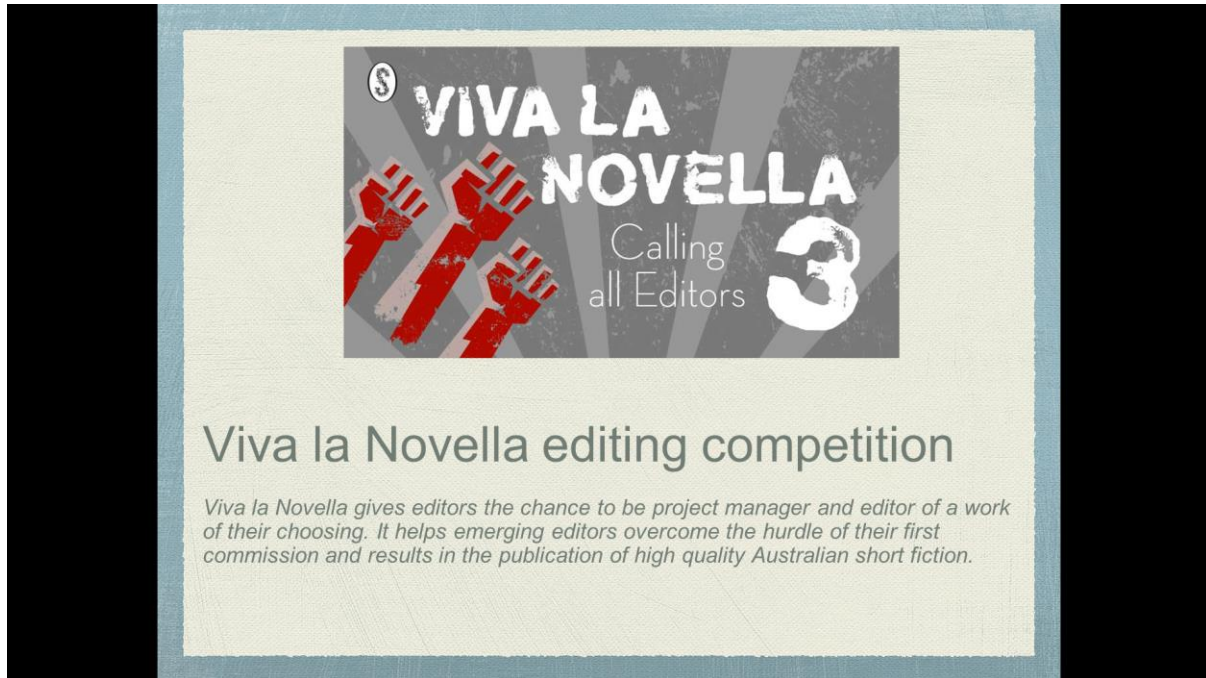


Viva la Novella editing competition

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A sign of the maturity of a profession is when prizes reflect the best values and standards of practitioners, feature a valid, transparent process of merit-based selection and are recognised outside the profession as well as within it.

In the past few years, two national competitions for editors have emerged that meet these criteria: Viva la Novella's editing competition, 'Stepping Stones', which runs parallel to the writing competition, and the IPEd Essay Prize.

It's great to see these emerging opportunities for recognising high standards in editing and advancing the prospects for career development for editors.

Brenda Gurr will talk about the IPEd Essay Prize shortly. I'm here to share with you the experience I've had in the past year with the editorial side of Viva la Novella.

This is the first time that I've been involved with Viva, although it's been running for three years and the editorial strand has been part of the process for two of those three years. I was drawn to it because I liked the model. I'd been looking for something that placed editing at the centre of the process. It needs to be emphasised that not all editing competitions take as their starting principles the realities and disciplines that editing entails. Viva does exactly that.

Let me backtrack. I had mixed feelings about my first experience judging an editing prize. This was as an IPEd representative for the Barbara Ramsden Award a few years ago. I was interested to participate in what was then billed as the only national editing award. It was

established and is run by the Victorian branch of the Federation of Australian Writers, and the focus is very much on writers and publishers. In its history, the Barbara Ramsden Award has recognised some well written and well produced books and no doubt these books owed much of their quality to highly skilled editing but the administration of the prize would not necessarily lead you to this conclusion.

As a judge, I was given a set of published books and a brief statement by the publisher about the contribution the editor had made. Only some of the published volumes even mentioned the editor's name. Comments by the editor and author were not included in the selection documentation.

