

Henry Handel Richardson Society of Australia Inc.

Newsletter December 2014



Vale Rex Fuge



Rex Fuge

As many members will know, our founding President, Rex Fuge, died on 6 September 2014. For many years before the HHRSA was set up (in Rex and Mary's Chiltern house) he was the moving force behind the annual celebration of Henry Handel Richardson's birth (3 January) held in the gardens at 'Lakeview' in Chiltern.

He also ensured that the very wide-ranging collection of historical material housed in the Chiltern Athenaeum continued to develop and always remained accessible to the public. Both of these were key roles in the cultural life of the north-east, and both were of course voluntary in nature.

Rex was fascinated by local history, and was always ready to share his knowledge, at HHR functions, or with visitors and tourists at the Athenaeum, or on special expeditions such as his celebrated tours of neighbouring cemeteries.

He had been a farmer before moving into town, almost next door to his beloved Athenaeum, but it is perhaps less well known that he held several elected offices in the municipal life of Chiltern and Indigo Shire, an experience of local government from which we all benefited when funds for 'Lakeview' were needed. Rex never ceased to be its advocate and supporter.

He received a well-deserved Order of Australia for his years of outstanding public service. He is sadly missed, and our sympathy goes to Mary and the Fuge family.

Clive Probyn, President, HHRSA

HHR's Birthday 3 January 2015

The BYO picnic tea to celebrate HHR's birthday will be held for the 45th consecutive year at Lake View, Chiltern, on Saturday 3 January 2015 commencing at 6pm. All very welcome.

For those who haven't been before, each year we sit in the peaceful garden of 'Lakeview' under the canopy of the wonderfully mature trees with a view out to Lake Anderson.

'Lakeview' is the house where Richardson lived for several very significant months of her childhood from 1876-77. In her memoir, 'Myself When Young' she says of the house:

I liked it because all its windows were French windows and usually stood wide open, which gave one a sense of freedom, and because it had a verandah running round three sides of it.



Lakeview

Details of the house and town can be readily identified with those of the house the Mahony family occupy in 'Ultima Thule', the third volume of 'The Fortunes of Richard Mahony'. Chiltern is still recognisable as the town of Barambogie in the same book.

HHR Writing Competition 2014

About fifty people gathered at the Wheeler Centre in Melbourne to hear the announcement by our vice-president, Graeme Charles, of the winners of our second writing competition. The standard of entries was so high that our judge, Helen Garner asked that we give two third prizes. Another prize of \$1000 was awarded for an outstanding essay with some relevance to HHR.



Graeme Charles announcing the results

The Winners

First Prize - *Pressure Okay* by **Jennifer Down**

Second Prize - *Nosebleed* by **Melanie Naphthine**

Third Prize - *What I Wished* by **Rebekah Clarkson & A Lovely Afternoon by **Stephanie Buckle****

Highly Commended and Special Essay Prize

Perhaps if she had never been your friend by **Sylvia Martin**

Highly Commended

Parrot by **Annette Trevitt**

The Flamingos by **Melanie Kinsman**

Metaphor as Illness by **Hugh Kiernan**

Loving It by **Rose Allan**

The Getting of my Father's Wisdom by **Cath James**

Frangipani Kisses by **Cheryl Hayden**

H by **Ann-Marie Priest**



The Prize Winners

First Prize: Jennifer Down for her story, *Pressure Okay*



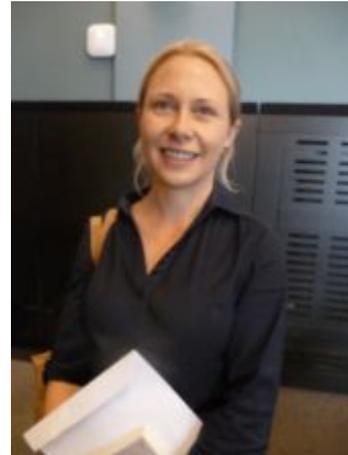
Jennifer Down

Jennifer is aged 24, and in those 24 years she's done a lot. This year she won the prestigious Elizabeth Jolley prize. Her first novel will be published by Text Publishing in 2016 and she's been working on short stories in between the rewrites.

