

Fellowship of Australian Writers

2016 National Literary Awards

Results

(1) Excellence in Non Fiction.

First Prize:-

Tim Winton. 'The Boy Behind the Curtain'.

Highly commended:- Lesley Harding. 'Margaret Preston Recipes for Food and Art'; Nick Richardson. 'The Game of Their Lives'.

Judges' Comment.

A good selection of books was entered this year. The entries were generally of a high standard. Tim Winton's collection of essays is thought provoking and totally engaging, a superb collection of life experiences drawn from humility and wisdom. Both judges were deeply impressed, not only by the content, but by the very high literary quality of his entry. A worthy winner from a strong field.

Lesley Harding's book on the life and work of the noted Australian artist, Margaret Preston, is a brilliantly presented book - a treat for both the eyes and the mind.

Nick Richardson's engagingly and entertainingly written book makes a significant contribution to Australia's sporting and military history. Both books are fine examples of the writers' and publishers' craft and are highly commended.

(2) Christina Stead Fiction Award.

First Prize:- Liam Pieper. 'The Toymaker'

Highly Commended:- Melina Marchetta. 'Tell the Truth, Shame the Devil'; Jane Harper. 'The Dry'.

Commended:- David Dyer. 'The Midnight Watch'; Tania Park. 'Blind Justice'; Sue Parritt. 'Pia and the Skyman'.

Judge's Comment.

The entries this year were less than in previous years but were of a high quality. What we looked for initially was a story that grabbed our attention early and maintained our interest throughout. Many of the books petered out as the book progressed or had disappointing endings.

The winner, 'The Toymaker' met this criteria spectacularly with a totally unexpected twist at the end. We also had a number of self published books and though we'd encourage people to back their own work, the lack of editing was very apparent so they fell over on the second criteria, of grammar, flow and plot.

(3) Anne Elder Poetry Award.

First Prize:- Berndt Sellheim. 'Awake at the Wheel'.

Commended:- Lisa Brocknell. 'Earth Girls'; Susan Varga. 'Rupture'; Jennifer Crone. 'Our Lady of the Fence Post'; Stuart Barnes. 'Glasshouses'.

Special Mention:- Carmine Frascarelli'.

Judges' Comment.

Berndt Sellheim's combination of poetry and prose is impressive. It deals with pressing issues, impending ecological crisis, the scathing effects of capitalism, our own mortality. But it is also lyrical and masterful. We especially liked 'The Experience Machine', which is epic in scope and its all the right bases. It encapsulates the modern existential malaise without losing its sense of humour. Technically accomplished, especially the line breaks; this is vital poetry. Sellheim is grounded in the art and craft of poetry, he embraces post modernist poetry and runs with it, producing a thought provoking selection.

Brocknell is a masterful poet in the making, and her bold in-your face approach is refreshing. She is not afraid to display her vulnerabilities as well as her strengths. She does so without ever being precious and/or self indulgent. Australia has always produced talented women poets and we should celebrate that.

Dorothy Porter may be her heroine, but Brocknell is poised to go further. Strong metaphors and striking imagery make this a rewarding read.

Susan Varga For her first poetry book - Varga considers herself primarily a prose writer - she has, nevertheless delivered a punchy, raw and profound collection. Varga's recovery from a severe stroke, the 'Rupture' of the title, is searing in its honesty and bold and brave in its execution. Her passion for life and her celebration in reclaiming her life makes this book a real gem.

Jennifer Crone's idea of basing this selection on the aftermath of the Bali bombings in 2002 is relevant and contemporary. Two hundred and two people were killed, including eight Australians. The Marion apparition' at the construction of the memorial site brought crowds of visitors.

These poems intrigue and bring into focus issues of faith and the metaphysical. How can Christianity and Islam be reconciled.

The 'war on terror' solved nothing. Now that we live in a world of satellites and

terrorism we need more collections like 'Our Lady of the Fence'. Generally poetic sequences veer towards the self indulgent, but here Crone reins it in.

Stuart Barnes has a 'beautiful and sophisticated selection of poems ... the manuscript presents a deeply poetic sensibility at work', so commented the judges of the Thomas Shapcott Poetry Prize. And they are right. All John Asbery acolytes should check this out. At his best Barnes is compelling, imaginative and dramatic. At times he can be obscure, and this holds this collection back. But he is a major poet in the making; watch this space!

