentic moment."

ACU Poetry Prize judge MTC Cronin described Murchison's work as "a poem of many journeys". "This is a story of our generational desires to protect, to teach, to honor, to pay homage. To thank for being nurtured."

Murchison is also working on her first novella. She said the different forms provide different opportunities. "If prose is the slow burn, poetry is the ignition point - the spark and fury."

Second prize was won by Melbourne-based poet and former ACU academic Carolyn Masel, and third prize went to Brisbane-based Bruce Clark. Poems were submitted anonymously and judged by poet MTC Cronin from a shortlist of 75 poems prepared by Emeritus Professor Margot Hillel OAM and Professor Robert Carver.

“All of the top three poems were, to me, the voices of speakers who could not be merged, confused or conflated with the sound of others. Strange that in our desire to ‘recognise’, to be ‘a part’ of things, that we also actively search for the strange, the unfamiliar, the standout. It is because we know it will enlarge us,” Cronin said.

The ACU Poetry prize is a continuation of the Catholic Church’s long-standing tradition as a patron of the Arts and is part of ACU’s commitment to the support of arts and culture. ACU Vice President Fr Anthony Casamento said he was delighted to have received more than 700 entries to this year’s prize.

“With the on-going challenges of the pandemic, resilience has been a very important personal trait for all of us. It is so inspiring to see the many ways in which poets have explored this theme and created beauty and meaning out of what is a difficult time across our community,” he said.

Statements from the winning poets, together with their poems are available at [www.acu.edu.au/prizeforpoetry](http://www.acu.edu.au/prizeforpoetry)

All 75 shortlisted poems will be published in an anthology that can be purchased from [www.acu.edu.au/prizeforpoetry](http://www.acu.edu.au/prizeforpoetry)

ACU Poetry prize winners

Winner \$10,000

Anna Murchison (Hobart) for Child of Gath-hepher

Second place \$5,000

Carolyn Masel (Melbourne) for Etymological Wisdom

Third place \$3,000

Bruce Clark (Brisbane) for Mister Micawber

Highly Commended \$1,000

Keith Harrison (Canberra) for Cadences for Ms. Weznecki

Damen O’Brien (Brisbane) for The Dawn

Rod Usher (Melbourne) for Marginal Notes

Anna Murchison and Fr Anthony Casamento are available for interview.

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