

Katharine Susannah Prichard Short Fiction Awards 2011

Judge's Report

Judge: Juliet Marillier, novelist

General comments:

This year there were 57 entries in the Katharine Susannah Prichard Open Awards and 10 in the Mundaring National Young Writers Awards. The range of quality overall was wide – some of the work was obviously from experienced and capable writers, while some was let down by basic errors of spelling, grammar or punctuation. Writers of any age need to make sure these elements are right before entering work in a competition.

Many of the entrants, especially the younger writers, submitted what was essentially a chapter from a novel, or a novel-sized plot condensed into a few pages. If you have a 3000 word limit, you should try to create a story that works perfectly at that length. One or two of the stories came across as unfinished – lacking a satisfactory ending.

I'd also suggest to entrants that they avoid writing stories with trick or surprise endings – this can make a story feel amateurish and contrived. Ideally the ending of your story will read as the natural conclusion of the story arc.

There wasn't much comedy this year, so when I came across one or two genuinely funny stories I really enjoyed them. Unfortunately these were let down by technical flaws, but thank you those writers for lightening the mood!

Stories in this year's competition touched on some powerful themes: a couple dealing with infertility; an old woman reliving past trauma; repressed tensions within a blended family; a young soldier grappling with his own mortality. Each of the winning and commended stories deals with a significant issue or question; has an emotional impact; absorbs and entertains; and is well structured within the confines of the short story form. In each of the winning and commended stories, the building blocks of short fiction are used with skill and imagination.

I should also add that the stories placed first and second in the Young Writers Awards were good enough to stand alongside the best stories in the Open category.

Mundaring Young Writers Encouragement Award (under 13)

No award this year.

Mundaring National Young Writers Awards (under 20)

First Place:

'Pretending' by Emily Paull

A beautifully crafted, deceptively simple story in which conversations within a blended family touch on a minefield of relationships. This is challenging subject matter for a young writer. The understated ending packs a huge emotional punch.

Second place:

'Anthem' by Daena Ho

An ambitious, well-crafted story in which a young World War 1 poet is visited by the muse Calliope on the eve of battle. A highly original idea, executed with some sophistication – a remarkable piece of writing for a sixteen year old.

Commended:

'Midnight Sun' by Oliver Pomeroy
'The One that Got Away' by Grace Andrews
'Where Vehicles Meet' by Michael Collins

Katharine Susannah Prichard Open Awards

First Place:

'The Nest' by Nicole Sinclair

The writer's evocative language conjures up an Australian landscape in which the narrator's sense of self (past and present) is reflected as he ponders his wife's grief over her failure to conceive. A beautifully balanced story.

Second Place:

'Grasping for the Moon' by Rosie Barter

A well-crafted story in which an ageing woman experiences physical and emotional turmoil after the arrival of an unexpected house guest. The writer deals delicately with a challenging theme.

Third Place:

'The Sky Empty' by Josephine Clarke

A vivid and engaging story, giving the reader a window into the life of a lonely, angry old woman. While this is less technically accomplished than the stories placed first and second, it is a memorable piece of storytelling with well-handled changes of pace.

Commended:

'After Rain' by Karen Atkinson
'The Passenger' by Fiona Bell
'Angie's Sparkle' by Susan McCreery
'Water Under the Bridge' by Dorothy Simmons