

**This Report on the Short Story Category of the Biennial Literary Award 2015 was presented by
Dr Molly Travers at the Friday 25th September Meeting**

1st Prize “The Menkas”

2nd Prize “Ammonia Plains”

Special Mentions

“Capote goes to market”

“Mrs Nunn and the Blue Mask”

Sunny Girl”

“Double Take”

“Three Voices”

“Dorothy’s Glycine”

Comments

There were many good stories and every one was worth reading. As usual, a failure to edit has to disadvantage writers. For instance, one has only to look at any novel to find out how direct speech is punctuated. The semi-colon is still overdone, though the exclamation mark has gone out of favour, fortunately.

But on the whole, the stories were well written, and every one had something interesting to say – some comment on human behaviour, whether serious or humorous. I enjoyed the hours I spent on them. There were a number about growing old, and I recognized myself in some of them – and almost felt that out of loyalty, I should give the prize to one of them. Only one was science fiction. However, after much rereading, I have chosen a fable set in a European village and an Australian country comic yarn.

The 1st prize goes to “The Menkas”. This is a fable, told in the style appropriate to a fable, and with a setting in a Macedonian village – now contaminated by the local metal smelter that is closing, leaving the villagers without jobs. The writing style is balanced and without errors of any kind. The characters are intended stereotypes but fit together comfortably. Not only is the plot amusing, but there are other wry twists, too – for instance the arrival of a German industry to replace the closed smelter and providing jobs, but perhaps without such pollution. Visually, with its plot of sexual satisfaction, the story is tasteful and very funny. I think of all the stories, I found this one the most satisfying. It made me smile.

The 2nd prize goes to “Ammonia Plains”. The modern ocker Australian yarn is not so easy to do. Nor is slapstick humour so easy. And this one is thoroughly up to date. The local police are after an unroadworthy vehicle. The pigs are intensively farmed. And the comedy is consistent, visual (and tactile and olfactory), along with three credible characters all of whom come to life. It’s corny but original. And faultless in writing and presentation. Throughout, I found a single mistype but not one other error.

A Special Mention goes to “Capote goes to market”. The three characters at the second-hand market – the narrator who sells valuable books, the girl selling her old clothes including bras, and the sinister buyer who befriends her – are developed by physical description and what the narrator thinks, or what the protagonists say and do. The market scene is vivid, and the sinister plot comes to a clever end. The reader has to become involved, and is left urging action. The evocation of atmosphere and suspense is well done. As are details of the books for sale – I enjoyed that. The bookseller’s failure to take action fits with his obsession with his valuable books; it is credible that such a person would observe, surmise, but do nothing.

Other Special Mentions include three positive stories about old age, and one about a young girl, all of which introduced credible characters and vivid settings, along with an interesting plot.