

Assessors Report: 2018 Varuna Fellowships for Writers and Illustrators

The Varuna Fellowship assessors were impressed with the quantity and quality of applications for 2018 Varuna Fellowships. The number of applications for Fellowships has been rising, year on year, and this year set a record of over 250 applications. There was a heartening breadth of subject, form and genre presented which gave us hope for the continuing vitality and relevance of Australian literature. The assessors were conscious of the honour of undertaking such an important role in encouraging selected projects and writers.

There was an interesting mix of applications this year. Although literary fiction remained the dominant form, making up over 150 of the applications, we received a dozen or so illustrated childrens' books, memoirs and short stories, and slightly more than that in the way of narrative non-fiction and YA fiction. Screenplays, essays, genre fiction and graphic novels made up the balance.

The rising number of applications, however, also signals an increasingly competitive environment for Australian writers. The assessors would like to offer feedback for writers applying for Fellowships in future, and to consider in their work more generally in an ever more rigorous publishing environment.

It is vital to demonstrate your commitment to the craft of writing by making sure that your submission is well edited, proofread and correctly formatted. For example, it is important that you follow our submission formatting guidelines, such as 12 point Times New Roman, 1.5 or double-spaced lines and page numbers. Precise formatting guidelines can be found [here](#).

Many writers may benefit from the process of publishing some shorter fiction as an important part of their apprenticeship before tackling such a complex and difficult form as the novel. Such writers could consider supporting the many fine Australian journals that publish short fiction and creative non-fiction, submitting their work to these journals and in general becoming aware of the standard of work currently being published. It is important to think through the complex challenges of focalisation, framing, voice and point of view which are so particular to writing fiction.

The assessors are proud, however, to support the fine writers and exciting projects selected for the 2018 Fellowships and look forward to reading the finished work. As one of our assessors wrote for a recent program “*But these are stages in the journey. It does not mean that those manuscripts that were not selected are not worthy of development. My deepest respect for the effort spent. Each submission always feels like holding a heart in my hand.*”

We look forward to the varied and important projects we will have the honour to read next year.

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