

2022 CITY OF FREMANTLE HUNGERFORD AWARD

JUDGES REPORT

Longlist

From ninety manuscripts, judges Natasha Lester, Richard Rossiter and Rashida Murphy drew on their long experience of authorship, mentoring and teaching writers to choose a longlist of eleven manuscripts for the 2022 City of Fremantle Hungerford Award.

- *Future Perfect, and Other Worldly Tenses* by Matthew Chrulew (short story collection)
- *Dark Seeds* by Narelle Hill (crime fiction)
- *The Crimson Thread* by Rachael Keene (literary fiction)
- *Islands of Secrets* by Stefanie Koens (historical and contemporary fiction)
- *The Slow Patience of the Sea* by Joy Kilian-ESSERT (short story collection)
- *Tell Me the Story* by Gerard McCann (narrative non-fiction)
- *The Carrington Effect* by Shannon Meyerkort (historical fiction)
- *Kintsugi* by Marie O'Rourke (narrative non-fiction)
- *Salt River Road* by Molly Schmidt (literary fiction)
- *The Plover's Nest* by Christine Talbot (historical fiction)
- *Treehearts* by Annie Wilson (YA contemporary fiction)

We are enormously grateful to the three judges for their time, care, effort and expertise, and their dedication to working with new and emerging Western Australian writers.

Longlist comments from Richard Rossiter

Having previously judged the Hungerford Award, one feature stood out in 2022: the number of entries—close to 90, which is significantly higher than in previous years. (Maybe someone should investigate the relationship between Covid and creativity!). I find reading such diversity of entries is always an engaging, exciting experience. It provides an insight into the writing, achievements, imagination, and interests of an extraordinary group of West Australians.

Fiction is the most strongly represented category, in all its forms: crime, speculative, historical, women's. And, in particular, YA fiction. Some of the most powerful writing, in my opinion, was in the narrative non-fiction category where writers are drawing on deeply felt personal experiences which, at times, make for a disturbing read. A persistent focus across the range of genres was *lives under pressure*. A sense of struggle and threat—due to a variety of factors—was a common thread. Cultural diversity was evident in a number of stories (but not so gender diversity). Some of the more adventurous (form, theme) writing was evident in the short fiction category.

The overall quality of the entries was outstanding. There were numerous submissions which, for various reasons, didn't quite make the long list, but are nevertheless 'publishable' works, which is indicative of the very high standard of the entries and a promising sign for the future of writing—across the spectrum—in WA.

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In writing with such a wide range of subject matter, audience, and genre, it is difficult to isolate what it is that draws the attention and engagement of a judge. However, if there is a single factor, it is *voice*, which frequently cannot be separated from a focus on *character*. The narrating voice needs to be authentic, empathetic, perceptive. It needs to probe beneath surface behaviours to examine motivation. Another important factor engaging attention, and evident in the long listed, works, is a strong sense of *place*. Rural, urban, domestic—no matter where character and action are located—the attention to detail which goes beyond mere ‘setting’ is highly significant. Much of the narrative and emotive content of the story is established for the reader through attention to the careful, nuanced, descriptions of place.

Longlist comments from Natasha Lester and Rashida Murphy

What a delight, in judging this year’s City of Fremantle Hungerford Award, to see the proof that there are many talented writers here in WA. Everyone who entered should be proud of having written a book, something many people only dream about. When you’re reading so many manuscripts at one time, you start to understand that the elusive idea of voice plays an enormous role in a manuscript’s success. Several manuscripts had such strong and confident voices from the very first page that it was immediately obvious they would go straight to the longlist. Voice is largely developed through reading and through practise, and for those writers who didn’t make the longlist, we would encourage reading widely, outside your genre in particular, to help you develop a more unique and beguiling writing voice. We would also encourage extensive rewriting – rewriting beyond the point where you feel like you can’t rewrite anymore. That kind of dedication and commitment shone through in a handful of manuscripts.

Two themes or concepts stood out – the Australian landscape and fantasy worlds. For the latter category, it’s so important to consider how you can make your set of characters and your story unlike any other, as many manuscripts felt a little too derivative. There were two or three manuscripts that made us forget we were reading a manuscript – we were so drawn in by the voice of the story, so eager to know what happened that we simply lost myself in the book. Those writers combined a natural affinity with words alongside an understanding that their story needs to appeal to a reader, which meant they had killed all their darlings and honed and edited and shaped their work, thus setting their manuscripts apart from the others that felt less fully realised and needed more time, development and writerly sweat to be successful.

Shortlist

The shortlist was selected by Fremantle Press publishers Georgia Richter and Cate Sutherland.

General comments

There are degrees of accomplishment to be attained in writing a book-length manuscript and there is a distinct kind of threshold to cross:

- Does a work of work of fiction feel ‘real’, or does it continue to seem somehow ‘made up’?

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- Does the reader drop into the story to such an extent that they forget that they are reading?
- And, when the book is finished, does the reader feel as if they are seeing the world in a slightly different way now than they were before?

If a manuscript contains these elements even before the editing process begins, then the alchemy is right.

Each of the four shortlisted manuscripts crossed this threshold and stood out on a longlist comprised of extremely capable works.

The four are all quite different in form – there are literary and meditative essays, a powerful and deeply personal memoir, a selection of offbeat and quirky short stories, and a lyrical and moving prose and verse novel.

In terms of what they have in common, they all share difficult subject matter (because life after all is difficult) but in each, the challenge of encountering that matter is transcended by careful and controlled writing. The reader implicitly trusts the writer to take them on this journey.

Comments on the shortlisted manuscripts

The Slow Patience of the Sea & other stories by Joy Kilian-ESSERT

This collection contains short stories that are mostly domestic or intimate in nature. They observe and explore familiar characters and settings from unexpected angles, and offer degrees of hopefulness among dark themes. The seventeen compressed worlds created by this author were varied, surprising and utterly immersive.

Tell Me the Story by Gerard McCann

This memoir documents the experiences of a Catholic boy who was just one of scores of young boys sexually assaulted by convicted paedophile Leo Leunig in Perth in the 1960s. Despite the confronting nature of the subject matter, this memoir is immensely readable, honest and unadorned in its delivery and generous in its perceptions and sharing.

Kintsugi by Marie O'Rourke

This collection of narrative non-fiction essays is a meditation on the intersection between memory and family life. In its wise and gentle exploration of death, loss, grief, violence, love and maternal connection, it contains many elegant and insightful moments. It is a delicate and thought-provoking work.

Salt River Road by Molly Schmidt

In the aftermath of the death of their beloved mother, the five Tetley kids are falling apart in. This novel focuses on the fabric of small-town life, and the complexity of family and community relationships. This story about grieving and healing is interspersed with beautiful passages of verse throughout.

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Well done to all who entered the 2022 City of Fremantle Hungerford Award. Congratulations to the longlisted authors for their outstanding work, and to the shortlisted authors who made a difficult task most enjoyable.

Georgia Richter
Cate Sutherland
Publishers, Fremantle Press

