



AUHE Prize for Literary Scholarship 2023 Announcement of Shortlist and Winner

Judging Panel:

Prof. Emerita Lyn McCredden (chair), Prof. Denise Varney, and Dr Lorraine Sim

There were 13 submissions for the 2023 AUHE Prize for Literary Scholarship, in what the judges saw as a robust field. Within the wide disciplinary category of “English” represented in the submissions there was an impressive range of methodological and disciplinary approaches: close textual analysis, archival work, cultural studies, historical and literary historical contextual work, theological studies, genre and period studies, gender studies, biography, military studies, single author studies, drama studies.

The three shortlisted works are fine examples of the disciplinary diversity of contemporary literary scholarship. Shortlisted for the 2023 AUHE Prize for Literary Scholarship are:

Melinda Cooper

Middlebrow Modernism: Eleanor Dark’s Interwar Fiction, Sydney Studies in Australian Literature, 2023.

Thomas H. Ford and Justin Clemens

Barron Field in New South Wales: The Poetics of Terra Nullius
Melbourne University Press, 2023.

Roberta Kwan

Shakespeare, the Reformation and the Interpreting Self, Edinburgh University Press, 2023.

Citations

Melinda Cooper’s *Middlebrow Modernism: Eleanor Dark’s Interwar Fiction* announces its presence as a text of rich historical, critical, literary historical and

generic scope. The work clearly and accessibly places Dark's fiction in the interstices of Australian, international, literary and political debates. It is a nuanced and sophisticated account, which argues that "*aesthetic modernism and Australian nationalism were not "opposite traditions" but rather "mutually enabled" each other, fusing together in complex and interesting ways.*" (10)

Middlebrow Modernism: Eleanor Dark's Interwar Fiction makes a valuable contribution to the growing field of Dark studies, not afraid to take up crucial debates around Dark and issues such as eugenics, liberal humanism, post-nationalism, and Australian modernism and modernity, "*employ[ing] a paradigm somewhere between the circulation model offered by the transnational turn, as articulated by world literature and the new modernist studies, and the emphasis on the uneven economic conditions that shaped modernity provided by postcolonial studies, settler-colonial studies and world-systems theory.*" (11)

As well as offering access to such sophisticated theoretical and ideological debates circulating in Australia and internationally in the interwar years of the twentieth century, this monograph offers detailed close readings across Dark's oeuvre, illustrating the ways in which her writing strategically and variously incorporated elements of the middlebrow, the popular and modernist experimentation. .

Middlebrow Modernism: Eleanor Dark's Interwar Fiction contributes new dimensions of understanding not only of Dark's fiction, but to international modernist studies and Australian intellectual and literary culture.

Thomas H. Ford and Justin Clemens' monograph, ***Barron Field in New South Wales: The Poetics of Terra Nullius*** offers a close-grained, archivally-informed and lively account of colonial poet and judge Barron Field's poetry. They illuminate its contradictory poetics "simultaneously insignificant and utterly significant, unoriginal and original, and courts an aesthetic appeal that it nonetheless frustrates." The authors argue that Field's poetry "...barely rates", but that a close reading "...can establish a number of unexpected details regarding the foundations of colonial Australia that would otherwise go unnoticed." (126). These include the origins of "the foundational fiction of *terra nullius*" and its consequences for Aboriginal peoples, bringing the debate about the term into the ambit of poetry, and vice versa.

The work offers a multitude of archival, historical and literary insights into the shaping ideas and practices of early colonial governmental, literary and legal cultures, and the role that Barron Field, that "simultaneously insignificant and utterly significant" poet played during his seven year tenure in the colony.

Barron Field in New South Wales: The Poetics of Terra Nullius is a convincing, playful, philosophically rich work of scholarship, written in an animated and original style.

Roberta Kwan's *Shakespeare, the Reformation and the Interpreting Self* is a powerfully argued and meticulously demonstrated account of the ways in which the Protestant Reformation redefined the prevailing notions of the self. This work is adept in its detailed referencing of a "hermeneutic revolution", the sweeping religious, social and intellectual changes ushered in by the Reformation and its theological thinkers. The human individual as *interpreting self* is given rigorous theological focus through the ideas of Calvin, and Luther, among others; socially, in the changing forces of British religious and cultural life and institutions; and in Shakespeare's writings, where *Hamlet*, *Troilus and Cressida*, *Measure for Measure*, and *All's Well that Ends Well* are analysed for their complex understandings of characters as interpreting selves.

Kwan's scholarship is deeply informed by knowledge of Medieval, early modern as well as current religious ideas and the impact of such ideas on the lives of ordinary people. For example, she argues, and demonstrates in this rich, contextual analysis of Shakespeare's drama, that:

...it is Shakespeare's stories to which we so often turn to illuminate our own, Shakespeare's voice whom we still welcome into our troubled public square and our debates about who we are and just what the common good might be... bringing the Reformers' thinking about these questions into dialogue with Shakespeare provides interpreters with a complex and rich...way of understanding his plays and their representations of selfhood (370)

Winner

The winner of the 2023 Australian University Heads of English Prize for Literary Scholarship is Melinda Cooper, *Middlebrow Modernism: Eleanor Dark's Interwar Fiction*, Sydney Studies in Australian Literature, 2023.