

2016 WESTERN AUSTRALIAN PREMIER'S BOOK AWARDS SHORTLIST

Judges' Summary Comments

Fiction

Allinson, Miles *Fever of Animals* Scribe Publications (2015)

From the beginning of this atmospheric and painterly journey, Allinson carries readers with him as he explores themes of surrealism, doomed love and growing up. In a highly original faux autobiographical narrative, Allinson is not afraid to leave questions open. The novel is an outstanding example of its genre, aesthetically appealing and moving.

Bradley, James *Clade* Penguin Books (2015)

In a familiar yet disturbingly dystopian fictional world, Bradley tracks the breakdown of all that we hold dear without ever losing faith in our ability to adapt and create. *Clade* subtly challenges received truths about climate change and survival. In a dazzling display of narrative momentum, Bradley takes us on a frightening journey through time in this highly original, technically proficient novel.

Harrower, Elizabeth *In Certain Circles* Text Publishing (2014)

This novel is a rich and fascinating exploration of the lives of four characters, two sets of siblings, over a twenty-year period. Following their friendship in youth, it sees them constantly return to one another, giving rise to questions of inevitability and self-determination, with love emerging as both an uplifting and dangerous force.

Harrower, Elizabeth *A Few Days in the Country and Other Stories* Text Publishing (2015)

This beautiful collection offers glimpses into the lives of a range of complex and nuanced characters. Combining earlier published work (of the 60s and 70s) with new writing, the collection is provocative of that era in Australian life. Harrower typically leaves moments of crisis unresolved, open to the reader's speculation.

Jones, Gail *A Guide to Berlin* Vintage Books (2015)

In a fascinating and well-paced narrative this novel brings together themes of loss, the devastation wrought by war and the relevance of literature, to name just a few. Jones has borrowed from the genre of crime fiction while at the same time drawing on a range of areas of thought - psychology, philosophy, and literary theory. Her central character, Cass, is sympathetic yet aloof, cool and passionate, both impressionable and impressive.

Kinsella, John *Crow's Breath* Transit Lounge (2015)

Crow's Breath is a collection of short stories, almost vignettes, set in the Western Australian Wheatbelt. The narrator relates intimate knowledge of the lives of country folk; characters, both young and old, are utterly believable. The language hums with the voice of a poet.

London, Joan *The Golden Age* Vintage Books (2014)

London tells the story of Frank Gold who is alone on two counts, first his polio, which sets him apart from 'normal' children and second his status as a 'reffo' from wartime Hungary. Already

celebrated as the winner of the Prime Minister's Literary Award (2015), *The Golden Age* is a beautifully written novel which takes up a little examined aspect of Australian life, during a polio epidemic.

Midalia, Susan *Feet to the Stars and Other Stories* UWA Publishing (2015)

Taken from a poem by Sylvia Plath, the title of this short story collection is perfectly apt. It describes Midalia's ability to turn everyday life upside down, allow her characters to play the fool and then rescue them from deep unhappiness. *Feet to the Stars* is engaging, both funny and sad and many of the stories have a sharp political edge.

Ryan, Tracy *Claustrophobia* Transit Lounge (2014)

Claustrophobia is a psychological novel of jealousy, curiosity and desire. A young woman discovers a letter written by her school-teacher husband, many years earlier, to a former lover; she sets out to track her down and becomes increasingly involved. A compelling and skilfully written novel, set in Perth, Western Australia.

Non-Fiction

Atkinson, Alan *The Europeans in Australia: Volume 3 - Nation* UNSW Press (2014)

A reflective inquiry, underpinned by deep intellectual rigour, *The Europeans in Australia: Nation* investigates the formation of an Australian identity as the nation itself was formed. Intimate and resonant this is a landmark work that inspires and provokes a deeper understanding of the moral and physical landscapes of Australia.

Bungey, Darleen *John Olsen: An Artist's Life* ABC Books, an imprint of HarperCollins (2014)

A rich portrayal of the man, the artist John Olsen, and the art world he came to inhabit. Bungey draws on years of research, using Olsen's diaries, interviews with the man himself and with those whose lives intersected with Olsen's. A biography that will delight readers with the personal light and imagery Olsen achieved with his art.