Editors know that this raises more questions than it answers. We would want to know things like...

- **What was the state of the manuscript when the editor received it?** The starting point is vital. A final manuscript that was in very good shape may have needed little editorial input. Another manuscript that was flawed but had promise might have entailed significant editorial work.
- **What was the brief?** Was the editor asked to undertake structural work or was the task to do a line edit? How much autonomy was the editor afforded? Was there support and editorial input into the areas of design, proofreading and marketing?
- **How much time and money were allocated?** Was there a fortnight, a month or several months available to work on the manuscript? How many iterations took place? Or was there a tight timeline with little scope for revision and reworking?
- **What was the editorial process?** Did the editor and author collaborate closely? Was everything done by email or were there face-to-face or skype meetings or other forms of communication? Was the editor's collaboration limited to one or two members of the team or was it a more complex scenario with editor, author, publisher, designer and others involved?
- **What were the challenges?** These may have been logistical or legal; there may have been technical issues of style or structure. Now that editors are increasingly involved in marketing, social media and digital production, did the editor's role include an involvement in negotiating the contract, selecting cover art or writing marketing copy? This copy might include anything and everything from drafting blurbs to devising twitter hashtags...

You get the picture. Without knowing any of this background, the only way to assess the editorial input was to read for problems. This is a shallow way to appraise an editorial project, as all professional editors know. Editors learn from sometimes bitter experience that many of the glitches in the published text are not down to them. Authors sometimes add text after the editing process and they may reject editorial recommendations. Publishers sometimes draw a line and say NO MORE when the editor feels more work is needed. Designers are the salt of the earth but they have been known to introduce errors in the final text.

All of this means that judging the book is far from the best way to judge the editorial process. It's often said that you can't judge a book by its cover but it's a lesser known truism that you can't always judge a book editor by the content.

That's not to say that assessing the quality of editing can't be done. If the model is to award a prize for the best edited book in a given year, it's possible to come up with a workable process that focuses on the editing and not the writing or production. In fact, after my experience in 2011, I sent my suggestions to IPEd and would be happy to make them available to anyone interested.

Today I am talking about a very different concept and it's one that I think is a lot more appealing to individual editors and the profession as a whole.

In 2012, Sydney publisher Seizure inaugurated a writing prize, Viva la Novella, which has expanded to incorporate a valuable and unique editing component called Stepping Stones.

My involvement in this project has been as editorial mentor and supporter from mid-2014. I met David Henley, publisher at Seizure, when we were both speaking on a panel at the NSW Writers' Centre. I was intrigued and gratified to hear that Viva la Novella had an editing component and made a point of finding out more.

Here was a model that focused on editing as an integral part of the publishing process. It was an editing competition that not only added a glittering line to the winners' CVs but also contributed to their professional development, and resulted in a set of final publications of which everyone in the process could be proud.

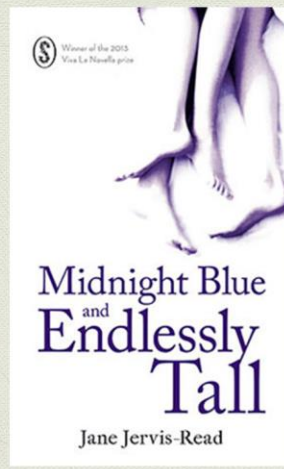
Some background, dating from the inception of the prize, will help to provide more context.

The Viva la Novella competition has been running for three years. It started as a prize for writing, inviting submissions of new works of short fiction.

The 2013 winner was *Midnight Blue and Endlessly Tall* by Jane Jervis Read, edited by Alice Grundy and Rod Morrison.

Viva la Novella winner 2013

- Editors: Alice Grundy and Rod Morrison
- Quality of entries
- Scope to include a structured editorial component



It's a great read. Suave and original. Surprising, sophisticated, moving. Buy it yourself if you don't believe me.

In the first year, Viva la Novella received over 80 manuscript entries and plenty of positive attention via word-of-mouth and social media. The quality of the entries was incredibly high and there were as many as ten that, with the right editor, could have been published—which is what inspired the introduction of the editorial component. David is a staunch supporter of editing, seeing it as 'perhaps the only vital function of the publishing industry'.

After 2013, the competition expanded to provide a unique professional development opportunity for editors as well as writers.

