

PRESS RELEASE: The AVBOB Poetry Gala 2021

POETRY PULLS US TOGETHER: THE 2021 AVBOB POETRY PRIZES

THE AVBOB POETRY COMPETITION AND POETRY GALA

The AVBOB Poetry Project announced the winners of the fourth AVBOB Poetry Competition on Tuesday evening, 17 August, celebrating in fine style. The winners in all 11 language categories were each awarded a cash prize of R10 000 and a R2 500 book voucher. The three finalists in each language category will also see their poems in the annual anthology, *I wish I'd said... Vol. 4*, which was launched at the moving and uplifting event, livestreamed via social media.

Compère Rozanne McKenzie opened the evening with a reflection on the astonishing growth of youth poets, who dominated the competition – 84% of the finalists were poets aged 35 and under. “In every category, except English and Afrikaans, we have a youth poet as a winner!” she said. “This speaks volumes about the youth who are speaking in their mother tongues. It also reveals the raw potential of our country’s young people, which is a cause for great hope for the future.”

The musical entertainment followed sounding a poignant and powerful note. Double bassist, Viwe Mkizwana’s ostinato solo framed a call-and-response duo with singer-poet, MoAfrika ‘a Mokgathi. Her resonant refrain ‘My people don’t die’ was an inspiring statement of faith mirroring the resilience and courage of poets and poetry.

AVBOB CEO Carl van der Riet noted that COVID-19 had been a severe test. He extended his sympathies and condolences to those who have been impacted by the pandemic and renewed his commitment to all staff and stakeholders.

Van der Riet said the AVBOB Poetry Project had come into existence in July 2017 with one clear goal “... to provide those at a loss for words with poems that speak to their suffering. The AVBOB Poetry Project continues this aim and includes a belief in *ubuntu*. We believe that by enabling each person to see and know their own humanity through the humanity of others, we contribute to the healing and restoration of ourselves and our communities.”

He also reflected on the remarkable 35% growth of entries in 2020 with 7 124 individual poets sending in a total of 41 149 poems, almost exactly double the number of poems submitted in 2017, the first year of the competition. He said, “In the past four years, a grand total of 121 629 poems were submitted and the online AVBOB Poetry Library now offers more than 14 000 selected poems of comfort.” These works are freely available to the public for use at funerals and memorial services, or simply to read in moments when inspiration or consolation are needed.

With 4 100 new poems added to the AVBOB Poetry Library in 2020, each poet was paid a R300 usage fee. “This equates to an investment in South African poets of R1 230 000,” Van der Riet said, “and shows AVBOB’s commitment to providing consolation for those who mourn.”

Douglas Reid Skinner, English editor and co-translator of the winning poems, spoke from London. He noted an overall improvement in the quality of entries in 2020, with writers digging deeper and shaping their poems better. He praised the educational value of the competition, suggesting that aspiring winners should start by reading the poems in the poetry library. He reiterated that study and reading are the only route to writing good poetry: "There are no shortcuts. It's not easy street."

He commented further on AVBOB's primary role of looking after the departed and bereaved, and secondary support of education, the cornerstone of any society: "They put refurbished shipping containers into schools as libraries, fully stocked with books, and they have donated hundreds of millions of rands towards the schools infrastructure project. They are helping to build the future."

The annual anthology, *I wish I'd said... Vol.4*, which was launched at the online gala, was compiled by editor-in-chief, Johann de Lange, and Sesotho editor, Rethabile Possa-Mogoera. It showcases the three finalists and a series of commissioned poems in each official language, including four translations of Afrikaans poems by Lynthia Julius into !Xun Thali and Nama.

De Lange said the poems received in 2020 bore witness to the way the pandemic had changed the world and testified to communal suffering. "Whether it is an elegy or an epitaph, a jisei, haiku, or lament, poetry comforts and nourishes the dying as well as the living," he concluded.

In alphabetical order of language category, the 2021 AVBOB Poetry Prize winners are Jacques Coetzee (Afrikaans), Ann Scarborough Moore (English), Bongani Kleinbooi Skhosana (isiNdebele), Sinethemba Lusawana (isiXhosa), Hlulizitha Zwelihle Nxumalo (isiZulu), Tebogo Patricia Mamabolo (Sepedi), Thabang Khaba (Sesotho), Beauty Tlhabi (Setswana), Enocentia Matsebula (Siswati), Jeremiah Neluvhalani (Tshivenda), and Owen Maswanganye (Xitsonga).

