

Podcast transcript

Western Australian Premier's Australia-Asia Literary Award The Hon Alan J Carpenter MLA

We're in an interesting point, obviously, an interesting point in our development as a society. Our State Government \$73million package, which we call the Ignite package, has been designed to change the shape of our cultural landscape and it's about making a statement, to ourselves, about ourselves and to the world and to the region in which we live and operate.

It's about taking our cultural industry to a completely new level. Driving new ideas, artistic excellence, recognising and investing in the home-grown talent that Sheila referred to and which we know that we have and ensuring that we have a brilliant, vibrant future, beyond rocks and gas, a lot more than that.

The establishment of Australia and Asia's richest literary award signifies the State Government's belief that here and Australia and Asia, are the centre for development of all kinds in the twenty-first century.

Australia and Asia are home to the world's oldest and richest cultural traditions, from the indigenous visual cultures of Australia, through to the historical written records of China.

The idea is to drive ideas and artistic excellence, investing in talent. About our community experiencing the highest standards, the highest qualities in activity, space and places.

It seeks to elevate Western Australia's standing as an international cultural centre, and is key to a vibrant future for the State.

The Western Australian Premier's Australia-Asia Literary Award will offer \$110,000 for a full, book-length work of literary fiction in English.

The work must have been published in the preceding year and will be open to publishers from throughout the world who either publish authors from Australia and Asia or whose author's works are primarily set in Australia or Asia.

The Awards are open to any book-length work of literary fiction published either electronically or in print.

The Awards focus will be on literary merit, no matter what the format. This will allow it to embrace and grow with the technological changes occurring all around us.

The winner of the inaugural Western Australian Premier's Australia-Asia Literary Award will be announced in Perth in November this year, and I look forward to that.

I think it's an exciting development. It's a development which we want to attract attention and so if it's a bit controversial, good, I'm glad. Good.

It's now my pleasure to welcome the chair of the Award judging panel, internationally renowned author and editor of the Asia Literary Review, Nury Vittachy.

Thank you.

Nury Vittachy

Thank you. Good morning, good afternoon I should say. I see you're a bit awestruck by my presence. I'll try not to be condescending boys and girls.

It's great to be here.

You know immediately after I was born, war broke out on the island where I was born and the interesting thing about this war was that the Prime Minister of the country issued a law saying that no one could write about it.

My father, outraged by this, wrote a book about it, smuggled it out of the island to London, where it was published and sold out. And my mother said, 'You've signed our death warrants,' which was correct, he had. But before the contract men could get to our house it was announced that my father had won a literary award, so we got cash, he got a name, we escaped from the island and it changed our lives. That's what literary awards do, they change people's lives.

The most famous book awards in the world are the Booker Prize and the Pulitzer Prize. Now they're not just famous book awards, I would argue that they're the most famous cultural awards of any kind in the world. Any, most famous arts awards of any kind and yet there's a gap in the market and that gap is the Eastern side of the world. The Booker Prize is associated with the UK and the Pulitzer with the US.

Now what these fine people have done is created something global, something massive on the scale of the Booker, on the scale of the Pulitzer and where is it based? It's based here in Western Australia.

It's a gap in a huge market. There are four billion people between Australia and Asia. Four billion out of the world's six-and-a-half billion people and do you know what? Nearly all of the literature comes from the West and so that's an anomaly and anomalies always fix themselves. So what we have here is a prize sitting on an anomaly which is about to fix itself and that means that as Australia and Asia rise to their deserved places on the world stage, then they'll take Western Australia with them.

I've been following book prizes all my life and have been involved in setting them up before and I'm particularly honoured to be involved with this one.

I've noticed, and those of you who check out the Booker short-list, the Pulitzer Prize short-list and so on, will notice that the great literature tends to be, um, trans-global. There's usually, it's almost obligatory, that there's elements from different cultures mixed in a single book. And there's no place more schizophrenic, in the nicest possible way, than Australia.

The literary festivals that I organise in Asia often feature writers imported from here because Australia is, has a lively creativity that we really appreciate in Asia.

So to sum up, this prize is great news for the authors, not just of Western Australia, not just of Asia, but for the authors of the world because it raises the profile of this place and the surrounding region and more importantly, it gives it not just a big place on the world stage but its rightful place on the world stage.

Thank you.