

## Judging Panel's Report – Short Story Section 2009

Thank you for again giving us the opportunity to judge the short story section of Yarram's CLC's Short Story and Poetry Competition. The judging panel found the task this year challenging and exhilarating, with great debate not only about the winning entries but also regarding the criteria we should apply to this competition.

When we met to discuss our respective short list of entries, we decided to try to define our version of a winning story.

Firstly, what is a story? They have been around since humans started communicating, and take many forms: pictures, jests, myths and family tales, to name just a few. What forms are acceptable for this competition? Would a graphic novel be eligible?

Then came discussion about what defines the literary worth of a piece of writing, and how we should apply that definition when choosing a winner. We agreed that artistic merit is important, and our winning story must definitely be well written. But beautiful writing without structure and characterisation can alienate the reader. Just as Hercules had to choose between duty and pleasure, must a reader choose either enjoyment or literary worth?

It was agreed that literature stands the test of time, inviting re-reading, discussion and thought, and that this standard should be set for our winning story.

Eventually we decided we crave it all – a well written, thought provoking story which is original and satisfying and makes us keep it close by for the pleasure of repeated reading.

Here is the result of our discussions. It is a substantial, but by no means exhaustive, list of the criteria this particular judging panel looks for in a winning story:

- Our winning story will be in words, not pictures.
- To be a story there must be a theme or connection between events: ie a beginning, middle and end, however nebulous.
- We want to be engaged. Beautifully crafted writing is not enough by itself to intrigue our curiosity, evoke our emotions and keep us reading.
- There must be a point to the story. A collection of memories or vague opinion piece is not enough.
- The story must give us an insight into human nature and give us food for thought long after we have finished it.
- The story must have structure and resolution without predictability;
- The writing should be well crafted, original and compelling;
- We want to be intrigued without being confused. The writer's intent, however subtle, must be evident.
- And of course we want the fundamentals: correct spelling, grammar and punctuation. These enhance the connection between the writer and reader and show you care about us.

We know that some entrants will disagree with our criteria, and that is your right, but we have to be true to our definition of a winning short story and judge accordingly. Other judging panels will value different criteria and reward different types of stories.

We were pleasantly surprised when we went away to review our shortlists of stories. In almost all cases, our initial choices, based on what had instinctively appealed to us, stood up to our list of criteria.

This year's winner is "Endless Possibilities". Judges admired the simplicity of prose, evocative images and the compelling sense of what was not said but clearly implied. We felt this writing was technically perfect, well crafted and left us wanting more. Well done!

Second place went to "What the Raven Saw". Delivering a powerful message through the interaction between two strong characters, this story was clever, witty and thought provoking.

An encouragement award goes to the local author of "Duplicity". This story showed great promise in achieving many of our criteria, and we hope to read more entries from him or her next year.

We congratulate all the entrants, and encourage all of you to consider our list and keep writing!