Register online at www.avbobpoetry.co.za to enter the competition and to read the poems in the poetry library. To order I Wish I'd Said... Vol.4, SMS the word "poem" to 48423 (at a standard cost of R1.50 per SMS) to have it posted to you at a total cost of R240, or it is also available from most good bookstores.

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The 2021 AVBOB Poetry Prize winners:

In alphabetical order of language category, the 2021 AVBOB Poetry Prize winners are:

LANGUAGE CATEGORY:	Afrikaans
WINNER:	Jacques Coetzee
POEM:	<i>Doepa vir Allenigheid</i>

2 nd place	3 rd place
Maretha Maartens Poem: <i>Die Senotaaf van Emmaus</i>	Salvia Ockhuis Poem: <i>Koud</i>

LANGUAGE CATEGORY:	English
WINNER:	Ann Scarborough Moore
POEM:	<i>The Message</i>

2 nd place	3 rd place
David Muirhead Poem: <i>Intervention</i>	Phelelani Makhanya Poem: <i>Covid-19 in the village</i>

LANGUAGE CATEGORY:	isiNdebele
WINNER:	Bongani Kleinbooi Skhosana
POEM:	<i>Ungaweli Kude NoSomnini</i>

2 nd place	3 rd place
Happy T Skhosana Poem: <i>Indlela KaZimu Ithembekile</i>	Musawenkosi Mahlangu Poem: <i>Zifihle Kuye</i>

LANGUAGE CATEGORY:	isiXhosa
WINNER:	Sinethemba Lusawana
POEM:	<i>Abongikazi</i>

2 nd place	3 rd place
Sisikelelwe Dlekana Poem: <i>Ulwimi lweenkobe</i>	Sinesipho Madywabe Poem: <i>Intliziyo lilwandle! Nqwa nothando</i>

LANGUAGE CATEGORY:	isiZulu
WINNER:	Hlulizitha Zwelihle Nxumalo
POEM:	<i>Amathonsi okuvalelisa</i>

2 nd place	3 rd place
Sinenhlanhla Manzi Poem: <i>Isihlahla sempilo</i>	Nomthandazo Sithole Poem: <i>Engeqiwa ntwala</i>

LANGUAGE CATEGORY:	Sepedi
WINNER:	Tebogo Patricia Mamabolo
POEM:	<i>Kabaganyo ya dithoto</i>

2 nd place	3 rd place
Kgalalelo Holliness Aphané Poem: <i>Di re tletše dimpa</i>	Mapule Ramaila Moswane Poem: <i>Mo tlogeleng</i>

LANGUAGE CATEGORY:	Sesotho
WINNER:	Thabang Khaba
POEM:	<i>Re batla ditlwebelele</i>

2 nd place	3 rd place
Thabo Kane Poem: <i>Mme O Bohlokwa</i>	Lehlohonolo Mofokeng Poem: <i>O tla kgutsa neng?</i>

LANGUAGE CATEGORY:	Setswana
WINNER:	Beauty Tlhabi
POEM:	<i>Ngwetsi ya malapa</i>

2 nd place	3 rd place
Siyabonga Clinton Koribe Poem: <i>Botlhoko</i>	Pontsho Moepeng Poem: <i>Loso wee!</i>

LANGUAGE CATEGORY:	Siswati
WINNER:	Enocentia Matsebula
POEM:	<i>Kukhula kwembewu</i>

2 nd place	3 rd place
Lindelani Khumalo Poem: <i>Lubhubhane</i>	Beketele Mahlalela Poem: Lohheya ndzini!

LANGUAGE CATEGORY:	Tshivenda
WINNER:	Jeremiah Neluvhalani
POEM:	<i>Hu divha Nwali</i>

2 nd place	3 rd place
Sheila Maphalala Poem: <i>Lufu</i>	Elelwani Muthelo Poem: <i>Muswa</i>

LANGUAGE CATEGORY:	Xitsonga
WINNER:	Owen Maswanganye
POEM:	<i>Ntshembo</i>

2 nd place	3 rd place
MR Mathye Poem: <i>A ndzi ku yi ta na mpfula</i>	Martin Ngobeni Poem: <i>U ri dlayisa ndlala</i>

PROFILES: AVBOB POETRY PRIZE WINNERS

Jacques Coetzee (Afrikaans)



Jacques Coetzee lives in Cape Town with his wife and a guide dog. He is a singer-songwriter in the band, Red Earth & Rust, and he tutors English literature at Unisa. He co-published a collection called *The Love Sheet* with Barbara Fairhead, and his debut collection *An Illuminated Darkness* was published by uHlanga Press in 2020.

