



The Henry Handel Richardson Society of Australia Inc.

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April 2012 Newsletter

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The HHR Centenary Writing Competition is underway.

After some careful preparation we've started. News of the competition has spread far and wide and our first entry has arrived.

Some exciting steps on the way have been:

Members of the HHR Society have donated generously to this project – a total so far of \$1,580.00. These donations will cover the prizes for the adult section and contribute to the payment for the judge.

Ramona Koval announced the competition at the Wheeler Centre's session on *The Getting of Wisdom* on March 15 to an audience of over 200. The newly developed brochures on the Society and the competition were circulated and eagerly read at this session.

Text Publishing has agreed to sponsor the youth section. Text will provide the funds for the First Prize of \$350 as well as a complete set of 50 of their new Text Classics, 20 Text Classics for Second Prize and 10 Text Classics for Third Prize. They will also provide a link on their website. We are very grateful to Text for their valuable support.

Writing centres across the country as well as writing groups have responded enthusiastically to the announcement of the competition. Information and links will appear on writers' centre e-bulletins and/or in newsletters in Western Australia, Queensland, Tasmania, Victoria and South Australia. The Australian Society of Authors will list it on their newsletter from June to August. Melbourne and Monash Universities have circulated the information to their staff and students. The Victorian Association for Teachers of English and a number of schools have been informed of the event.

One enthusiastic writing group based in Melbourne has posted the information on Facebook, Twitter and Meetup channels. The State Library of Victoria will also promote the competition through their social media channels as well as distribute brochures in the library's Palmer Hall and contact libraries throughout Victoria.

If you care to Google - 'Henry Handel Richardson Writing Competition' - you will get some idea of how far the news has spread.

Ways you can help:

Write an entry yourself.

Tell anyone who might be interested. Direct them to the website for the entry form and guidelines and other information – www.henryhandelrichardsonsociety.org.au

Deliver a poster and/or brochures to your local library, school, historical society, information centre. If you would like to have posters and/or brochures sent to you contact Graeme Charles on gcharles@communityaction.coop or at PO Box 35, Chiltern, 3683 or on (03) 57261173.

If you would like an email to forward to others send a request to Janey Runci on j.runci@bigpond.com

Donations are still welcome to cover the costs of promoting and advertising the competition and administrative costs of postage etc.

Prize Giving at the Annual Oration – October 12

Don't forget to keep the evening of October 12 free for our Annual Oration and prize giving for the writing competition.

Brenda Niall, renowned Australian biographer will speak on HHR and her first biographer, Nettie Palmer, at the State Library of Victoria. Niall's most recent biography is *True North: The Story of Mary and Elizabeth Durack*, published by Text.

This event at the State Library promises to be a special one. More details to come.

The Centenary

2012 is the one hundredth anniversary of HHR's visit to Australia for the purposes of research for *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony*. HHR travelled in Australia with her husband, John George Robertson, her sister, Lil, and her nephew, Walter.

October 12, the date of this year's Annual Oration is also the anniversary of HHR's visit to Chiltern as mentioned in Clive Probyn's talk at the birthday tea in January this year. You can read a transcript of this engaging and informative talk on the Society website.

Unfortunately no photographs of HHR and her travelling companions survive. The photograph below with Robertson on the left, then HHR with Walter, and Lil on the right, is from the summer of 1914.



HHR at the Wheeler Centre – a report from Sue Gordon

In response to the lack of Australian literature being taught at universities, Melbourne's Wheeler Centre has offered a free course of ten weekly sessions - Australian Literature 101. They selected Henry Handel Richardson's *The Getting of Wisdom* as one of the ten examples of important Australian literature. On March 15th Ramona Koval from the ABC introduced the lecture by the writer Rodney Hall.

Ramona Koval said she vividly remembered reading *The Getting of Wisdom* at school. For her it was a revelation and she shared the feelings of alienation and struggle experienced by the heroine Laura. Coming from a migrant working class background she identified with Laura's experience of difference due to class, money and values.

Rodney Hall also stressed the ways readers today engaged with Henry Handel Richardson's characters and referred to the novel as something precious. He spoke of the writer exploring the 'passionate desperation' of a young woman wanting to know where she will fit in and what her chances will be in the adult world. He spoke of the 'totally convincing portrait' created and the 'direct simplicity' of the writing.

Rodney Hall stressed the importance of Henry Handel Richardson as a novelist, stating he believed her novel *Maurice Guest* was one of the ten best novels by an Australian writer. He described her awareness of the psychology of both her characters and her readers, and how the more Laura 'gets it wrong, the more readers get bonded with her.'

When questioned about the historical background of *The Getting of Wisdom* and the links with Chiltern and Maldon, Rodney Hall said it was 'fraught to try tying a novel to its sources.' He believes that 'teasing out sources is no help to a novel' because this takes the reader outside the work and the reader needs to be fully in it in order to understand what the book is doing.

The enthusiastic audience of over 200 took leaflets for the Henry Handel Richardson Society and the writing competition (and clearly read these before the session). Society members from Maldon and Chiltern attended the event.

Australian Literature and an Enterprising Student

Further to the reference in the last newsletter to Michael Heyward's statement that 'in not a single course in the whole country were students asked to read Henry Handel Richardson's *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony*' – members may be interested to follow the discussion further.