She studied Professional Writing at RMIT and cites the importance of the support given by the coordinator of the course, Claire Renner, and the wonderful tuition of Carrie Tiffany among others.

This year she also completed her Honors thesis in French at Melbourne University. Jennifer produces closed captions for the hearing impaired and does some occasional editing.

Second Prize: Melanie Naphthine for her story, *Nosebleed*



Melanie Naphthine

Melanie has been writing fiction for some time, but only began sending out her work in the last couple of years. Since then she has won First Prize in the Henry Lawson Short Story Award, The Ethel Webb Bundell Short story Competition, The Boroondara Literary Award, The Fellowship of Australian Writers Jim Hilton Award for fiction, Second Prize in the Katharine Susannah Prichard Award for speculative fiction and she was shortlisted for the Margaret River Prize, the Olga Masters Award and the Overland Victoria University Short Story Prize.

Melanie is a voracious reader and HHR is one of her favourite writers. She re-reads *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* every few years. Melanie's reading has evidently paid off in this highly accomplished story. The story emerged from a house she saw near her own and the lives she began imagining there.

Melanie works in educational publishing and the day of the prizegiving was her birthday.

Equal Third Prize - Stephanie Buckle for her story, *A Lovely Afternoon*.



Stephanie Buckle

Stephanie lived in the UK and New Zealand before settling in Canberra. She has been a teacher and a counsellor, and

began writing in 2003 after the Canberra bushfires. Her writing has won a numbers of awards, and several of her stories have appeared in *Island*. She has written two novels, both as yet unpublished, *Listen to Me*, and *From the Ashes*, and is currently working on her third novel, as well as continuing to write short fiction. Her first collection of short stories will come out in 2016 with Finlay Lloyd, an independent publishing firm established by Julian Davies.

Equal Third Prize - Rebekah Clarkson for her story, *What I Wanted*



Rebekah Clarkson

Rebekah is an Australian short story writer who is increasingly attracting attention here and overseas. A significant number of her stories have been recognized in major awards, shortlists and independent publications, including *Best Australian Stories*, *Southerly* and *Australian Book Review*, and her story, 'The Blue Suitcase' was recently translated into German. She was runner up in the 2013 ABR Elizabeth Jolley Short Story Prize and winner of the Readers' Choice Award for the same prize. Next year will see Black Ink publish her work as the title story in, *Something Special, Something Rare: Outstanding short stories by Australian women*. Rebekah has also published reviews, articles and poetry. She has a BA in Aboriginal Studies, an MA in Creative Writing, and is currently completing a PhD at the University of Adelaide, where she also teaches. Her research is focussed on the subversive opportunities offered to writers of the short story cycle.

"I had the opportunity to teach 'Australian Classics: Film and Literature' at the University of Adelaide this year and naturally we studied *The Getting of Wisdom*. It was a privilege to revisit this wonderful book myself, to introduce it to a new generation of readers and to be privy to their discussions about its continued relevance. It was through this experience that I discovered the HHR Society and I'm so glad I did."

Rebekah lives in the Adelaide Hills with her husband and two children.

Special Essay Prize – Sylvia Martin for her essay, *Perhaps if she had never been your friend*

Sylvia is a writer, cultural historian and former actor. She has also worked as a reviewer, editor and manuscript assessor. She holds a doctorate in Women's Studies from

Griffith University and is the author of two biographies: *Passionate Friends: Mary Fullerton, Mabel Singleton and Miles Franklin* (2001) and *Ida Leeson: A Life: Not a Blue-Stocking Lady* (2006), which was awarded the 2008 Magarey Prize for Biography. She recently completed a biography of Aileen Palmer, daughter of Nettie and Vance Palmer for which she was awarded a Publisher's Fellowship at Varuna. She lives in Katoomba.



Sylvia Martin

Helen Garner's Address at the Prize Giving

It must be half a century since I last read *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony*.

As with all mighty tomes of youthful reading, I had thought about it, as it receded into the distant past, with a feeling, most of all, of self-congratulation: it was huge, it was mighty, and *I had read it*.