Ann Scarborough Moore (English)



Ann Scarborough Moore is a graphic and fine artist from Kenilworth, Western Cape. She was a finalist in the second competition and won the first AVBOB mini-competition in May 2020. Her word pictures build bridges for grieving people who can't express themselves. She has written poetry ever since learning to hold a pencil and returned to poetry after a 34-year break. She is eternally grateful to AVBOB for this platform that fostered her poetic recovery.

Bongani Kleinboo Skhosana (isiNdebele)



Bongani Kleinboo Skhosana repairs shoes at his Manyebethwana home in Mpumalanga. There is a rich heritage of cobbler poets in the 19th Century, but he is the first South African poet to adopt this noble mantle. It was a small step from repairing soles to writing poems for the broken-hearted. He's known the struggles of depression and holding oneself together after bereavement. He's grateful to the AVBOB Poetry Competition for providing a platform to comfort the grieving.

Sinethemba Lusawana (isiXhosa)



Sinethemba Lusawana lives in Engcobo, in the rural Eastern Cape. A final-year student at Walter Sisulu University, he combines his engineering studies with poetry, like other famous poets, Athol Williams, Robert Berold and Rešoketšwe Manenzhe. His poem honours the medics of the pandemic who are in his heart and his prayers. His first entry into a poetry competition, he never imagined seeing this day!

Hlulizitha Zwelihle Nxumalo (isiZulu)



Hlulizitha Zwelihle Nxumalo is from Hlabisa, KZN. He works as a merchandiser in the retail industry. He lost his father as a child and imagined that if he were an adult with money, he could have prevented his death. His winning poem was written to ease his heart. Like the high-profile isiZulu poet, Mzwhake Mbuli, a sought-after bard at funerals in the '80s, Hlulizitha found his calling by honouring community members with elegies at the request of his friends.

Tebogo Mamabolo (Sepedi)



Tebogo Mamabolo is a second time winner in the Sepedi category. She stays in Soshanguve, south of Tshwane, and works as a quality control consultant in the pharmaceutical sector. Her winning poem this year exhorts people to pay attention to the matter of a will to prevent disharmony at the funeral. She believes the AVBOB Poetry Prize has helped her better express herself in her writing.

Thabang Khaba (Sesotho)



Thabang Khaba from Matswakeng, Free State is a self-employed backyard farmer whose poetry features the drought. Following in the fine tradition of farmer poets, like Modikwe Dikobe, Charles Mungoshi, and W.E.G. Louw, he says, "We need a permanent solution to the water crisis, so that farmers can produce crops, livestock don't suffer from hunger and thirst, and people have access to clean water."

Beauty Tlhabi (Setswana)



Beauty Tlhabi from Thutlwane, North West, works as a nanny. She follows in the footsteps of literary giant, Gcina Mhlope, who started her working life as a domestic worker. When she joined the Pene Botshelo Writers Forum in her teens, Molebatsi Bosilong, encouraged her to pursue her love of the written word. Her winning sonnet is a response to intense despair at the sheer number of funerals coinciding with the burial of a close friend.

Enocentia Matsebula (Siswati)



The youngest winner of the competition this year is Enocentia Matsebula, 17, from Kamhlushwa, Mpumalanga. Currently pursuing an International Baccalaureate at Waterford Kamhlaba in Eswatini, she loves writing short stories and novels. While looking at her baby photos in the family album, she realised how her parents' love and care had helped her grow into young adulthood. She has always wanted to enter a writing competition in her mother tongue.

Jeremiah N̄eluvhalani (Tshivenda)



Jeremiah N̄eluvhalani (21) from Ṱhohoyandou, Limpopo discovered his love of poetry as a teen. Without a platform to grow his passion, poetry remained a hobby. He began writing poetry when he heard about the AVBOB Poetry Competition in 2019, and is grateful for the opportunity it gave him. His poem responds to the loss of his beloved uncle, who was a pillar of his family.

Owen Maswanganye (Xitsonga)



Owen Maswanganye from Chudu, Limpopo now resides in Pimville, Soweto. He works as a CNC programmer by day and a poet by night. He follows in the footsteps of other poet programmers like the late Hugh Hodge and JM Coetzee. He believes that poetry can heal the nation, physically and spiritually. The AVBOB Poetry Competition gave him a platform to speak with, and to, the nation.