**Judging for Friendly Street Poets – 2021 Single Poet Volume**

Below is the judge’s report from Chris Mansell. She did not have the authors’ names, which have been inserted here afterwards [square brackets].

Chris Mansell wrote:

These manuscripts showed a high level of competence and many took risks. There’s obviously a depth of talent. I thought three of the manuscripts especially good:

* *The Natural World Does Somersaults* [Shaine L Melrose]
* *The Underside of Bark*[Gaetano Aiello]
* *Lament* [Michele M. Saint-Yves]

All of these manuscripts showed good technique and were ambitious. All were original, with something noteworthy to say. It is a cliché to state that it was a difficult choice but it was, in fact, a difficult choice. Should every line be as close to perfect as it can be? Should the themes always be large? No and no, but poems need an honesty of purpose and an honesty of diction. All three of these manuscripts do. In the end, given that all three manuscripts were good, I went for the one that had vigour and where the poet seemed to be most present in the work.

**Winner**

My choice for winning manuscript, *Lament*, was interesting, confident, and skilled. It moves from Scotland to Australia (Adelaide/Sydney) and back via the Pacific and PNG, exploring death and love. It is at times witty and manages the big issues and the small (for example, the first poem successfully brings together a cancer diagnosis and a much larger (cosmic) idea). So, though serious, there is energy in this manuscript. The poet well understands how to echo and nuance language. The poet is not afraid to use good, simple lines that sing , e.g. ‘I no longer catch your breath’ (re friend/lover with breast cancer). The biographical notes pull you in. There is acute observation and some lines that seemed obvious and truthful once they had been written (e.g. ‘Evolution has always been about survival of the nurtured’). I was pulled in by this manuscript. I could hear a real person and poet behind the words. The manuscript engages and at time challenges.

**Highly Commended**

*The Natural World Does Somersaults* richly evokes times and places often of childhood, where an ancient pine tree gives ‘a kind of rough love/to juvenile embrace’. It is indeed a natural world, though the world of people can intrude, suddenly, like a man with a gun in the short poem, ‘Him, Her, Me’ and through the trials of a rich life (that gun comes back, in a different form in ‘Colours we wear’). The world is not without love, but also not without threat.

*The Underside of Bark*is a great title. You immediately want to know what’s there, under the flyleaf. I especially liked the tone of this manuscript. It is deceptively informal sometimes. The poems are well-structured and the imagery surprising and even delicate (‘Where little flowers are butterflies/With tips of toes glued to sand…’) and sometimes, most definitely not (some of the imagery in ‘The Gift’ for example). In this manuscript, too, there is a definite sense of place.