In 2014, the entries continued to be of an enticingly high standard. The winners and their editors were:

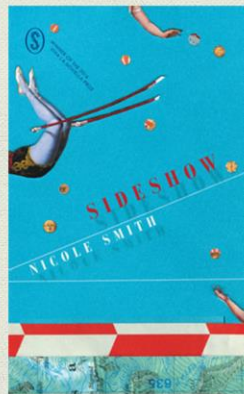
Sideshow by Nicole Smith, edited by Patrick Allington

The Other Shore by Hoa Pham, edited by Elena Gomez

Blood and Bone by Daniel Davis Wood, edited by Emily Stewart

The Neighbour by Julie Proudfoot, edited by Carody Culver

2014 Winners

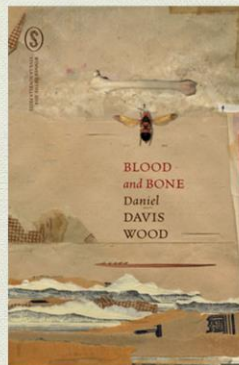


Edited by Patrick Allington

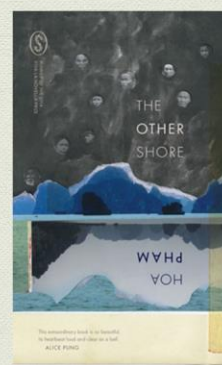


Edited by Carody Culver

2014 Winners



Edited by Emily Stewart



Edited by Elena Gomez

Of those editors, one has gone on to become a regular columnist for *Kill Your Darlings*, one has established a new publishing project with funding from the Copyright Agency and another has gained full-time employment as an editor at a trade publisher.

The editors receive a fee of \$1000, as well as the experience of participating in the entire publishing process of a prize-winning work of fiction.

Firstly, editors select the manuscript they wish to work on from all the submissions. They perform the role of slushie to come up with a shortlist, justifying their choice to the Seizure team. When their choice is approved, they make contact with the author of the manuscript they have chosen. They then continue the process by developing a written assessment, which incorporates suggestions for revision and proceeding to editing stages. The time

frames are brisk but realistic, with selection in October, followed by assessment, then copyediting and with final markup and cover art selection taking place in March of the next year. Proofreading and production takes us from then to the launch. Last year, this was timed to coincide with the Sydney Writers' Festival in May. In 2015, the winning titles will be launched at the Melbourne Writers Festival in August.

The winning books and writers for the 2015 Viva la Novella competition are still embargoed but I can tell you something about the editors. They are Zoya Patel, Nicola Redhouse and Marisa Wikramanayake. They each brought intelligence, sensibility, individual life and work experience and enthusiasm to the task.

2015 Editorial Stepping Stones

- Prize-winning books to be announced at Melbourne Writers Festival, 21 August 2015
- Editors:
 - Zoya Patel
 - Nicola Redhouse
 - Marisa Wikramanayake

Stepping Stones features

- \$1000 editing fee
- Participation in the full editorial production process:
 - Manuscript assessment
 - Negotiation of revision
 - Copyediting and markup
 - Editorial mentoring
 - Cover art selection
 - Marketing and launch
 - Being part of a publishing community.

My role started with selecting the editors, together with David Henley. The process of selection was both fascinating and gruelling. The three talented and promising winning editors were selected from around 50 applications submitted to Seizure. The longlist was hard to decide on and the shortlist was even tougher. When we had whittled down the field, we went back to the applicants with a second set of questions about their background and aspirations. Choosing those final three was really difficult. There is a lot of editing talent out there.

This is of course great news.

It is clear from the popularity of the competition that there is a huge demand for this kind of professional development. It provides hands-on editorial experience across the full range of editorial processes. As well as rewarding and promoting writers, it nurtures the careers of the editors.

The competition gives up-and-coming editors commissioning experience, an aspect that would normally come later in an in-house editor's career. Now that so many editors work in a freelance capacity, it's even harder to gain this professional skill. There is no natural

progression through a publishing organisation, learning on the job and participating from the beginning of a publication project. Once even editorial assistants could expect to gain bumper-to-bumper experience of the production process, but the shift from in-house to freelance has meant that for many, participation is confined to short bursts of line editing, without input into crucial and related functions such as assessment, development, production, design and marketing. Liaison with authors, artists, designers and digital professionals is often limited. With the massive technological developments that have accompanied the digital revolution, this is a serious gap in an aspiring editor's professional background and experience.

