



2015 DOROTHY HEWETT AWARD FOR AN UNPUBLISHED MANUSCRIPT

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The inaugural Dorothy Hewett Award for an Unpublished Manuscript opened for entries on 1 August and closed on 4 September 2015. This very short lead time was the result of a surprise announcement by the Western Australian government in February 2015 to convert its annual Premier's Book Awards from an annual to a biennial event. Given this, the judges were amazed and delighted at the more than 130 entries received. Clearly, entrants needed to have an existing manuscript that was in large part already prepared. We are hopeful, now that the award is established on the Australian literary scene of the award, that writers will be able to work towards deadlines known well in advance for subsequent years.

Two entries were withdrawn during the judging period as they'd been shortlisted elsewhere.

There were plenty of entries in poetry and fiction but the area of narrative non-fiction did not yield up entries and we'll be encouraging this further in 2016.

Entries came from all around Australia and included one international entry—so for an inaugural award it was a very pleasing spread.

Lots of historical fiction was entered, much of it based in Western Australia. Some of it demonstrated an innovative approach.

The range of approaches and the sophistication of many of the manuscripts impressed the judges. It is important to stress this was an anonymous judging process.

Shortlisted entries

The shortlisted entries are all very well poised and easily at a publishable standard. Ideas and impressions around place in both a physical and psychic sense are handled very strongly in this lineup with confidence in both sense and mood.

The mosaic of Western Australia that is provided through many of these manuscripts is exquisite: differently approached, of course, but always with depth and a distinctive voice. The other observation is the mixture of distance and proximity that is demonstrated across all of the approaches here, whether prose or poetic. And a further observation: displacement is a thread that runs through many of these works — and, as we know, this was a lifelong theme in the writing of Dorothy Hewett.

All of these manuscripts have the potential for publication, and each of them in one way or another kept haunting our imaginations as early readers. As is always the case there is room for development and extension and we trust that each author can go into a relationship with a publisher to find the full potential of their work. We thank each of them for their involvement in our inaugural award.

Highly Commended

We gave ourselves the opportunity at the start of the judging process to award a writer with the mantle of 'Highly Commended'. The Highly Commended entry receives a publishing contract with UWA Publishing. The Highly Commended award for 2015 goes to Kyra Giorgi for her manuscript of stories *'The Circle and the Equator.'*

JUDGES REPORT

UWA Publishing

As the writer describes it, the volume is

“a diverse collection of twelve stories that addresses questions of how our bodies define us, how others define us through our bodies, and the historical forces and conflicts that underpin these identifications.”

The judges commented that the diverse views of war across history refracted in various ways resulted in a particularly powerful manuscript. This attention paid to the vulnerability (and strengths) of the human body in each of the stories was intense, lyrical, and the accretion of each story realised what we always hope for and desire in a short story collection. The writing is polished and aware of its antecedents without ever being derivative. UWAP Publishing looks forward to working with the writer in the editorial stage and releasing this book in early 2017.

Winning entry

Josephine Wilson's novel *'Extinctions'* was a unanimous winner. The judges had much to say about the novel, praising its craft and ambition. It evokes a strong, complex sense of Perth, where it is set. It is funny throughout, in a sometimes wry, sometimes absurd laugh-out-loud way, but the humour is often tinged with sadness.

The judges loved the beautifully crafted voice of the protagonist, an elderly man facing the denouement of his life. *'Extinctions'* becomes a timely metaphor not only for how we face death and the inevitable losses that come with age, but also for the ecological issues we face that colour our vision of the future. Wilson deftly handles complex shifts back and forth in time and sensitively portrays the strengths and foibles of her characters. The story progresses artfully and inexorably towards a conclusion that quietly resonates long after the book is over.

The use of photographs inserted into the text, a literary device that has become increasingly common since popularized by W.G. Sebald, was seen in this instance as a distinctive enhancement: the images chosen both undercutting and making ironic the text along with giving information 'gifts' to the reader.

The judges were interested to discover upon making their decision that, by happy coincidence (remembering that the award was judged anonymously), Josephine Wilson's first novel *Cusp* was published as the first fiction title at UWA Publishing (then UWA Press) in 2005.

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February 2016



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