

Stringybark Erotic Fiction Short Story Award 2018

Judges' Comments

The Stringybark Erotic Fiction Award opened on 10 October 2018 and closed on 9 December 2019. It attracted 81 entries which was an all-time low for the erotic fiction competition, despite record prize money and widespread advertising. Any thoughts from readers on why this might be the case is most welcome. For comparison our previous competitions were as follows.

2011 Erotic Fiction Award — *The Heat Wave of '76* — \$515 in prizes — 104 entries

2012 Erotic Fiction Award — *Valentine's Day* — \$770 in prizes — 162 entries

2014 Erotic Fiction Award — *Cocktails* — \$860 in prizes — 130 entries

2018 Erotic Fiction Award — *The Scientific Method* — \$1000 — 81 entries

David Vernon

I salute all entrants to this competition. Writing erotica is about the hardest genre for any writer. Proof of this is the awards given for *bad* erotic writing. See for example: <https://literaryreview.co.uk/bad-sex-in-fiction-award> I am not aware of awards given for bad horror writing or bad humour writing. The reason Stringybark runs the erotic competitions is simply because writing this stuff *is* hard, therefore it is something that serious writers should attempt. What is the difference between wanting your reader to feel scared and wanting you reader to feel aroused? In both cases the writer is using words to manipulate the reader's emotions. However, as we all know society seems generally to think that the depiction of death or disablement is more acceptable than the depiction of the exchange of bodily fluids and hence erotic fiction is something that many writers shy away from.

In reading the 81 entries I have to admit that none of them were as bad as highlighted by the *Literary Review*. Most of them were quite reasonable and some of them quite erotic. I did find stories that simply described sex as rather dull. I enjoyed stories that had interesting characters, settings and plots (particularly plots). While 1800 words is a small number of words in which to develop the above story elements, it is still adequate enough to create an engrossing tale. Some writers seem to be so fixated on the sexual element that other aspects were neglected. Some of the more erotic stories hardly described sex at all (while others did — no one size fits all in this genre) but rather implied it. Certain words to me were an instant turn off. 'Throbbing' and its usual companion word 'member' tended to irritate more than excite. The other issue for me is the nature of consent. If one of the characters seems scared or unreasonably pressured then I am not inclined to think that a subsequent erotic event is consensual and to me is a turnoff (and against the rules of the award) Similarly, if a character is scared because of the situation in which they are (eg the building is burning) then I cannot see that character being suffused with oxytocin and endorphins and enjoying a good romp when simultaneously adrenaline is surging through their body. Hormones rule sex always!

Like all genres it is important for writers to read the genres they are attempting to write in. Erotica is no different. Do ensure that you read a few salacious literary tales before you attempt writing the stuff — it will help enormously.

Fleur Joyce

This is my first time judging in the erotica category and my goodness was it a funny business! It was easy to judge according to my own views and predilections, but I gained a new appreciation for the writer's difficulty in this genre once it came to the judges' discussion. We differed at times on what was corny, prosaic, weird and just 'different' - it's just so personal! Fortunately, there were enough stand out stories on which we could all agree. My favourites were just as likely to make me laugh out loud as swoon and it was great to see such a range of writing that reflected the realities of sex and desire – sometimes it is perfect in every cliched way and quite often it seems a very strange and hilarious thing in which we engage!

Colly Campbell

Thankyou Stringybark erotica writers for entertaining, surprising and sometimes annoying me in my judging quest. 81 short stories in all. How do the Booker judges do it, I ask?

I was always looking for a well-turned plot, as well as a well-wrought bonk, or at least a simulation of one. The winners are worthy recipients of the prizes and placements in Mr Vernon's next publication.

I would add that although they were very different, it was a bee's-dick, so to speak, in the points between the three prize winners. The rather formal but clearly randy young 18th century woman of *The Scientific Method* made it equally about her bi-curious characterization along with her "experiments". In *Naked Ambition* I enjoyed the two points of view in the life drawing class and the rather chaste but symbolic exchange in the end. At first I'd marked *Igniting a Fire* further down the table, but kept thinking of the neat ending and decided the teasing build-up to the character's anticipatory bliss in the "full body" massage should accrue more points, so I upped my score and was pleased to see it a winner.

Also, I don't mind a bit of a dark side to a story and *Private Lessons*, *The Mirror* and *Kazuko's Island* all obliged. To be frank, I marked down stories that just replicated porn scripts (in all their varied glory) and which didn't try for a twist or some added dimension in the characters other than a vehicle for lust.

3D character + Lust + interesting twist. That's the winning formula.

Rees Campbell

This was a fascinating competition to judge. Thankyou all the writers who contributed.

I found some of the stories definitely arousing – particularly where there was a great plot, and the sex was part of the story. The winning story "The Scientific Method" had an excellent plot and great character development, as well as some highly charged erotica within the small word limit. I loved a couple of stories where the last few paragraphs really

tied the whole story together. "Igniting a Fire" was an excellent example of this where I laughed aloud at the climax (so to speak). Humour was used beautifully in a couple of instances, and was always welcome. Shortlisted "Cracks and Crevices" was a great example of this.

I had to take care I didn't rate a "different" plot higher than its writing justified... there were so many stories which were basically a flimsy bamboo scaffold around a sex scene. Some of the best stories used sex sparingly, in "Naked Ambition" the sex was only in the minds of the protagonists, but all the more powerful for being so. I was surprised at the small proportion of gay erotica, but pleased at some straightforward raunchy tales, where everyone involved had fun. A few writers tried too hard to be different, and some rather bizarre fantasy erotica didn't really work.

Language was also another area which influenced my choices and like other judges, I found (even intimated) lack of consent, and deliberate power sex disturbing and displeasing.