Far from being thrown in the deep end, Viva editors are encouraged to seek advice from the publisher and editorial mentor whenever thorny issues arise. Advice and guidance is built into each stage of the process. This varies, of course. Some manuscripts and some editor-author teams required very little guidance and there are others where more support was sought or required.

At the end of the Viva experience, everyone gains.

There's no doubt that editing a prize-winning book looks good on an editor's CV. It's even better if the editing involves a valuable professional developmental experience that will stand the editor in good stead by:

- Raising confidence and gaining recognition
- Providing valuable experience across the entire production process
- Connecting with a community of writers, editors and publishers
- Providing professional exposure through the launch, social media, industry outlets and publicity by the publisher.

As well as the kudos for the individual editors, these prizes represent external recognition of the quality of editorial work. It boosts professional confidence and it encourages clients and employers to value editorial expertise more highly. It increases the visibility, standing and exposure of editing, a profession that has long been considered a backroom activity.

Seizure encourages editors not to be silent. They are involved in the public announcement and recognised in the book. To quote David, 'Much like writing a book helps authors define their own personality, editors being able to claim ownership and receive public recognition raises confidence.'

Putting the editorial process at the heart of a writing competition underscores its parallel importance. In an industry renowned for the invisibility of editors, here is a model that loudly and proudly challenges the invisible mender role. The editors of these novellas are involved from go to whoa. Participating is a foot in the door for those who lack trade publishing experience. It's a strong addition to an emerging editor's list of manuscripts. The professional environment is realistic and practical. Stepping Stones is at once a learning experience and a platform to demonstrate your skills. It's a fabulous opportunity.

But don't take my word for it.

Here's what two of last year's editors had to say about the experience.

As one of four editors for Seizure's viva la novella competition in 2014, I was fortunate to work with Nicole Smith on her hilarious and humane manuscript, *Sideshow*. I was a sort of editing curator, a role I believe we will see more of as the publishing industry evolves.

— Patrick Allington

Two years in and Viva's innovative program for emerging editors continues unsurpassed. Editors gain the opportunity to experience the publishing process end-to-end; from commissioning and copyediting, to marketing and proofing. As such, Viva provides an important pathway into the publishing industry, and we have seen previous editors achieve paying industry jobs as a direct result of the experience and skills they gained through Viva.

— Emily Stewart

And from this year's editors:

Viva la Novella was a fantastic opportunity to be able to commission what is a disappearing form. Seizure is utilising the potentials presented by digital printing and e-book publishing so innovatively, and it's been great to be able to team up with them to bring to readers a book that might otherwise have missed its chance. It's also been an incredibly gratifying experience to work so closely with an author, and to be part of the overall production of the book; involvement at this level is unusual once you are a freelancer, and I have missed it.

— Nicola Redhouse

First off, hello to all the editors (waves madly from Perth) and my apologies for being unable to be there.

In November and December last year I stared at a screen in three different countries going through 135 submissions, each at least 20,000 words long. At first I was a bit overwhelmed - I had to pick one by January. Just one. Out of 135. In a lot of cases the choice was easy but choosing the final one was a hard call.

Viva la Novella gives the novella a space to exist in the Australian literary landscape and it picks not one but three winners. And three editors who benefit greatly from being thrown into the deep end. I meandered out of my comfort zone with my choice in terms of genre but I have never had so much fun editing an author's work.

A month ago the publisher emailed both of us with the options for cover designs and last week I saw the final typeset proof. There is a sense of pride – I am proud of my author and of the work. I held my author's hand the entire way, and Pam and our publisher David were ever ready and willing to hold mine. In August this year you will get to see it and read it for yourselves. I recommend that you do.

— Marisa Wikramanayake

The Viva la Novella Stepping Stones editorial program is a sign that Australian editing is increasingly confident about its own importance and worth. It combines merit-based selection with professional experience and a high quality published outcome.

Gifted writers receive critical acclaim for their work, and so they should. Publishers of books that contribute to the depth and quality of Australian culture are appreciated and

applauded for the quality of the works they select. That too is as it should be. There has not been a commensurate emphasis on the importance of editing to writing, publishing and literary culture. The Stepping Stones editorial project of the Viva la Novella competition is one avenue to remedy the recognition of that missing but vital part of the process.

Another relatively recent development is the IPEd essay prize, which has also been running for three years. Both these prizes are centred on editing as a process and as a professional practice, an integral part of contemporary publishing.

These awards are of the editors, for the editors and by the editors.