

Media Release



Laugh-out loud *The Speechwriter* wins Australia's only prize for humour writing

11/5/2023

Martin McKenzie-Murray's "savage, dark and uproariously funny" satirical memoir *The Speechwriter* has won the \$10,000 biennial Russell Prize for Humour Writing, Australia's only humour writing prize, the State Library of NSW announced **TODAY [Thursday 11 May]**.

The judges applauded McKenzie-Murray's fictional debut for its dazzling wordplay and sheer inventiveness: "Forget every satirical political memoir you have ever read. *The Speechwriter* is here to re-invent the genre in a time where politics comes to us in fractals of the unreliable, shameless, self-serving, deluded and absurd."

Readers are thrust into the world of former speechwriter to the PM, Tony Beaverbrook who, from his prison cell, pens his memoir while trying to figure out how it all went wrong. All the while, his violent, amateur philosopher cellmate, Garry, is critiquing his literary merit.

Chair of the judging panel, journalist, author and comedian Wendy Harmer commented: "In this unhinged, profane, surreal world as imagined by McKenzie-Murray — with its cast of amoral lobbyists, obsequious staffers, time wasters and puffed-up polities — we hope readers find a LOL and OMG! on every page, like we did."

According to State Librarian John Vallance: "A life without laughter is like a library without books."

The Speechwriter (Scribe Publications) was selected from a 'bumper crop' of 60 entries by judges Wendy Harmer, acclaimed writer and teacher Rawah Arja and writer and comedian Alistair Baldwin. The shortlist comprised:

- *Off the Charts* by Georgie Carroll (Pan Macmillan Australia)
- *You're Doing it Wrong* by Kaz Cooke (Penguin Random House Australia)
- *My Daughter's Wedding* by Gretel Killeen (Hachette Australia)
- *Sexy Tales of Paleontology* by Patrick Lenton (Subbed In)
- *Here Goes Nothing* by Steve Toltz (Penguin Random House Australia)

The \$10,000 biennial prize has been made possible by the generous donation from the late Peter Wentworth Russell, a farmer, businessman and passionate reader, and his goddaughter Rachel Blazey, to celebrate, recognise and encourage the humour writing genre.

"It is always a joy to celebrate those that help us through our good times and bad with a wry comment, a quick wit or a dreadfully dry but funny story," commented Rachel Blazey.

THIS AWARD IS MADE POSSIBLE THROUGH THE STATE LIBRARY OF NSW FOUNDATION AND THE GENEROSITY OF THE LATE PETER WENTWORTH RUSSELL.

INCLUDING
Humour Writing for
Young People

The Russell Prize
FOR
Humour
Writing

2023

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“Whatever the style of humour that appeals, never let a day pass when you don’t enjoy the funny side of life!”

Lian Tanner’s *Rita’s Revenge* (Allen & Unwin) was announced as the winner of the \$5,000 Humour Writing for Young People prize, selected by a panel of five youth judges.

The Young People Award, offered for a published work for readers between 5 and 12 years, was selected from a shortlist comprising:

- *Weird School* by Damian Callinan and illustrated by Adele K. Thomas (Penguin Random House Australia)
- *Drum Roll Please, It’s Stevie Louise* by Tanya Hennessy and illustrated by Leigh Hedstrom (Allen & Unwin)
- *Your School is the BEST!* by Maggie Hutchings and illustrated by Felicita Sala (Affirm Press)
- *The House on Pleasant Street* by Sofie Laguna and illustrated by Marc McBride (Allen & Unwin)
- *Funny Kid Catastrophe* by Matt Stanton (ABC Books: an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers)

Background information:

- Works nominated for the 2023 Russell Prize for Humour Writing must have been first published between 1 January 2021 and 31 December 2022, and commercially available within this period.
- Works of fiction and non-fiction, including collections of short stories, poetry and verse were eligible for consideration.
- Previous prize winners are: *Black is the New White* by Nakkiah Lui (2021), *Other Stories of Men* by David Cohen (2019), *Quicksand* by Steve Toltz (2017) and *The Antibibliography of Robert F. Menzies* by Bernard Cohen (2015).
- Writers whose works are nominated must be living Australian citizens or persons holding permanent resident status.

SYDNEY WRITERS’ FESTIVAL EVENT

Wendy Harmer will be in-conversation with Martin McKenzie-Murray at a free event at the Sydney Writers’ Festival in Carriageworks on Friday 26 May, from 3.30 to 4.30 pm.

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The Russell Prize
Humour FOR Writing
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