Garner, Helen *This House of Grief* Text Publishing (2014)

Garner, by exposing her own emotions and reactions to the evidence presented during the court cases against Robert Farquharson, challenges the reader to do the same. What is revealed is a dialogue between author, reader and the case that rips at the human heart. Masterfully written, this is a deeply mesmerising and honest book.

Niall, Brenda *Mannix* Text Publishing (2015)

Mannix dominated the Catholic Church in Victoria for over 50 years and was renowned across the country for his public campaigns against conscription, his strong and public support of the Irish nationalist movement and stance in favour of the ALP split in the 1950s. This impressive biography portrays Mannix as an inclusive Irishman fighting for equality, yet doesn't shy away from the public recognition of him as 'a famously divisive figure' or having a very private, secretive self.

Sayer, Mandy *The Poet's Wife* Allen and Unwin (2014)

A captivating memoir of love and its decline; Sayer's account of her love affair and marriage to Pulitzer Prize winning poet Yusef Komunyakaa is lyrical, thoroughly engaging and one of those books that is difficult to put down. Sayer and Komunyakaa both emerged from unorthodox backgrounds, both becoming writers. Sayer writes with humour, insight and compassion in this remarkable work.

Starke, Ruth and Hannaford, Robert *My Gallipoli* Working Title Press (2015)

With great economy and directness Starke and Hannaford refract the iconic nature of Gallipoli (Gelibolu) through accounts from individuals from all sides of the conflict. Just as the text and illustration contextualise each other, the structure of the work permits multiple perspectives as the reader's experience accumulates. This eloquent and moving book allows for the complexity and humanity that inhabits war to be felt by readers of all ages.

Ward, Biff *In My Mother's Hands* Allen and Unwin (2014)

A disturbing family history focused on Ward's engagement with her mother's mental illness and the shadowed history of her elder sister's drowning. This is a vivid journey on a road to understanding, acceptance and healing. A memoir that speaks its truth in unpretentious prose.

Children's Books

Balla, Trace *Rivertime* Allen and Unwin (2014)

Presented in graphic narrative style, this book is a journey of discovery, as Clancy and his Uncle Egg take a canoe trip down the Glenelg River. The softly toned illustrations link with the mood of the narrative and echo the simplicity and flow of life on the river. This engaging and enriching book will appeal across a broad age range of both girls and boys.

Barnard, Simon *A-Z of Convicts in Van Diemen's Land* Text Publishing (2014)

Meticulously researched, beautifully designed and superbly presented this impressive volume gives a new generation of readers a detailed and fascinating insight into the convict era.

Caisley, Raewyn and Blair, Karen *Hello from Nowhere* Viking (2014)

Eve enjoys every aspect of her life, living with her dad at an isolated service station out on the Nullarbor at Nowhere. Embracing warm inter-generational relationships and the vivid outback landscape, both text and illustrations combine into a happy picture book to engage young readers.

Graham, Bob *How the Sun Got to Coco's House* Walker Books (2015)

Unique, original, exceptional. Following the rising sun as it travels the world from dawn till dusk, this book is a story, a poem, a magical synthesis of picture and text.

Kwaymullina, Ezekiel and Morgan, Sally *We all sleep* Fremantle Press (2015)

A wonderful picture book for younger children. Stunning paintings in vibrant colours, combined with a deceptively simple poetic text, make this a truly Australian work of the highest quality.

Lester, Alison and Honey, Elizabeth *Our Island* Viking (2014)

With mentoring from skilful author/illustrators Lester and Honey, the children of Mornington Island have turned their drawings into a vibrant, colourful picture book which celebrates their daily lives in their deeply loved and closely observed environment. With its spare evocative text, this is a beautiful book to share with young children while all readers will enjoy the stunning artwork.

McKinlay, Meg *A single stone* Walker Books (2015)

This exquisitely written novel makes for compelling reading. It raises important questions on gender, power and the dangers of blindly following tradition. Simply outstanding.

Metzenthien, David and Camilleri, Michael *One minute's silence* Allen and Unwin (2014)

The succinct text and powerful scratchy, sepia-toned illustrations of this picture book draw its readers into imagining their own participation in the emotions and terrifying experiences of protagonists of both sexes and from both sides of the Gallipoli campaign. This thought-provoking book will engage mature upper-primary readers to adults.

Millard, Glenda *The Duck and the Darklings* Allen and Unwin (2014)

Millard's poetic, alliterative text instantly engages, intrigues and captivates. The whimsical illustrations extend and perfectly reflect the warm poignancy of the story. An outstanding and enriching book.