To tell the truth, my memories of it were blurry and impressionistic, though studded with painfully bright points – for example, Mahony at Queenscliff, in deep mental and spiritual trouble—the way he walked with his eyes always fixed on the ground 'so that passers-by should not use them as spy-holes.'

Over many years, my tastes changed. I didn't think I would ever read the trilogy again. Yesterday, sprawled on the couch in the heat, thinking about what to say today, I picked up my copy and skimmed the introduction. Yep – I remember all this – Ballarat — the goldfields –yep, yep, yep. But then I turned the page to the opening of the novel. My God! In the very first sentence *a man is buried alive*.

The rotten earth collapsed, bringing down the roof in its train. The digger fell forward on his face, his ribs jammed across his pick, his arms pinned to his sides, nose and mouth pressed into the sticky mud as into a mask; and over his defenceless body, with a roar that burst his ear-drums, broke stupendous masses of earth.

That is writing! I was thunderstruck. I could not put the book down. I sank into it and lay there absorbed for the rest of the afternoon and into the night.

My feeling for HHR ran alongside my fifty-year friendship with the late Axel Clark, her biographer. Axel was diagnosed with a brain tumour in 1980. He lived another twenty years, sometimes ill enough for further gruelling surgery, sometimes stable, sometimes in fine fettle; but through all these changes, he worked. He was the least complaining, the sweetest-tempered, the most devoted and determined person I ever knew.



Helen Garner (in the centre) surrounded by the prize winners

In the late 1990s, while he was working on the second volume of the biography, we drove together one day from Melbourne to Sydney. He suggested we stop at Chiltern so he could show me the HHR house. I forget the season, but I remember the weather as dull and clouded, with a cool wind. We had come on the wrong day. The house was not open to visitors. We stood in front of it and looked out over the grey lake in silence. Then in a low voice he said, ‘Bleak, isn’t it.’

I think this was the first time he acknowledged to me the tremendous load that he was hauling—his long, long illness, its draining effect on his life spirit; his weariness; his struggle to finish the work. And outside that closed, locked old house I had my first sharp physical sense of HHR’s childhood, how anxious and difficult it must have been, and what she had to fight free of. Very soberly we drove on.

Early this morning I leafed through volume 2 of Axel’s biography and came upon a little scene that he quotes from HHR’s memoir *Myself When Young*.

She was describing a time when she was trying to write *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* and ‘felt wretchedly inadequate to the task.’

I had got to a part that stuck me: try as I would, I couldn’t get it to move. I felt cross and tired and generally disgruntled. And one day I vented my irritation by flinging out, “I don’t know I’m sure how I ever came to write *Maurice Guest* – a poor ignorant little colonial like me!” My husband glanced up from his writing table and said in his wise, quiet way, “But emotionally very experienced”.

This is the point from which I can step across the gap of time (and form) that lies between Richardson’s vast canvas and the short stories we’re here today to praise.

The chief thing that struck me about the stories was the sense that their writers are, like HHR, ‘emotionally very experienced’. They work with great depths, and breadths, of human longing and sadness and joy. I was moved by them, and found it very hard to rank them. I would draw up a list of winners, but find that when I woke next morning their order had somehow shifted overnight, for reasons I was hard put to articulate.

I loved the writers’ ease in the world of family, the different angles on which they went at this age-old scene of struggle and love and rage and sometimes of triumph. There was some very fine observation of children, of their suffering and jubilation, and also their ferocity. Powerful psychological insights were delivered with such a light touch that I hardly felt them until they zapped into my nerves and tingled there.

I was impressed by the writers’ tackling of pain and the fear of death; their delight in the material world, its preciousness and beauty, and what they could make it mean; the growth of love, the blessing of forgiveness, the endurance of the unendurable. I admired their authority, their quality of stride—and how they could be funny in a way that was not intended to make a reader laugh so much as to save her (and the story’s narrator) from despair.

The work shows a high level of technical skill: fine handling of structure; the ability to move elliptically through time; judicious withholding of information, and the release of it in tiny unexpected surges, or gentle sprays. In one story in particular, the difficult matter of class is laid bare.

