

## 2019 AUHE Prize in Literary Scholarship Judges Report

Panel: Ann Vickery (Chair), Tom Clark, Ben Etherington

### Winner

**Guy Davidson, *Categorically Famous: Literary Celebrity and Sexual Liberation in 1960s America***

In his deep study of the careers and work of James Baldwin, Susan Sontag, and Gore Vidal, Guy Davidson demonstrates how their negotiation of literary celebrity was integrally tied to their sexual identity, something that was part of enabling a new openness about homosexuality in the 1960s. By leading a paradigmatic shift in the understanding of sexual identities, all three, Davidson argues, generated a proto-visibility that would test mechanisms of social control and set an example for broader liberation. Davidson also challenges current understandings of the intersection between public and private in celebrity studies through analysing the limits around sexual disclosure in the 1960s. Breaking with the orthodoxy that posits sexual identity categories as only ever coercive, Davidson boldly argues for their critical and political value. Carefully and elegantly written, immaculately researched, and highly accessible, *Categorically Famous* makes an important contribution to a number of new interdisciplinary fields while always staying attentive to the role of literature in reconceptualising the social.

### Shortlist

**Chris Danta, *Animal Fables after Darwin: Literature, Speciesism, and Metaphor***

*Animal Fables after Darwin* offers a series of close readings of modern literary responses to fables and the fabulous, focusing in particular on the role of metaphor. It uses the ideological and aesthetic differences between texts to reveal a gulf between understandings of animal experience and potential “before” and “after” Darwin. Danta argues persuasively that the fable has an important role to play as a vehicle for the critique of transcendence and a reconsideration of the human’s biological context. *Animal Fables after Darwin* is extremely approachable without in any way detracting from the sophistication of its argument.

**Alys Moody, *The Art of Hunger: Aesthetic Autonomy and the Afterlives of Modernism***

In *The Art of Hunger*, Alys Moody deftly combines aesthetic theory, thick historical description, and close literary analysis to argue that key modernist and late modernist writers were drawn to representing hunger for its capacity both to embody some of modernity's deep-laying contradictions and to explore the limits of liberatory claims that often attach to aesthetic autonomy. For Moody, the 'art of hunger' cannot pretend to solve hunger, but it can help us to understand the existential crisis that artistic practice confronts in the face of avoidable starvation.

**Simone Murray, *The Digital Literary Sphere: Reading, Writing, and Selling Books in the Internet Era***

Simone Murray's *The Digital Literary Sphere* is a much-needed study of the way online spaces of literary reception have expanded, remediated, and redefined literary tastes and markets. It lays out clearly how this domain has largely gone untheorised before developing a sophisticated and comprehensive conceptual model for analysing it. This is then deployed to

great effect in a series of wide-ranging studies that themselves present a model for further scholarship in this field.

**Brigid Rooney, *Suburban Space, the Novel and Australian Modernity***

*Suburban Space, the Novel and Australian Modernity* is a highly absorbing investigation into the role of the novel in mediating urbanisation and the everyday. Through rich contextual framing and elegant close textual analysis, Rooney considers how engagements with Australian and global modernities were channelled through a suburban imaginary and the layered affective registers associated with the domestic environment. Engaging with mobile and new subjectivities, transformative technologies, and Indigenous perspectives, *Suburban Space* provides a new understanding of the significance of fictional narrative in Australian self-fashioning.

**Commended**

The judges would also like to commend the exemplary care taken by Elizabeth Pender and Cathryn Setz in producing their beautiful edited volume *Shattered Objects: Djuna Barnes's Modernism*.