

Poetry Shelf celebrates Kathleen Grattan Prize for a Sequence of Poems



Robyn Maree Pickens

Robyn Maree Pickens is the 2021 winner of the Kathleen Grattan Prize for a Sequence of Poems. The annual competition is organised by Auckland based writing group, International Writers Workshop (also known as IWW.)

Vana Manasiadis judged the competition and described Robyn Maree Pickens' winning entry, a sequence entitled "High clouds", as "a supple, intimate, fragile and extremely powerful work. I went to places in each of the poems that I couldn't have guessed at from the beginning, the work stranges expectation – and this is what the sublime in poetry should do, and in this case does".

Robyn kindly gave me permission to post a poem from her winning sequence.

That gasp in your teeth

Where would we have gone with all this *jää*?

I learnt *jää* after *lumi*

When we crossed the bridge
you pointed at the frozen river
& said *jää* but I heard *yar*

I mean there is too much *jää* to press you
against a tree in the forest
spruce, larch, birch

Too much *jää* to unwrap
the scarf from your neck

Jää rucked around a wave particle

Pack ice *jää* sharded along the shore

& when we speak we say *virvonta ystävä* fainting willow

but we mean
you are new to me

& we ransack google / follow / request / heart

Robyn Maree Pickens

There were two runners-up: **Kerrin Sharpe** for her sequence, 'Te hau o te atua/The breath of heaven, and **Marie McGuigan** for her hybrid sequence, "The Goose Wing".

Vana described **Kerrin Sharpe's** sequence as "an incredible work which has continued to generate multiple layers and emotional landscapes with every read; the sculpting of its physical geography is stunning and palpable".

Vana described **Marie McGuigan's** sequence as "an extremely rich work with breath-taking images that come together to move in all senses – into and out of form, the past, the air, language, and always deep love and leaving".

Marie kindly gave me permission to post a poem from her winning sequence.

She is riding on a goose wing

a birdboned scapula that supports her hollow frame. Ease of
wind, rush of flight, she is empty and opened out

She has no wish
to land – to be part

of the sour land
the milk swill the
pile of piss soaked
sheets a mouse in
the knife drawer and
the fur flaked black
rim around the bath

No wish to fall
on a plate of
broken teeth
split lips and wide
shining Chevs

Stay high on the goose wing, she says and calls to her sisters. The goose will gather ganders. The sisters will emerge, shoulders clenched, skin prickled, from deep within the rock.

They will fly with her on goose wings too towards the crystal east.

Marie McGuigan

Robyn Maree Pickens is rarely seen IRL or URL as s/he is in the final stages of finishing he/r critical-creative PhD on reparative ecopoetics. *That gasp in your teeth* was written in early 2020 when Robyn was on a writer's residency at Saari, in Finland. Robyn's [website](#)
[Photos, interview and poems](#) from Finland residency.

Marie McGuigan is a teacher, a traveller, a parent and poet. Her words are taking more space in her life now and she is beginning to value their power. A graduate of Hagley Writers Institute, she is honoured to share joint runner up of the Kathleen Grattan Sequence of Poems with her tutor Kerrin P Sharpe.

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