Pignataro, Anna *Being Agatha* The Five Mile Press (2015)

This picture book will entrance children of all ages, and their parents. It has a quirky protagonist, delightful whimsical drawings, and a terrific message: that being ourselves is the best and only thing to be.

Poetry

Dougan, Lucy *The Guardians* Giramondo (2015)

Seemingly simple, actually very dense poetry, Dougan's elliptical work hints at a life that hovers just beyond our comprehension; in dreams, tales, the past, in the imagination of the poet. This otherworld surrounds even the most domestic of the poems. Often funny as well as serious, the work is at the same time mysterious and haunting.

Holland-Batt, Sarah *The Hazards* University of Queensland Press (2015)

Here, a kind of tough lyricism and an exacting use of language makes for dramatic, assertive poetry, dealing with hard love and harder loss. Holland-Batt writes of personal and historic figures, of the hazards of human and animal life, imagining always, often through surprising metaphors, the 'real and imagined hazards' of living.

Kissane, Andy *Radiance* Puncher & Wattmann (2014)

The radiance is in the poetry Kissane writes, and the things he writes about. The work is often playful and always intriguing as it invokes the worlds the poet explores; sometimes domestic and personal, sometimes imagined and even surreal.

Maiden, Jennifer *The Fox Petition* Giramondo (2015)

Mostly long, often conversational poems between well-known political or public figures, Maiden's poetry is sharp, witty and entertaining. Its focus is on rights of all kinds and for her the poetry is definitely, and defiantly, the political. While it often uses historical figures, the work is always marked by its contemporary significance and broad historical relevance.

Malouf, David *Earth Hour* University of Queensland Press (2014)

Malouf's beautifully crafted, contemplative poetry is always erudite and often intense, working through long lines to develop complex ideas. Attentive to both nature and culture, the work is, as the title suggests, motivated by an awareness of mortality while it also celebrates life and living.

WA History

Bolton, Geoffrey *Paul Hasluck: A life* UWA Publishing (2014)

This biography is one of the best examples of the late Geoffrey Bolton's work. Some 12 years in the making, it combines scrupulous research, thorough but lightly-worn erudition, narrative drive and wry humour. Unlike many biographers, Bolton maintains an empathetic distance to produce a balanced and comprehensive account of one of Western Australia's distinguished sons.

Erickson, Dorothy *Inspired by Light & Land: designers and makers in WA* Western Australian Museum (2015)

This encyclopaedic, land-mark publication, superbly and very generously illustrated, is based in serious scholarship and meticulous documentation. Erickson's narrative style is robust, acerbic at times but always informative. An important addition to its field.

Morgan, Ruth A. *Running Out? Water in Western Australia* UWA Publishing (2015)

Morgan's subject is topical and most relevant to Western Australian readers, but it also has a wider appeal. It presents impeccable research and referencing, while Morgan's wit and humour is engaging. This is a pioneering study of value to other scholars, and the seriously interested reader.

Newstead, Adrian *The Dealer is the Devil: an insider's history of the Aboriginal Art trade* Brandl & Schlesinger (2014)

This is a very personal but important account, engagingly written, of a lifetime's involvement in the Aboriginal art trade, notable for its historical perspective, sharp and critical observation. Newstead is perhaps the most knowledgeable person working in this field. His book is an invaluable introduction as well as a vital and informative record of an extremely complex area, written with passion and conviction.

Taylor, John J. *Between Duty and Design: the architect soldier* UWA Publishing (2014)

An outstanding, well-researched, generously illustrated, critical biography of an important architect-soldier whose achievements on both fronts need to be brought to the attention of a wider audience. This book will appeal to the general reader for its narrative style, and to the scholar as an excellent example of the historian's craft.

Young Adults

Croggon, Alison *The River and the Book* Walker Books (2015)

The River and the Book are the two most precious things to this story's remote, matriarchal village; one sustains its physical needs and the other its spiritual soul. Simbala, who holds the inherited position of the Keeper of the Book, tells the story of the changes wrought by the river wars upstream and the theft of the Book. Her journey to get the Book back, gives her an awareness of her identity independent of her role as Keeper; and to the reader, an awareness of the cultural and environmental disruption and damage done to traditional societies by ignorant, consuming Western nations and corporations.