In another, I envied the writer’s ability to apply the technique that Freud said a psychoanalyst must use, in listening to patients—something he called ‘evenly suspended attention’. The writer of this story kept my sympathies hovering between her characters in the most exemplary and disturbing way.

It’s a long time since I have tried to write a short story; but being as I am very interested in compression, I learnt a great deal from these works.

The whole experience of reading them has been a joy to me. I thank the writers for the pleasure they’ve given me, and the example they’ve set. The bar is high and I read their work with respect and admiration.

If I may, I’d like to end with a single sentence from Jennifer Down’s winning entry, *Pressure OK*, to describe the mood I was in after I had read the stories. She’s talking about a widower who’s just been to the theatre with his grown-up daughter to see a great Australian play. They’ve parted with an awkward affection, and he’s walking back to the station. The sentence consists of only ten words. It seems so simple, but it leaps with poetic energy. It’s modern, it feels like now, yet it might also have been describing one of poor Richard Mahony’s rare moments of tranquillity and hope. I would kill to have written it. Here it is:

‘His veins were warm and all the stars were out.’

© Helen Garner

Bruce Steele's new book on HHR's husband, Professor J.G. Robertson: his lectures on Wagner



Bruce Steele signing copies of his previous book at Lake View

Last year Bruce Steele's *Walter Lindsay Richardson: A Victorian Seeker* was published. It was a spin-off from the Monash University HHR Project. This year has seen the publication of a further volume – Bruce's edition of *Wagner as Poet and Thinker*, a series of lectures by HHR's husband Professor J.G. Robertson.

These lectures were given at London University in 1933 only a couple of months before Professor Robertson's untimely death and have remained unpublished until now. Most people if they think of Richard Wagner at all remember him as a composer, but Robertson argues that he was also a significant poet-dramatist. He deliberately sets the music to one side in order to highlight Wagner's poetic librettos and to study his ideas and his place in 19th Century German culture.



JGR and HHR at Lyme Regis c. 1929. (Photo by Olga Roncoroni)

Readers of this Newsletter may remember that when HHR and Robertson met in Leipzig, they discovered a mutual

interest in Wagner's operas and set to work studying the music and the texts. Robertson was no musician, but HHR was able to play through the piano versions of the scores as they increased their understanding of these complex works. While Wagner was to become an important influence on her novel *Maurice Guest*, Robertson continued his study of the texts on and off throughout his life. These lectures are his last thoughts on the subject.

Although delivered before a university audience, the lectures are eminently readable. Anyone with a love of Wagner's operas will find them enlightening and stimulating.

Published at a retail price of \$39.95, copies will available to HHR Society members and their friends for \$30 on 3rd January 2015.

New members – from England, the USA and Serbia

Doreen Calvert from Cornwall, England

Dietra Reid from Baltimore, USA

Ivana Nikolija from Serbia – Ivana wrote of her great love for Australia, which led her to Richardson's short stories. She is at present reading *The Getting of Wisdom*.

House-swap in Cornwall

Doreen (Dee) Calvert lives in St Ives, Cornwall. She and her partner run a contemporary fine art gallery there and would love to house-swap with any HHR Society members here. She is coming to Australia over this summer and is interested in catching up with any of our members who are into ceramics. Dee was in Chiltern visiting her son last January and came to the HHR Birthday on 3 January then subsequently joined the Society. People can find out more about her gallery at www.porthminstergallery.co.uk and she would love to hear from members via her email address which is doreen.calvert@virgin.net

Annual General Meeting

The AGM will be held at 'Lakeview' at 5 pm on 3 January 2015.

Reminder Subscriptions

At the AGM held on 3 January 2014 it was resolved to keep our annual membership subscription at \$15 per individual. If you haven't already done so, you can send your 2014 membership sub to the Society at PO Box 35 Chiltern 3683 or direct deposit into our account 'Henry Handel Richardson Society of Australia' BSB 803 070 Account no. 77605, making sure your name is shown.

HHRSA Committee

President: Clive Probyn

Vice-President: Graeme Charles

Secretary: Janey Runci

Treasurer: Dot Charles

Committee Members: Helen McBurney, Bronwyn Minifie

Website: www.henryhandelrichardsonsociety.org.au