

Judging the Judge

Some years ago, I was invited to join with a group of two other judges to award the national poetry book award for a collection of poems to be announced at Writers' Week in South Australia - with a very rich prize. There were about thirty books of poetry entered. I can't recall any of the collections not being eligible for the shortlisting of six by all three judges. We met many times, argued, agreed, and finally went away to shortlist initially and then later to come up with an overall winner. There were no second prizes. The three shortlists were not identical. The three books chosen ultimately for the first prize were all different – although those same three books appeared in each shortlist.

I remember well that last meeting when we all agreed that all three collections were not only made up of excellent well-made poems but superb anthologies of those same poems. What we argued about until well after midnight was quite simply the emotional element. In other words how these poems touched our hearts and minds. One of the collections followed the theme of birth, another the natural world and the third a collection of contemporary prayers or meditations.

Harold Bloom the eminent American literary critic and Sterling Professor of Humanities at Yale University has commented in one of his many books 'We read poems to find ourselves'. Any individual sitting on (invited) judgement on others poems must firstly determine that they are all well made and whether traditional or modern do not falter when it comes to the integral elements of poetry. For example, the poems should not contain prolix, sentimentality, mixed or ludicrous metaphors, etc.).

The poems chosen here are all well-made and some are superb. The winner and runner up were the latter but in addition, had a profound emotional impact on me.

Jeff Guess
Gawler
June 2018