Lionel G. Fogarty

Kenneth Slessor Prize for Poetry

2016 - Shortlisted

Shortlisted
Judges' comments

_Eelahroo (Long Ago), Nyah (Looking), Möbō-Möbō (Future)_ shows us that Lionel Fogarty’s work is going from strength to strength. The assured poetic voice, the dexterity and panache with which Fogarty transects and mashes up discourse and grammar, are evidence that his craft is ever-evolving. These poems are finely held together with structural matrices which are almost indiscernible, but re-reading always yields great rewards. This book is a spiralling journey through politics, erotics and history. Fogarty’s combustible poetics are iconoclastic (‘commandments are mead to brake’), entrancing and reflexive. He explores the nature of poetry which, he says, can ‘trance us to rare concentration’, and when he writes about ‘the reward in high-risk certainty’ he could well be describing his own methodology.

He acknowledges the profound inspiration he draws from writers like Kevin Gilbert and Oodgeroo Noonuccal and also pays homage to non-Aboriginal writers such as Eleanor Dark who championed ‘dark man’s rights’. Fogarty is a sharp analyst and critic of white Australia, which he sees as a ‘sad loose society’. His poems call out racism as ‘a sick disease’. At stake is always the expropriation of Aboriginal territories and the constant powerful presence of ‘land in the hands, land in the hearts’. This book is a complex meditation on the idea of home and homelessness. Fogarty subverts complacencies and prejudices, always focusing on the big picture; he insists, for example, that ‘the poor not homeless cause they have souls richest … land taken make us homeless’. His imagination is global and he has a keen sense of connection between the Asia Pacific and first nation Australians, affirming the potential for these two groups to ‘write-to-write together’.