Carmine Frascarelli. Ali Alizadah writes, 'Frascarelli's is a committed work of resistance, and a fascinating work of art'. Good on Rabbit for publishing such edgy, avant garde poetry. Where it works it is brilliant and celebratory. As Sydney Road becomes increasingly gentrified we need works like this to remind us what it was. From a working class immigrant suburb to the hang out of the bohemians, this is an important Melbourne story, as significant as the homeless at Flinders Street Station. We are not sure if Frascarelli has quite mastered the form, but we look forward to future works.

General comment:-

Some of the other works were strictly 'vanity' publications, which is all well and good, but several of these publications have limited appeal. Other titles were earnest and sincere; they should sell well; but were generally safe, and lacked risk taking.

(4) Barbara Ramsden Award.

Cancelled.

(5) Community Writers Award.

First Prize:- Four in a Corner Writers' Group. 'Perspectives'

Judge's Comment:-

Be very careful. Anthologies from writers' groups give out way too much information. After I've finished one of these anthologies, I know the ages, views on life, relationships to change, political beliefs and personal literary tastes of most of the members of the writers' group.

I know something of the politics within the group but most of all I know the imaginative lives of the participants and particularly the boundaries that the writers have imposed upon themselves.

There can be only one winner and it is always a relief when there is an obvious choice. 'Perspectives' is a collection of eight short stories. Each writer is in control of their craft. This is not to say that they could not improve, but each of them knows how to construct a narrative, how to develop characters and how to capture

and maintain a reader's interest. They do more than simply recount events, they fashion them into something more. Language and story work together to create a whole experience. I was also impressed with the order of the stories, although I suspect that they would have read just as well in any arrangement.

(6) Jennifer Burbidge Award.

First Prize:- Dr Joanna Nell. 'Mind over Matter'.

Commended:- Vicky Daddo. 'My Next Incarnation'; Bette Martin. 'Perspective'; Dr Melisabeth Cooper Fell. 'Chicken Sots'; Jessie Tu. 'The Hardest Fight'.

Judge's Comment:-

One story stood out as a clear winner. However, most of the stories were well written, and presented interesting aspects of living with disability, and four merited commendation for their well developed story-lines and their strong and sustained voices. More entries in this award would be welcome.

Winning story: 'Mind Over Matter.'

This beautiful and moving story resonated with me for its perceptive understanding of the reality and complexity of the carer's role as age and disability complicate married life. It is also very cleverly crafted, and, in the course of a realistic 15 minute consultation with a general practitioner, three characters are richly painted, two life stories are sketched, a tragedy unfolds and an optimistic (if limited) future is envisaged. This is achieved largely with dialogue and action, with very little reflective 'telling' to fill out the back-story. It is one the best stories I have had the pleasure of reading as judge of this competition.

(7) John Shaw Nelson Poetry Award.

First Prize:- Ben Walter. 'Lagoon Sequence'.

Second Prize:- Damen O'Brien. 'What Happened to the Oysters'.

Highly Commended:- Ulli Bier. 'All Our Days'; Laura Jan Shore. 'Bewilderment'

Commended:- Roger Vickery. 'Environment Project'; Jennifer Harrison. 'Lucky Dip'; Jo Gardiner. 'What the Black Cockatoo Said to July'.

Judge's Comment:-

Poems about love and grief, politics, culture and environment - as represented

in many of this year's entries - need to be free of cliché, careful with form, and free of spelling and factual errors unless these serve the poem. The strongest poems included imagery that surprised or made the reader pause to think, and which offered more on subsequent readings.

Many entries were narrative poems that told their story in a sustained way; the best of these were not prosaic but carried the reader to the final lines and gave insight into the event or situation related, actual or imaginary.

Poets should be aware that rhyme, if used at all, needs to be used with a care for meaning and the music of the poem.

The winning entry, 'Lagoon Sequence', a series of three linked poems, constructs other than human perspectives with a surety of tone and imagery that offers more on each reading. An image of sedge becomes a critique of colonist flag-waving nationalism offering other possibilities for relating to place.

The second placed poem, 'What Happened to the Oysters?', develops its theme in a measured tone with good use of language and allusion, questioning the way human and other agencies intersect and respond to an economic and environmental collapse. 'All Our Days' gives an attractive account in vernacular of the joy of gathering tucker on country. 'Bewilderment' offers a strong narrative with a poignant close.

Longlisted were: 'Applique'; 'House Sitting'; 'Night Loneliness'; 'Returned'; 'Trying to Find Beauty'; and 'Tumbleweed'.

(8) Jim Hamilton Award.

First Prize (Joint):- Craig Cormick. 'The Last Supper'.

