

Media Release



Witty Aussie satire snatches nation's first humour writing prize

25/6/2015

Bernard Cohen's witty novel/political satire that gives Aussies a "most elegant kick in the teeth we didn't know we needed" has won Australia's inaugural humour writing prize, the State Library of NSW announced tonight.

Sydney writer Bernard Cohen won the \$10,000 biennial Russell Prize for Humour Writing for *The Antibibliography of Robert F. Menzies* (HarperCollins Publishers), selected from a diverse field of 57 entries.

The judges – Dr Kathryn Heyman, Paula Tierney and James Tierney – praised the "biting wit" of the novel and its "ambitious themes, ridicule and craft."

"At times a reader might be encountering a novel, a biography, a political satire or the wittiest PhD exegesis there's ever been," the judges reported.

Chair judge Kathryn Heyman observed: "Bursting with many perfectly choreographed moments, the judges felt that Cohen perfectly captured the states of nervy restlessness in the Australian psyche, while possessing the grace of great fiction."

The novel is set in Canberra where a soon-to-be-elected prime minister invokes the spirit of Sir Robert Menzies. Increasingly discontented with his role as mere nostalgic symbol, Menzies makes a run for it and with much hilarity the Antibibliographer seizes the opportunity to document the most significant untold story in Australian political history, and save his career!

"In [*Antibibliography of Robert F. Menzies*] Cohen has created a sharp political satire shot through with true and startling originality," Dr Heyman said. "

NSW State Librarian & Chief Executive Alex Byrne added: "Humour writing is not an easy genre to master, and Bernard Cohen and his fellow shortlisted authors have shown how humour is not only there to entertain us but to, perhaps more importantly, raise and promote important discussions about our contemporary culture."

"The State Library is thrilled to be administering this unique new Prize that celebrates our unique Australian sense of humour and writers' and readers' love of wit, satire and other forms of humour," said Dr Byrne.

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

The Russell Prize
Humour
FOR
Writing

2015

Media Release

The other shortlisted titles 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 Full Ridiculous*, Mark Lamprell (Text Publishing)
- *The Wife Drought, Why women need wives, and men need lives*, Annabel Crabb (Random House Australia)

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

The Russell Prize for Humour Writing 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.

Bernard Cohen and Dr Kathryn Heyman, Chair of the judging panel, are available for interviews.

For more information and to organise an interview please contact:

Vanessa Bond, Media & Communication Branch, State Library of NSW
(02) 9273 1566, 0411 259 898, vanessa.bond@sl.nsw.gov.au