

THE FOGARTY LITERARY AWARD

Judges' Report, May 2023

This year there were 27 eligible entries in the Fogarty Literary Award. These included 11 young adult fiction manuscripts, 11 works of fiction, four crime novels and one collection of short stories. While subject matter was as broad as ever, a high number of manuscripts contained gender diverse characters, many were set in small communities, and about one-fifth of the field of manuscripts featured fantasy elements.

Although this is the smallest field since the Fogarty began, this year also contains the highest number of shortlisted manuscripts to date, about one-fifth of the field. The three judges were in agreement about which books should be on the shortlist – six titles that could not be separated from each other in terms of quality and achievement.

This year, Brooke Dunnell joined the judging panel of publishers Georgia Richter and Cate Sutherland. Brooke won the Fogarty Literary Award in 2021 with her novel *The Glass House* (formerly *The Deniers*) and is a former judge of the Premier's Literary Awards as well as a number of short fiction competitions.

Cate and Georgia concur with Brooke's observation that each of the works entered in this year's competition contain the admirable qualities of enthusiasm, competence, dedication, and the (always impressive) ability to pull together and complete a book-length work. What stood out in this shortlist was the sheer quality of good writing, and freshness of perspective that caught the reader's attention. As Brooke says, 'There is a confidence and assurance in each of these works. The reader can sense the effort in it and understands that the writer has thought deeply not only about the work as a whole but also about every sentence it contains. These are writers who pay attention to their readers.'

Shortlist

The Skeleton House by American-born **Katherine Allum** is a work of literary fiction characterised by a controlled delivery and a sense of suffocating foreboding. Set in a small town in the Nevada desert, it follows Meg, mother of two children and married to Kyle. He is the husband everyone thinks is perfect, but perhaps that is only while he can have the world on his own terms. As Meg resists having a third child, finds herself a job and joins an unexpectedly liberating book group, tension rises in the place Meg calls the skeleton house – the home still under construction in which the family lives. This is a story of the darkness which can lie beneath the ordinary.

Katherine Allum was one of those 'weird homeschool kids' growing up, and was rarely seen without pen, paper and a library book. American-born, she moved frequently during childhood and finished her hybrid education in a small town in the desert. She completed her MA at City, University of London, where she wrote the first draft of her debut novel. She lives in Perth with her husband, and she does her best story plotting while swimming.

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The Anatomy of Witchcraft by **Prema Arasu** is a captivating young adult novel blending themes of magic, witchcraft, and boarding school life with a rich tapestry of governmental intrigue, colonial history and gender politics. The principal protagonists, Lock and Leo, are well-crafted, multifaceted characters, supported by a diverse and extensive cast. The immersive world-building in this tale is intricate and highly convincing. Lock's tenacious desire to become a witch in a society where only women are permitted to practise witchcraft is at the heart of this tale and takes him from the classroom of the neighbouring girls' school to the corridors of power.

Arasu has a PhD in Creative Writing from UWA and is currently a postdoctoral research fellow at the Minderoo-UWA Deep-Sea Research centre.

Jasper Cliff by **Josh Kemp** is a work of Australian gothic crime fiction. The fictional town of Jasper Cliff, located near Marble Bar and Nullagine in the eastern Pilbara, is home to a handful of residents and is the last known location of aspiring young novelist Toby Gaull. When Toby's older brother Lachlan arrives in town hoping to track his brother's last known movements, he starts having visions beyond his usual experience of epileptic seizures. It is here he encounters The Rift, an ancient phenomenon that seems to reveal aspects of the region's violent history. Is it possible that it can tell Lachlan what happened to his brother? *Jasper Cliff* is a wonderful example of Australian gothic fiction, featuring unnerving imagery of both nature and the unreal, and creating a distinct sense of place. Tension is maintained throughout, revealing to readers the dark past, and doubtful future of the dying town.

Josh Kemp is an author of Australian gothic fiction. His debut novel, *Banjawarn*, was the co-winner of the 2021 Dorothy Hewett Award and won the 2022 Ned Kelly Award for Best Debut Crime Fiction. He's previously been shortlisted for the Kill Your Darlings Unpublished Manuscript Award, longlisted for the Fogarty Literary Award and highly commended in the Viva La Novella Prize. He lives in the South West of Western Australia but finds himself drawn, over and over again, to the red dirt of the state's north.

In ***Nock Loose*** by **Patrick Marlborough**, a retired Olympic archer and former stuntwoman loses her granddaughter in a fire. This is the beginning point of a lively novel centred around the town's violent medieval festival, 'Agincourt'. The colourful past lives of Joy and the history of her South West town collide as she seeks answers and revenge. This is a highly original, frequently funny and action-packed novel with a distinct narrative voice.

Patrick Marlborough is a writer, comedian, journalist, critic and musician based in Walyalup (Fremantle), Whadjuk Boodja. They have been published in many national and international publications, and their novel, *A Horse Held at Gunpoint*, was shortlisted in the 2021 Fogarty Literary Award.

A Wreck of Seabirds by **Karleah Olson** delves into themes of loss, isolation and entrapment and is set against the brooding backdrop of the West Australian coast. The narrative moves back and forth in time, following the interwoven storylines of three protagonists. In 'The Shore', Briony and Ren, each grappling with grief and loss, are brought together in their hometown, where Ren has returned to care for his dying father and Briony remains hopeful of finding her missing sister, Sarah. Meanwhile, in 'The Shallows', Sarah and her best friend Aria are hopelessly trapped on a remote island off the coast, and nobody has a clue where they have gone. Finally, in 'The Deep', we follow Ren as a child, navigating the shifting dynamics of his family life. This tightly written, atmospheric novel captures the natural environment and explores the depths of human emotion.

Karleah Olson is a PhD candidate at Edith Cowan University, where she is studying Australian coastal gothic literature.

Emily Paull's novel *The Dreamers* is a literary romance that begins in Fremantle in 1937. This novel about the young man Winston, who works in a biscuit factory, and the young woman Sarah, who lives in a world of wealth and privilege, is a hugely satisfying read with a cast of characters who each display their courage, failings and foibles. Beneath the story of wartime romance is an engaging subplot of the complicated past that lies between their families and the secrets they are reluctant to reveal. Part of the pleasure of reading the work is Paull's confident handling of familiar themes – such as the barriers of love created by class, and the cost of war for those who go and those who stay behind.

Emily Paull is a Western Australian librarian, author and book reviewer. In 2019, her debut collection of short fiction, *Well-Behaved Women*, was published by Margaret River Press. Her novel, *The Good Daughter*, was highly commended in the 2021 Fogarty Literary Award.

Conclusion

It was a rewarding process to judge these manuscripts and to get a sense of the calibre of Western Australian talent among writers just beginning their careers. It was particularly affirming to see that some of the names on this shortlist have appeared in previous Fogarty Award listings.

We would like to acknowledge all those who entered the award this year and commend you for your achievement in creating a book-length manuscript.

The Fogarty Literary Award will be announced on Thursday 25 May 2023.

Fogarty Literary Award judges

Brooke Dunnell, author
Georgia Richter, adult fiction and narrative non-fiction publisher,
Cate Sutherland, children's publisher