First Prize (Joint):- Trish Bolton. 'Murder Most Suburban'

Commended:- Mark Brandi. 'Frankie'; Clinton Caward. 'Like'; Graeme Sparkes. 'Macaulay Station'; Kirsten Cameron. 'Mary and the Sound of the Gun'; Jane Downing. 'Yack'.

Judge's Comment:-

Entrants may rest assured that all duty of care was shown to their MSS; each MS was read to the end by both judges, who regarded each work with a critical and empathic eye. This is more than a writer can expect from most publishers' readers. The standard of the entries was impressive, and as a consequence the judges were often at variance in their ratings, including those of the prize-winners. Though vastly different, the two winners- Murder Most Suburban and The Last Supper - were both instructive examples in how to approach a murder mystery. The former is light in tone, contemporary, fast-paced, and has commercial potential. The latter leavens the appalling story of the Tasmanian cannibal convict Alexander Pierce with Irish folk tales, a mon-

stously priggish commandant, and some Beckett-like byplay from a pair of guards. Of the highly commended entries: Macaulay Station - some fine writing and a terrific ending save a tale of inner urban angst from an essentially crapulous world view. Yack - small town intrigues threaten to acquire significance. Yet both judges thought it was better than that ... Like - a potentially significant MS displaying considerable intelligence. But please check the sexual politics. Mary and the sound of The Gun - again the judges were conflicted. Both agreed on the raw honesty and the writing verges on the poetic. Frankie - how thin the line between horror and mundanity - but allow your characters some enjoyment in the little things! Authors of the above can contact the judges (via the FAW) for further advice.

(9) Angelo B Natoli Short Story Award Award.

First Prize:- Bai Klane. 'East West Tiger'.

Second Prize:- Mark Brandi. 'The Fox'.

Highly Commended:- Roger Vickery. 'Five Dragons'; Juoy Tait. 'Thicker Skin'; Jessie Tu. 'Story'; Dr Susan Fox. 'Immediate Family'.

Commended:- Dr Eugen Bacon. 'Jungolo'; Katrina Watson. 'A Pair of Shorts'.

Judge's Comment:-

The winning and second prize entries this year both demonstrated a real knowledge of their subject. 'East West Tiger' shows us the path to wellness can be both remarkable and unadorned. Stevie is learning to trust and to find his place in a difficult world through a job at a petrol station, while Aaray and Sai are trying to heal and grow in a hostile environment. The story, with its undercurrent of cruelty, is infused with kindness which is the lynchpin of the narrative. The simple descriptions of the daily running of the petrol station are authentic. The author's style is powerful, without pretension. The story leaves the reader moved, and glad.

In 'The Fox' we are shown the dichotomy of nurture and callousness in the natural world. The father is a pragmatic farmer, dealing with life and death on his farm but still capable of compassion. The child learns about the ache that accompanies attachment. The author's description of the fox is skillful. We apprehend the animal through all our senses. In particular, the author's invocation of smell is wondrous. Very little separated the winner and second place getter. A story does not need a smart line at the end. A story is like a gate. At its end, the gate opens and we are able to see beyond it into another place. That quality characterised all of the finalists.

My sincere congratulations to the winners and the commended, and thanks, as

always, to the FAW for the privilege and pleasure of reading the entries.

(10) Di Cranston Script Award.

First Prize:- Nicholette Marie van Schie - de Roos. 'Performance'

Highly Commended:- Melinda Jane -The Poet Mj. 'The Farme's Wife - Third Draft'; Jill Dwyer. 'The Ant Farmer'; Barlow James Redfearn. 'The Home Front'.

Commended:- Stephen House:- 'The Weirdo Club'; Lyndal Simpson. 'Possum'.

Judge's Comment:-

There were ten submissions for the Di Cranston Award this year, and it was pleasing to see the quality of entries was higher, with thoughtful consideration to story, structuring and script, and attention to detail in narrative development.

There was no radio play, but there were screenplays and stage dramas, with a good mixture of ideas. The winner, 'Performance', was a clever play within a play style, juggling the two elements successfully about an aspiring actress trying to satisfy an audition while balancing personal and social relationships. The writing was sharp and astutely constructed, leading to a laudable conclusion. There was clearly a great deal of thought put into the drafting and final version of the somewhat complex storyline.

The other entries covered a number of different topics and genres, with an emphasis on Australian stories and social observances.

A concern I do have is that some writers still use cliché, or hackneyed approaches to storytelling, which generally works against reader/audience interest. Attempts to be more original, incisive or challenging in terms of writing plays and screenplays would offer a much better approach to audience engagement.