Groth, Darren *Are You Seeing Me?* Random House (2014)

Groth's characterisation and writing are masterful. Alternate chapters take us into the minds and emotional highs and lows of nineteen-year-old twins, one of whom is autistic, as they tell their stories; and journal entries of their father woven into Justine's story, provide an insight into the past. Heart-rending, compassionate, funny and wise, *Are You Seeing Me?* is powerful in its message: see beyond the disability to the person it may often hide.

Hayes, Nicole *One True Thing* Random House (2015)

Hayes leads us on a tour of the life of a 'celebrity' child, Frankie, the daughter of a prominent politician in the lead-up to an election. With a thoroughly engaging, misleadingly light-hearted writing style, Hayes develops a story that considers media and political ethics alongside family relationships and the (almost) everyday life of a teen girl. Absorbing, enlightening, highly enjoyable.

Lawson, Sue *Freedom Ride* Black Dog Books, an imprint of Walker Books (2015)

Racial tensions are high in 1960s Walgaree, and escalate with the anticipated arrival of the Australian Freedom Ride bus, a student protest which challenges the racist, apartheid-like treatment of Aboriginal people. When Robbie, our teenage protagonist, gets a job at the local caravan park, he is influenced by his young employer, Barry, and Barry's mother, whose warmth and attitudes are at odds with those of the rest of the town. He navigates his way to an independent choice for racial justice, uncovering, in the process, his family's dark secrets and the mystery of his absent mother. Based on the factual Freedom Ride bus protest of 1965, this important book highlights the past mistreatment of Australian Aboriginal people and provokes the question, 'How far have we really come?'

Lomer, Kathryn *Talk Under Water* University of Queensland Press (2015)

In a neatly told dual narrative, Will and Summer meet online and become friends. When Will moves back to his small Tasmanian home town where Summer now also lives, he realises that Summer hasn't been completely honest about herself: she is a strong, vivacious character who happens to be deaf. In the gentle evolution of their relationship, the two navigate the communication difficulties of their friendship, single-parent home situations and a weekend sailing adventure, making *Talk Under Water* highly readable and interesting, with important (but not invasive) commentary on disability, love and life after loss.

Zorn, Claire *The Protected* University of Queensland Press (2014)

A powerful yet sensitively written book, this story follows protagonist, Hannah, through a difficult period of her life. Examining themes of loss, grief and bullying, Zorn manages not to overwhelm the reader with 'issues', but rather carefully unpacks Hannah's journey in a realistic, heart-breaking but ultimately hopeful story. With immaculately paced tension and potent emotional punch, leavened with genuine humour and warmth, *The Protected* is a superb example of a contemporary young adult novel.

WA Emerging Writers

Davis, Brooke *Lost and Found* Hachette Australia (2014)

This is a charming story of three quirky characters on a journey of search and discovery who, on a road trip across Australia, find much more. Davis explores love, death, and friendship through the whimsy and wisdom of her child protagonist. Her unique voice delivers a compassionate story.

Glickman, Ray *Reality* Fremantle Press (2014)

As Glickman brings his characters - six people selected at random - together, their moralities are tested. *Reality* is an intelligent novel that explores questions of personal responsibility and ethics. It is also witty, with a direct first-person narrator who plays with his characters while wryly observing Western Australian people and places.

Maling, Caitlin *Conversations I've never had* Fremantle Press (2015)

In this stunning poetry collection, Maling constructs and defines a young Australian identity against a backdrop of recognisable Western Australian landmarks. Subtle and elegant, the poetry is powerful in connection and feeling. Maling's fresh collection explores promise and possibility.

Shah, Sami *I, Migrant* Allen and Unwin (2014)

I, Migrant is a page-turning, laugh-out-loud view of religion, politics, sex and life. After a lengthy immigration process, the Shah family eventually settles in downtown Northam, WA. Comedian Sami Shah's prose is sharp, and, combining warmth and intelligence, he delivers a powerful memoir.

Scripts

Decent, Campion *Unholy Ghosts* Australian Script Centre (2014)

Nimble seriousness in a stage drama - well-wrought performance craft and presentation - navigating what is a highly personal experience of the fraught passing of parents. Not aiming to be innovative entertainment in form, but the strong sense of stagecraft, plus the acerbic dialogue and neatly realised, if troublesome, ensemble characters, deliver an effective and moving valedictory relevant to many.

