

Media Release

Winning biography reveals Australia's enigmatic Federation 'Father'

6/8/2018

A fascinating biography of Australia's second prime minister, Alfred Deakin, has won this year's \$25,000 National Biography Award, the nation's richest prize for biographical writing, the State Library of NSW announced **TODAY [Monday 6 August 2018]**.

The Enigmatic Mr Deakin (Text Publishing) by political historian Judith Brett delves into the public and private life of Australia's Federation 'Father' Alfred Deakin (1856-1919).

The judges praised Brett for her rigorous research and analysis of her subject and reliability of judgement, calling her work "among the very best political biographies written in Australia."

According to Senior Judge, Associate Professor Richard White: "*The Enigmatic Mr Deakin* reveals how 'Deakin was never a mate'. He was respectable, courteous, intellectual, interested in the life of the spirit, a little aloof, not given to swearing nor much of a drinker, certainly no larrikin hero: no wonder popular culture rarely finds time for him."

"Yet, as Judith Brett demonstrates, this immensely important figure, and Australia's most influential early prime minister, shaped the new nation in ways that continue to resonate," Associate Professor White said.

According to NSW State Librarian Dr John Vallance: "Awards on their own don't guarantee good biographical writing. It's the atmosphere created around this particular prize that makes it such a special part of our literary calendar."

"With 81 entries this year, its success is testament to the initial vision and passion of Dr Geoffrey Cains and the late Mr Michael Crouch AC," says Dr Vallance.

"I'm delighted that the Nelson Meers Foundation has now stepped in to secure its future. The Nelson Meers Foundation has an enviable record of contributing to a wide range of organisations and projects that focus on the arts. They have been a wonderful supporter of our Library over many years."

The Nelson Meers Foundation has increased the value of the prize for the shortlisted authors to \$2,000. This year's shortlisted works are:

- *Songs of a War Boy* by Deng Thiak Adut with Ben Mckelvey (Hachette Australia)
- *Paul Keating: The Big-Picture Leader* by Troy Bramston (Scribe Publications)
- *A Writing Life: Helen Garner and Her Work* by Bernadette Brennan (Text Publishing)
- *Writing for Raksmei: A Story of Cambodia* by Joan Healy (Monash University Publishing)
- *The Boy Behind the Curtain* by Tim Winton (Penguin Random House Australia)

The judges for this year's Award were Associate Professor Richard White, Dr Chris Cunneen and Dr Georgina Arnott.

National
Biography AWARD 2018

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In recognition of the long standing support from the late Michael Crouch AC and the Crouch family, the Nelson Meers Foundation will establish from 2019 an additional \$5,000 prize in his name for the first published biography by an Australian writer.

The National Biography Award is administered and presented by the State Library.

For more information and to organise an interview please contact:

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