



THE UNIVERSITY OF
MELBOURNE

Australian Centre Literary Awards 2017

Judges Report

School of Culture and Communication



Kate Challis RAKA Award

This award for Indigenous creative artists has been made available through the generosity of Bernard Smith. The 2016 Kate Challis RAKA Award is for an Indigenous playwright. Award value: \$20,000.

Jub Clerc for *The Fever and the Fret*, 2015

Jub Clerc emerges as an exciting new voice in Australian theatre with her play *The Fever and the Fret*. *The Fever and the Fret* made its debut in Perth in 2015 with a superb production auspiced by Yirra Yaakin Theatre. With a confidence borne of its grounding in Aboriginal experience, the script explores language, in its varying modalities, as a vehicle of Aboriginal subjectivity. This considered use of language gives the actors scope to develop the interiority of their characters, and an enduring sense of their dignity, over the extended time frame of the play. With a backdrop of mining, and a family member's dementia, Clerc has written a play that draws audience and actors together in a profound shared experience that is culturally specific as well as universal.

Judges: Denise Varney (chair), Elizabeth Heathcote, Don Heathcote, Jeanine Leane, Philip Morrissey.



Peter Blazey Fellowship

Fellowship to honour the memory of Peter Blazey for a work-in-progress in the non-fiction fields of biography, autobiography and life-writing. Award value: \$15,000 plus residency at the Australian Centre.

Cassandra Pybus for work towards a biography of Trugannini

This is a valuable and important piece of biographical research, focussing on the life of Trugannini, an Indigenous Tasmanian woman who was taken from Bruny Island at the age of sixteen and, as Pybus puts it, was "effectively a prisoner of the state until she died in 1876". The judges were impressed with the quality of writing, the rigor of the research and the command of narrative direction. This is a significant biography, one that will reveal both the horrors of militant colonialism and the ability of Indigenous people to survive under great duress. We note that this work is mindful of "the protocols that govern non-indigenous writers dealing with Indigenous subjects".

Judges: Ken Gelder (chair), Penny Blazey, Jonathan Green, Denise Varney.



Vincent Buckley Poetry Prize

Established to honour the memory of Vincent Buckley, the biennial prize is offered alternately to enable an Australian poet to visit Ireland and to facilitate the visit of an Irish poet to Melbourne. Award value: \$12,000 plus residency at the Australian Centre.

Joel Deane for *Year of the Wasp*, 2016

Joel Deane's poetry gives us striking and perceptive images of the world he moves through: actual local places like Melbourne's Westgate bridge to distant locations he either visits or imagines and recreates. He charts his experiences with a vivid precision, dissecting his thoughts in ways that pay delirious tribute to the many possibilities of the poetic form. *Year of the Wasp* (2016) is partly a chronicle of Deane's recovery after a stroke. The loss of language here becomes mythological, and is regained with an acute and critical awareness of the everyday world. Deane's poetry can turn to political matters on the one hand, while burrowing into the most intimately fraught experiences on the other: the lonely nocturnal killing of a fox, for example. But these glimpsed moments of cruelty and suffering sit alongside a series of touching insights into human love and warmth and the celebration of a human capacity to survive and endure.

Judges: Ken Gelder (chair), Peter Otto, Linda Weste.