Quality of writing is essential to a good play or script, and the use of an effective drafting process, together with more original attempts at telling a story, would result in a much better pay-off. The winning entry successfully utilized a more original approach to telling a personal story, as well as using a dramatic framework in a clever and insightful way. I continue to encourage writers to think outside the square and contribute challenging and intelligent approaches to plays and screenplays.

(11) Micro Fiction Award.

First Prize:- Roger Vickery. 'Cannibal Beat'

Highly Commended:- Dr Ruth McConnell. 'Cerebus'; PS Cottier. 'Hunt'; Dr Eugen Bacon. 'Mahuika'.

Commended:- Lyndal Simpson. 'Metro-Sexual Romance'; Michaela

Sanderson. 'Windy Day'.

Judge's Comment:-

The entries this year featured a wide variety of styles, subjects and approaches. All were notable for their polished use of the mechanics of language (spelling, use of punctuation, precise choice of words) and the quality of the ideas explored. The stronger entries wasted no time in thrusting the reader into an enticing or authentic 'story world' - a location on a tropical island, a computer-game style 'eworld', suburban backyards, a beach or a morning commuter train - and into the minds of the characters. The other characteristic these entries shared was a memorable ending - whether it was a languorous song lyric, the revelation of something surprising or important, or of an evocative image. The winning story worked on a number of levels; I was left thinking about the setting and the relationships between the characters for a long time after I had read it.

(12) How Tweet It Is Poetry Award.

First Prize:- PS Cottier. 'The Cat's New Beard'.

Highly Commended:- Roger Vickery. 'Dissonance'; Janice Williams. 'Ciao'.

Commended:- Roger Vickery. 'Hypo-thesis'.

Runner Up;- Nicolette Maria Van Schie-de Roos. 'It Rained'; Alyce Caswell. 'Martian Soil'; Agi Dobson. 'Dark Eyes Mist.'

Judge's Comment:-

The entries to How Tweet It Is 2016 varied greatly. When it comes to micro submissions I look for pieces that hold together. I look for wit, but in a very small piece, too much cleverness can detract. Inevitably the process of judging feels flawed, even while judges try their best to make a decision about whether one poem works better than another, some subjectivity encroaches. For this judge, little poems - when they work - are like little jewels, crystalline and complete. The ideas expressed in the short poem 'Dissonance' were impressive. It would have been a clear winner but where the poem fails is that the character count was met by squeezing words together to save space.

Like 'Dissonance', the poems 'Ciao' and 'Hypo-theses' play with topical issues of global politics, distilling complexities into handfuls of words. And these poems spoke clearly to the issues of 2016. 'Ciao' specifically cleverly interweaves the world stage with the personal, aligning a break up by text with that other awkward break-up Brevit. The winning poem is not so ambitious. Instead 'The Cat's New Beard' is a small observation, cleverly crafted. The poet has created a picture, and done it with deft strokes. There is no large political statement here but

the poem rings true and stands complete.

(13) Young Poet of the Year Award.

First Prize age 8-12:- Jenna Rogers. 'Moon'.

Highly Commended:- Thomas Boorer. 'A Farmer's Gift.'

First Prize age 13-16:- Margot Lee. 'A Time in Exile'.

Judge's Comment:-

The problem with poetry is defining just what poetry is. There is something universal in its use, but the forms and content vary from culture to culture, and from epoch to epoch and from fad to fad. In its use of rhythm, alliteration, rhyming and other linguistic tricks, it has other uses such as a mnemonic device for finding our way around our real or mythological universes, as in the 'Kalevala' or Australian aboriginal 'song lines'.

In its cross-sensory referencing modes, it enables us to combine our many disparate concepts of time, space, sensation to make a new unity of understanding beyond literal description. ('Green ideas sleep furiously', to quote Noam Chomsky.)

Poetry can also be fun, despite what so many school anthologies present to us. We are exposed too much to Rupert Brooke, Wordsworth, Shakespeare and perhaps not enough to Lewis Carroll, Spike Milligan, nor to such forms as the Noble Limerick. Do not dismiss the genius of some advertising slogans that move us to war, pity, mirth and political correctness so efficiently.

What disappointed me in this year's young poets' entries is just how narrow to them is the concept of what constitutes a poem. They need to reach out and read and listen to as many authors and cultures as they can find - and if they are fortunate to have more than one language, then they should explore that as well.

In the 8-12 section 'The Moon' the simple mechanistic patterns of astronomical movements are observed, yet they are given a mystical and personal reflection. Such reflections in words could also be expressed in painting or music. (The syncretistic resonance of good poetry.)

