

28 August 2015

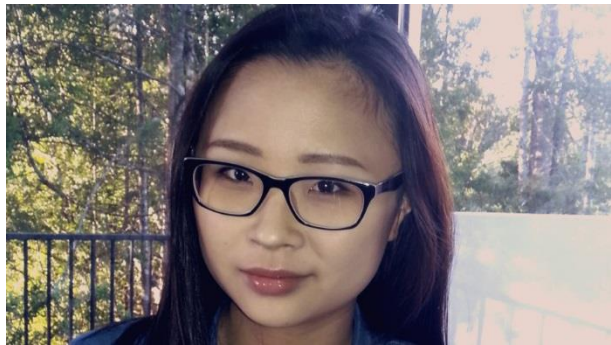
Reviving a ritual—a poet is born

A Year 13 student at Auckland International College has won the National Schools Poetry Award for 2015, organised by Victoria University of Wellington's International Institute of Modern Letters (IIML).

Grace Lee won the award for her poem 'Eileithyia' (printed below), which she says was inspired by the timeless ritual of birth.

Grace says she has been interested in writing and reading poetry for a long time.

"I thought poetry would be a great medium through which I could look at the idea of femininity and how it has changed over time."



Cliff Fell—competition judge, poet and IIML Teaching Fellow—says 'Eileithyia' is about the most universal of all things, being born.

"The title refers to the Greek goddess of childbirth and the poem renews the ancient rituals and rites relating to childbirth by seeing them through young, contemporary eyes."

What drew Cliff to the poem was the gusto and exuberant music of its lines and imagery.

"This is a poem that is unashamedly in love with the idea of life, and which conveys an emotion that is inevitably compelling."

Grace was one of ten finalists in the poetry competition for Year 12 and 13 secondary school students. Entries came from senior secondary students all over New Zealand.

Cliff says he enjoyed reading the range of poems that were submitted, some of them very promising.

Grace will receive \$500 cash, as well as a \$500 book grant for her school library. Her poem will be displayed on posters throughout New Zealand. In addition, Grace and the nine other finalists will attend a poetry masterclass at the IIML, with accommodation courtesy of the Bolton Hotel. The masterclass has long been a highlight of the National Schools Poetry Award, which began in 2003.

This year the full Award programme has been made possible by the generosity of Creative New Zealand and the donors to the Award's Boosted Campaign, in particular Ogilvy & Mather and Weta Digital.

All ten finalists receive a package of literary prizes and subscriptions from the New Zealand Book Council, New Zealand Society of Authors, Victoria University Press, New Zealand literary journals Sport and Landfall, and Booksellers New Zealand, as well as two anthologies edited by the late Harvey McQueen, donated in his memory by Anne Else.

The other finalists are:

- Josh Richard, Collingwood Area School
- Katie Hooper, Timaru Girls' High
- Anastazia Docherty, Cambridge High School
- Leah Dodd, New Plymouth Girls' High School
- Holly Morten, Otumoetai College
- Sarah Liu, Epsom Girls' Grammar School
- Alyxandra Devlin, St Mary's Diocesan New Plymouth
- Amy Huang, Rangī Ruru Girls' School
- Jake Kelly-Hulse, Sacred Heart College Auckland.

Grace Lee will read her poem at 1pm today in Auckland International College's school hall as part of the school's celebration of National Poetry Day.

Eileithya

Her belly is effervescent—
explosive with life bursting forth,
the buttons on her blouse hanging on
by straining threads.

Dewy green fields run on for miles in her womb;
blood-roses bloom from veins, cords,
saltwater, and steam with life.
Passion breathes hotly into the greenhouse and it grows—
it *grows*.

She's a furnace. Snow melts at her feet,
the buried daisies stir,
stand close to her and feel the heat radiating
from the fire of her goddess-stomach.

Her swollen feet blossom from an old earth.
They sing to her, the stones,
to the serpents twining,
to the moon-rabbits kicking in the meadows,
and she glows.

She cruises by, a juggernaut,
parting the seas
her hips sway to the ghost of hymns
sung on the banks of the Euphrates.

She carries a dynasty with her;
her skin strains over a family—
three hearts, six kidneys.
Spring draws near, and the first cries with it.

For more information contact Cliff Fell on 04-463 5815 or visit the National Schools Poetry website: <http://www.schoolspoetryaward.co.nz/>

Issued by Victoria University of Wellington Communications & Marketing. Kristina Keogh, Assistant Communications Adviser, can be contacted by emailing kristina.keogh@vuw.ac.nz or phoning (04) 463 5163 or 027 563 5163

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