

Media Release



Australia's most amusing stories shortlisted in inaugural prize

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Six of the most amusing books published over the last two years have been shortlisted in Australia's inaugural humour writing prize, the State Library of NSW announced today.

The shortlisted books for the \$10,000 biennial Russell Prize for Humour Writing are:

- *A Short History of Stupid, The decline of reason and why public debate makes us want to scream* Helen Razer & Bernard Keane (Allen & Unwin)
- *Boomer & Me, A Memoir of Motherhood, and Asperger's Jo Case* (Hardie Grant Books)
- *I, Migrant, A comedian's journey from Karachi to the outback* Sami Shah (Allen & Unwin)
- *The Antibiography of Robert F. Menzies*, Bernard Cohen (HarperCollins Publishers)
- *The Full Ridiculous*, Mark Lamprell (Text Publishing)
- *The Wife Drought, Why women need wives, and men need lives* Annabel Crabb (Random House Australia)

With the Sydney Comedy Festival in full swing, the judges felt that this was the perfect time to announce the shortlist, selected from an "impressive 57 entries in its first year."

According to Dr Kathryn Heyman, Chair of the judging panel: "Humorous writing requires more than the ability to craft a punchline. The best humorous writing demonstrates profound intelligence, deep understanding of human nature, empathy, linguistic skill and perfect timing. It depends on a sharp vision and a certain fearlessness. These qualities are amply evident in the shortlisted titles for the inaugural Russell Prize for Humour Writing."

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“It's been an honour to judge the first year of this exciting new award. Australians have a magnificent and varied tradition of humour, so it's exciting to finally have an award which honours the particular skills involved in humorous writing,” Dr Heyman said.

The Russell Prize for Humour Writing aims to celebrate, recognise and encourage humour writing, and to promote interest in this genre.

According to Alex Byrne, NSW State Librarian and Chief Executive: “For some readers it's the laugh out loud moments that make them fall in love with books. It's wonderful to now have a prize dedicated to writing that promotes humour in its many guises and celebrates what makes Australians laugh.”

The Prize has been made possible by the generous bequest of the late Peter Wentworth Russell, a farmer, businessman and passionate reader.

Works nominated for the 2015 prize must have been first published in the previous two years, between 1 January 2013 and 31 December 2014.

Works of fiction and non-fiction, including collections of short stories, poetry and verse are eligible for consideration.

The Prize is administered and presented by the State Library of NSW on behalf of the estate. The Library administers or supports six other Awards including the NSW Premier's Literary and History Awards.

The winner will be announced at the State Library of NSW on 25 June 2015.

For more information, interviews and images, please contact:

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Russell Prize for Humour Writing

Shortlisted titles

A Short History of Stupid, The decline of reason and why public debate makes us want to scream

Helen Razer and Bernard Keane

Allen & Unwin

Keane and Razer's *A Short History of Stupid* is a precise, funny and urgent description of the scattering inattention and falsehoods which are laced like sugar through so much of our public debates. Whether calling out the 'cheap meth of personal development seminars', in cold fury counting the deadly potential cost of anti-vaccination or writing the wittiest consideration of property rights as the basis of liberal democracy this side of David Hume, Keane and Razer deftly scupper much of the unexamined nonsense that tweets, updates and opines its way into our consciousness.

Boomer & Me: A memoir of motherhood, and Asperger's

Jo Case

Hardie Grant Books

Rich in detail, vivid and compelling, *Boomer & Me* records Case's life as a divorced parent of Leo, an ebullient, determined boy struggling to fit in. With a sharp eye, Case observes the narrow world of schoolyard parents and playground bullies, the juggle of work and family, and the deep connection between mother and son. In its evocation of parental chaos it is hilarious, absorbing and frequently deeply moving.

I, Migrant, A comedian's journey from Karachi to the outback

Sami Shah

Allen & Unwin

By turns moving, shocking and laugh-out-loud funny, Sami Shah's memoir, *I, Migrant*, is a humorous and intelligent look into the mind of a comic. Shah chronicles his life as a journalist in war torn Karachi, where he witnesses the aftermath of the assassination of Benazir Bhutto, to his immigration to outback Australia and subsequent discovery that Australian wildlife comes with dangers all of its own.

The Antibibliography of Robert F. Menzies

Bernard Cohen

HarperCollins Publishers

Like the large ghost of the political past which returns to haunt its pages, *The Antibibliography of Robert F. Menzies* is capacious and just beyond the fingertips of our grasp. Post-modernist with actual jokes, it reads alternatively as realist fiction, biography, political satire or the wittiest PhD exegesis there has ever been. The fact that Cohen's novel is one in an elegant state of disassembly should not obscure that everything here is in its right place. Its ambitious themes, ridicule and craft takes direct aim at our national woolliness, all the while possessing the inexplicit grace of great fiction.

The Full Ridiculous

Mark Lamprell

Text Publishing

The Full Ridiculous, is the sensitive and heartfelt journey of a man whose life and family is in crisis. Micheal O'Dell has survived an horrific accident but from there, with the help of a deranged police officer, an influential narcissist and an adolescent drug dealer his life spirals beyond his control. Whimsical, playful and heartfelt, Mark Lamprell brings a deft touch to this quirky story of love and family.

The Wife Drought, Why women need wives, and men need lives

Annabel Crabb

Random House Australia

"I need a wife" is a common joke among working women. Annabel Crabb takes this joke and unpacks it, creating a witty and passionate treatise on gender, work and family. Rich with amusing anecdotes and historical insights, Crabb manages to make statistics funny. An urgent, funny and important book.