

The ALS Gold Medal has been awarded annually, from 1928 (apart from a brief hiatus between 1975-82). The Australian Literature Society awarded it until 1928, and ASAL for the last 32 years. I was privileged to work with two of my ASAL colleagues, Susan K. Martin and Paul Salzman on the judging panel for 2015, on your behalf. And what a phenomenon it was!

Over 60 works of literature by the great and illustrious, to first time writers.

The shortlist of five works, announced on May 4, was:

The Golden Age, Random House, a novel by Joan London.
Drones and Phantoms, Giramondo Poets, poetry by Jennifer Maiden,
Earth Hour, UQP, poetry by David Malouf,
When the Night Comes, Hachette, a novel by Favel Parrett,
Nest, Hachette, a novel by Inga Simpson.

The judging panel had a cornucopia of fine literature to judge, and we had our small disagreements. How interesting it is to hear another's sense of a work, and to measure how it meets with, or doesn't meet with, one's own impressions. But about the shortlist we had no disagreements. There were several other works which could have/should been shortlisted, though it would no longer have been short.

But for 2015, the winner of the ALS Gold Medal is...the author of 19 poetry collections and 2 novels, a three times winner of the Kenneth Slessor Prize for Poetry, two-time winner of the C. J. Dennis Prize for Poetry, and many other national prizes. She is, of course, Jennifer Maiden, for *Drones and Phantoms*.

Jennifer's works include:

- 1974: *Tactics*. (UQP, 1974)
- 1975: *The Problem of Evil*. (*Prism*, 1975)
- 1990: *The Winter Baby*. (Angus & Robertson, 1990)
- 1993: *Acoustic Shadow*. (Penguin, 1993)
- 2005: *Friendly Fire* (Giramondo, 2005) ISBN 1-920882-12-X
- 2010: *Pirate Rain* (Giramondo, 2010) ISBN 978-1-920882-59-4
- 2012: *Liquid Nitrogen* (Giramondo, 2012) ISBN 978-1-920882-99-0
- 2013: *The Violence of Waiting* (Vagabond Press, 2013)

And *Drones and Phantoms* - awarded the 2015 Australian Literature Society Gold Medal for its sharp, ferocious, funny, poetic rendition of contemporary Australia – and America, and Ethiopia, and feminists (ethically secure and insecure), and human evil– from the highly personal to the incisively political, often in purposeful collision:

It opens:

When I was young, I wrote that poor men
Do not belong in rich men's houses, thinking
Of Forbes visiting more comfortable
Poets who were into Real Estate (capitalized), but
There is also the memory of a sanguine
Real Estate (capitalized) mogul saying
Privately that they liked it when
The Labor Party was in power, as
Labor cost less to bribe.

That's the opening "Diary Poem: Uses of Live Odds".

This is not a politically correct volume of poems. It is not personal in any light, confessional, love-me kind of way. It's muscly, and funny, and bristles with incongruities: Tony Abbot and Queen Victoria in mutual puzzlement; Hilary Clinton and Eleanor Roosevelt stepping together out of time; Lady Diana and Mother Teresa, "both the most vulnerable of creatures".

It's poetry that stabs at the moral evils and stupidities of our day, revealing their quotidian disguise, but also the monstrous human, as in "Maps in the mind", which would like to paper over human violence, but discovers

The isle of the dead is always rock
and piled rock huts with a block
for proclaiming sorrow,
impatient as rape, tomorrow
too hot, too cold
like maps-in-the-mind of Manus Island,

like maps of Manus Island.

You can hear the musicality of rhyme, the way flip, popular images topple over into deep political insights, orchestrated in the firm, often deceptively jaunty rhythms. But there is never anything less than steely revelation in these poems. And what is revealed is the humanity of the poetic voice and art, in jagged juxtaposition with the capacity for monstrosity - recognized in the most shambling of protagonists like Tony Abbot, discoursing with Queen Victoria at a backburn where fireman Tony "wiped the black/fine fire sweat from face", enduring a sermon on the dubious wisdom of excluding the "most eager", the refugee, from our shores. "My dear Albert would have seen/an extravagance of a similar nature/to that of real war." [Tony] sighed/like fire lost in the branch tops, said/ "But, Ma'am, inside me everything is war." (24-5)