

## SENIOR POETRY

### WINNER OF FIRST PRIZE IN SENIOR POETRY, AND GRAND PRIZE WINNER : JOANM DAVIS

(The poem was inspired by a visit to the rainforest at Mission Beach)

#### RAINFOREST N.Q.

In this place of meditation . . . a concept of Humanity  
is rooted in the present but blooms beyond my sight:  
I can see and describe the texture of bark,  
measure its base within a circle of anxious arms,  
sift the richness of the mulch of layered years,  
weep with cold when living light is held  
from the proven sun then wake to watch refreshed  
a colour sequence slice from melting leaves;

High, high away from my cluttered sight  
swings the touch and beauty of a blossom,  
exhilaration, fragrance, pollen, falling  
seed; I cannot fly, this canopy  
of Time prevents my climbing from the shining  
black and red and ochre at my feet.

Long ago, in the dreaming – Girroo Gurrll,  
part man part eel, rose out of the ocean  
and saw, with happiness, the new land.  
He swam through the sea, journeyed underground  
to walk in the rainforest, giving names  
to everything, hills, streams, animals and birds;  
the tribes of men multiplied and looked out to sea:  
Chivaree, the Seagull Man, came by canoe  
from the Torres Islands, making dances, beating drums,  
calling the sound of the cockatoo dance alive  
in the forest; with feathers and masks, with his Brother Ee-all

he danced, then stole the daughters of Nyungoo the pigeon;  
"Ayee, ayee, Quinkan!" — the spirits inhabit the dark,  
the clefts, caves, and waters, hidden green and shining.

And the tribes of men looked westward to the sea  
to know the Macassans in their fishing praus,  
to sing like the Baiini; and the tribes of men  
looked eastward to the sea to know the Badu  
and sing of the travels of man and of spirits  
after death; and from the sheltering forest  
the tribes of men looked east and west — "Balanda,  
Balanda," — the Dutch, the Spaniard, then Captain Cook;

one tribe of men-in-ships hove to and named again  
the mountains, rivers, bays, the plants and vines,  
and wrote these alien names — "Balanda, Balanda!" —  
with the deeds of Bligh, and Flinders, 'Pandora' wrecked,  
the escape of the 'Mermaid'; those tribes of singing men  
spoke the journey of Leichhardt into their songs.

Look through the curving gape of a black chasm  
to a strip of mild dark pricked by light  
while the forest walls lean inward to shield this scar,  
a wound from man's sword in the battle of interaction,  
but the victories are by no means onesided.  
Across the road fireflies blink suddenly,  
just there — no, there — near that fallen tree,  
in the underbrush, there's no moon here,

moist smell of leafmould moves with my feet,  
decay and regeneration, "Which way?"; isolation  
in the brilliance of fireflies; tentacled vines seize  
the wrists, the ground is broken-darkness scored by light  
pecking at eyes, staring, beneath the tree fern looming  
stark and still as a rib-cage in the breathless night.

. . . "Have you read it? — you must have read it — his NARRATIVE OF AN EXPEDITION by the botanist Mister William Carron — only three survivors; led by Edmund Kennedy, noble fellow, a surveyor wasn't he?—a Guernsey man, from the Channel Islands — thirteen men there were, left Sydney in April of last year to walk, to walk! from Rockingham Bay to Cape York through trackless swamps and jungles, starvation horror, disease, and him only thirty when speared by the blacks — but they're not all bad, there was Jacky Jacky," . . .

fear for the Brothers Jardine encircled and caught by the forest in the 'wet', the alien horses and cattle die; in the footsteps of Hann, Mulligan finds the Palmer gold; "Ayee, ayee Quinkan! — spirits inhabit the shining dark — Ayee, Ayee!"