Lui, Nakkiah *Kill the Messenger* Belvoir (2015)

This drama, with its wry humour and pragmatic depictions of the clash between competing subject positions, signals we are perhaps now on the cusp of the increasing creation of a new generation of Indigenous writing for both live and screen work. A more personal and challenging reflection relevant to a wider world awareness is emerging, and Lui's play signals something of this vital evolution in the performance arts.

Miller, Suzie *Dust* Stage Play Black Swan Theatre Company (2014)

Intriguing stage drama pushing Australian naturalism into an effective surreal realm employing the potent core metaphor of red dust. Ostensibly that element evokes a dystopian, end-time sci-fi trope but the greater appeal of this strategy is that the playwright - who has an admirable grasp of this performance material and a most effective application of stage design possibilities and mechanics - delivers the audience to wider concerns in our antipodean culture through the shifting structure of the character elements. Risk taking evident in this well-crafted and challenging creation.

Murray-Smith, Joanna *The Divorce* Currency Press (2015)

In a challenging and risk-taking creation in two-part television musical drama form, the playwright has collaborated with a young emerging Australian composer to structure a delightful small screen entertainment. It has echoes of operetta, tinctures of Jacobean drama blended with modern high 'soap' and sly camp. Underpinning all is a Bard-like and at times wicked celebration, a contemporary epithalamion for modern marriage and love, setting aright unexpectedly in the astutely structured conclusion, what bitter Sunderings have wrought. Unique, memorable and relevant.

Philpot, Lachlan *The Trouble with Harry* Oberon Books (2014)

A play with a chorus that is in many ways ourselves as citizens forming crippling judgements about 'different' immediate neighbours of ours. An insightful immersion in a transgender domestic arrangement - a real-life hidden partnership in early 20th Century urban Australia. This performance gains increasing emotional potency by the steady dramatic structuring as the fates of the protagonists unfold. Very moving and deeply empathetic performance writing at the heart of present-day gender questioning.

Sewell, Stephen *Embedded* The Yellow Agency (2015)

Stephen Sewell's *Embedded* is contemporary in its attitudes, with its honest portrayal of spiritually bereft individuals lost in what appears to be an ending. It is gripping and confronting in the way the two protagonists intellectually, sexually and politically play out their condition. This work is exciting, potent and tears at the fabric of now.

Digital Narrative

Breeze, Mez *A [[Non]] Guardian Age*

This digital narrative is accessed through a book-like web interface. It incorporates mixed media including poetry, prose, graphics and sound files in a remix of a forgotten work, Anna Maria Bunn's *The Guardian*, from 1838. The new work not only re-presents parts of the original, but also provides a commentary on the passing of time, aspects of country and the novel upon which it is based.

Crisp, Ben *Stasis: 7-118*

This 'choose your own adventure' narrative has a highly original interface with a compelling set of graphics and soundscape that draws the reader into the storyworld. The short text fragments build to form a compelling story that draws the reader in as they play the part of the main protagonist. Replaying the narrative, and making different choices, shows key scenes playing out from very different perspectives.

Dena, Christy *Magister Ludi*

This narrative game has a novel interface, which is particularly well-designed for use through a tablet. The mode of interaction is simple, but the choices to be made ask the reader to consider how the game might work, with unexpected responses being the most successful. As it develops through the reader's interactions, the narrative questions traditional ways to view education and life experience and suggests new ways to think.

Powell, Dimity *The Chapel of Unlove*

This narrative employs the *Story City* platform and is therefore primarily designed to be enjoyed as part of a walking tour. Normally the narrative would be driven by the choice of direction the reader takes for their walk, although it is also possible to make direction choices without physically moving around the space. Engaging and amusing, the story has a number of twists and turns only apparent when one works through the narrative more than once, altering choices made. Alternative endings mean this story walk could be taken a number of times, and suggestions for bonus activities and links to external web-based content add further interest.

Reiter, David P. *Timelord Dreaming*

This intriguing electronic book is written in short sections the author describes as 'tweetems', which give a sense of the sometimes confusing world experienced by a patient in hospital. Acting as memory snippets, the fragments build a story; each short narrative segment being enhanced by links to web-based content that enlarges on the 'tweetem' text. The reader is taken on a surreal journey, and can choose when to follow links for more information and when to move on to the next piece of the narrative.