

# Media Release

## 2016 National Biography Award winner drawn from the ashes

8/8/2016

A gripping biography of one of Australia's most prominent religious figures, who demanded his private records be burnt posthumously, has won this year's \$25,000 National Biography Award, the State Library of NSW announced **TODAY [Monday 8 August 2016]**.

The fiercely private Catholic Archbishop Daniel Mannix (1917-1963) is the challenging subject of *Mannix* (Text Publishing) by Brenda Niall, the extraordinary work selected for Australia's richest biography prize from a record 110 entries.

Niall first met the influential archbishop at the age of six, and then later as a graduate employed to interview the then 95 year-old. At this time Niall was given the rare opportunity to see a box of his personal papers. However, years later while researching the biography she discovered that these telling documents were lost to history – Mannix instructed they be destroyed after his death.

The judges praised Niall for “recovering both the public identity and the fiercely protected private self to create a beautifully balanced portrait of a very complex and elusive character.”

According to NSW State Librarian & Chief Executive Alex Byrne: “Over its 21 year history the National Biography Award has celebrated a body of incredible stories about our nation and its people to the benefit of us, the readers. This year's winner, together with the five other shortlisted works, is yet another outstanding addition to this long list.”

The shortlisted authors each receive \$1,000:

- Martin Edmond *Battarbee and Namatjira* (Giramondo)
- Stephen FitzGerald *Comrade Ambassador: Whitlam's Beijing Envoy* (MUP)
- Karen Lamb *Thea Astley: Inventing Her Own Weather* (UQP)
- Peter Rees *Bearing Witness: The Remarkable Life of Charles Bean, Australia's greatest war correspondent* (Allen & Unwin)
- Magda Szubanski *Reckoning: A Memoir* (Text Publishing)

The judges for this year's Award are: Dr Peter Cochrane, author and Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities; Rosemary Sorensen, a reviewer and journalist; and Associate Professor Richard White, author and historian with the University of Sydney.

National <sup>AWARD</sup>  
*Biography* 2016

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The annual National Biography Award Lecture will be delivered by 2015 award winner Dr Philip Butterss on Wednesday 10 August at 5:30pm. Dr Butterss will talk candidly about his biography of Australia's most popular poet C J Dennis titled, *An Unsentimental Bloke*. Original C J Dennis materials will also be on display at this free event.

To reserve your free ticket, please visit the [State Library's website](#).

The National Biography Award is administered and presented by the State Library on behalf of its benefactor Michael Crouch AO.

**For more information and to organise an interview please contact:**

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