The highly commended poem brings empathy, structure and a story to us in some lines that are memorable: "The farmer sat, sang and smiled/At the glorious gift of rain."

In the 13-16 age group 'A Time of Exile'. Poets can possess an ability to summon up universality and empathy of human experience at a remove of time and place. We see this, for example, in the poetry of Anna Akmatova and Thomas Transtromer, amongst many others. Of note is this author's ability to maintain stylistic congruency and integrity for the length of the poem.

First lines: “Summer breathes,/and time and sweat decay.”

Last lines: “The shrill whistle of the wheel on the track/shall be the only thing that remains.”

Of the remaining poems in this category, none was worthy of especial note. There are some good ideas, beginning and ends, but few pieces could hold ‘it’ together; some were rather like trying to make sense of spillage of alphabet soup, others just lacked the hand of a person who had thought through what it was they wanted to convey, and how to work at ‘it’.

My overall advice is to never throw out something that is not quite working at the moment; what you find in your notebooks in the future could suddenly just work in a way you never anticipated when you wrote it; the solutions will come with time.

(14) Michael Duggan Short Story Award.

First Prize A Section:- Hayley Drake. ‘Naughty List’

Second Prize A Section:- Thomas Boorer. ‘The Secret Treasure’.

First Prize B Section:- Mia Constable. ‘The Lady in the Street.’

Second Prize B Section:- Jason Cleary - Gorton. ‘Shadows’.

Third Prize B Section:- Jordan Moss. ‘Trial of Vines’.

Highly Commended:- Jessica Frost. ‘Seemingly Happy’.

Commended:- Luca King. ‘5681’; Denham Noom. ‘The Blue Sapphire’; Elliott Perez. ‘I Shall Tell You a Story’; Jordon Moss. ‘The Wizard’s Gnomes’; Ben Hetherington. ‘On The Run.’

(15) John Morrison Short Story Award.

First Prize A:- Charlotte Pennington Disher. ‘A Room Full of Plants’.

Second Prize:- Rhiannon Smith. ‘Cracks’.

Highly Commended:- Acacia Hudson. ‘Hambags and Blisters’.

Commended:- Freya Cox. ‘On My Terms’.

(16) Mavis Thorpe Clarke Award.

First Prize A:- Kodi Sawtell. ‘Emotion’.

Second Prize:- Elliott Perez. ‘Wandering Tales’.

Third Prize:- Jane Juan. ‘Grace’.

Highly Commended:- Celine Ng. ‘Relationship Set’.

Commended:- Mason Moon. 'Depression and Happiness'; Biruntha Muhunthan. 'Nobody Hears, Nobody Fears'; Austin Baxter. 'Seven Poems'.

(17) Mavis Thorpe Clarke Collection Award.

First Prize:- St Michael's Collegiate, West Hobart. 'The Egger and Other Works'.

Second Prize:- St Michael's Collegiate, West Hobart. 'Giza'.

Judge's Comment:-

As always, all stories were written well, making it hard to choose places and as usual not all can be placed. Although some entries had their names; no page numbering; this did not deter me from judging fairly. The results I gave were deserving of their placements. I advise all entrants for future competitions to follow the rules. Number pages, omit your name, and to keep entering contests. Good luck.

(18) Ivy Hart

Peace and Environment Rhyming Poetry Award.

First Prize:- Sophie Roussos. 'Natural, Beautiful and Rare'.

Commended:- Lily Ward. 'Candy, Moon Mare'.

Judge's Comment:-

'Natural, Beautiful and Rare' was a rhyming poem of sustained quality. A mature and outstanding entry for a Year Three or Four pupil; it compared well with winners from previous years. From its first lines *Rolling Oceans, cold, wild and blue/abundant with life, both old and brand new*, it rollicked along to present a serious conversation message. The writer showed great promise and should send this poem out for publication and write many more.

'Candy Moon Mare' is a lyrical poem about the poet's love for a horse. It started with strong rhythm and rhyme but became patchy. I encourage the writer to work more on its rhyme and rhythm and make sure each verse follows on from the one before so this 'draft' becomes a polished poem worthy of publication.

General tips.

(i) Check rhyme and rhythm sound right, read your poem aloud and listen to someone else reading it.

(ii) Check what you write makes sense. If a word fits the rhyme, but not the sense, rework the line. It helps to make a list of words rhyming with the word for which you need a rhyme. If you cannot find a suitable word from the list,

try another rhyme.

(iii) Leave drafts to gel, then go back and re-read them, and, if necessary, rework them.

(iv) Strong verbs empower a poem.