An article appeared in the February edition of *Australian Book Review* – 'Searching for Oz Lit at the University of Melbourne'. The writer, Stephanie Guest, had been dismayed to find that as a BA student at Melbourne University she would be unable to do a course in Australian Literature. In 2011 this enterprising student organised an unofficial course at the university. Members of the group read chosen texts, sometimes gave classes themselves, and also invited speakers such as Helen Garner, Morag Fraser and Kim Scott.

The March edition of *Australian Book Review* includes letters in response to Stephanie's article from Barbara Creed for Melbourne University, and the writer Kevin Brophy who also works at the university. Stephanie replies to the letters in the same issue.

In August 2011 Stephanie participated in a discussion on Radio National's Book Show about the study of Australian Literature in our universities. The session was chaired by Ramona Koval, with Dr Sue Martin, Associate Professor in English at Melbourne's La Trobe University, and Dr Bernadette Brennan, Senior Lecturer in the Arts Faculty at Sydney

University and President of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature. Transcripts are available on Radio National's website.

Both Ramona Koval and Michael Williams, director of the Wheeler Centre for Books, Writing and Ideas referred to Stephanie's work in the first of the sessions on Australian Literature 101. Stephanie and fellow student Anna Heyward are both working as researchers for the Wheeler Centre on 'Australian Literature 101'.

More Study of HHR

Roger Neill of Goldsmith's University of London has recently embarked on a doctorate which includes the work of HHR, both as a musician and writer. Roger's work is in musicology, but also encompassing art and literature. At the heart of his research are Australians who migrated to the northern hemisphere in the fin-de-siecle.

Roger wrote to Clive Probyn asking whether there was any evidence that HHR or her sister Lil met in Leipzig with Alfred Hill, the Australian composer born in Melbourne in 1869, and largely unrecognised in his own country.

(You can read more about Hill, on a January entry on Roger's blog:
www.rogerneill.blogspot.com)

HHR and Lil and Alfred were all contemporaries at the Conservatorium, Lil and Alfred were both fiddlers, and HHR and Alfred were pupils of Schreck.

Roger made the point that most Australasians huddled together in Europe, whether in London, Paris or Leipzig, so it seems odd that there is no record of this happening with these three. He asked whether Lil left any letters or other memorabilia of her time in Leipzig and whether HHR wrote more letters which have not survived.

Clive replied to Roger that there is no mention of Hill by either of the sisters, and he believes this suggests that Hill was simply out of their league in their German years.

Our New Brochure – with thanks to Audra Kunciunas

If you attended the Wheeler Centre event you will have seen our smart new Society brochure. Graeme Charles did the groundwork for the brochure and then we were fortunate to have the services of a new member, Audra Kunciunas, who very willingly donated her time and expertise in its production.

Audra has recently located from Melbourne to Chiltern. She is a freelance editor and is also Promotions Coordinator for Greyhound Safety Net who arrange greyhound adoptions. (www.greyhoundsafetynet.org)

The Society is very grateful for her contribution.

Welcome to our New Members

Audra Kunciunas from Chiltern
Ric Pawsey from Kerrimuir
Delys Sargeant from Mt Martha
Rosemary Gordon from Wahgunyah
Michael Heyward from Text Publishing

HHR Tour – Germany, France & England - 2013

Graeme Charles is seeking expressions of interest from people interested in a 3 week tour of HHR sites in Germany, France and England, probably during August/September 2013. The tour would include Munich, Leipzig, Strasbourg, London, Hastings, Lyme Regis and possibly North Wales.

Estimated cost per individual (please note: estimate only) between \$5000 and \$6000 including air fare, accommodation and internal travel. A number of people have already expressed interest in the proposal but numbers are important from a cost point of view, so please let Graeme know (see contact details re competition above) if you would like your name to go on his list of interested people.

Have you renewed your membership?

Just a reminder that this year's subscription of \$10 is due.

If you haven't yet paid, your subscription can be sent to the HHR Society of Australia Inc, PO Box 35, Chiltern 3683, or direct deposited to the Society's account, number 77605 at the WAW Credit Union BSB 803 070. Make sure to list your name with the deposit.

Listed below are those members who have renewed their membership.

If your name is not on the list, but you believe you have renewed, please let Graeme Charles know on 03 57261173 or email him on gcharles@communityaction.coop

Renewed:

Nada Reid, Glenda Campbell, Janey Runci, Heather McNeill, Rex and Mary Fuge, Ian & Marelle Whitaker, Ross Harvey and Rachel Salmon, Graeme and Gloria Banks, Barbara Murdoch, Clive and Meg Probyn, Beth Chamberlain, Louise Doddrell, Helen McBurney, Marie Bell, Peter & Barbara Cuffley, Linda Ross, Judy Dixon, Beverley Wain, Bronwyn Minifie, Peter Hurry, Eunice De Piazza, Erika Hansen, C & R Summerfield, Margaret Taylor, Geoffrey Carne, Pat Clarke, Jane Wilkins, Jean Whitla, Frances Newbound, B & H Neill, R Sinclair-Wood, Graeme and Dot Charles, Barbara Finlayson, Dawn Snell, Eileen Burke