

## **ROBERT GRAY – EMERITUS AWARD REFERENCE**

Robert Gray's standing as an international figure is not in doubt. When contemporary Australian poetry is discussed abroad, his name is one of the first that is invariably invoked; and it is notable that he is admired and championed by an unusually broad spectrum of readers and critics. Gray's own ability to elude labels, his gift for transcending narrow stylistic confines and for disregarding critical factions, is an important factor in this regard. He achieves distinction across a wide range of genres and styles, formal and free, sometimes writing with narrative verve, at other times displaying the pithy delicacy of a haiku master.

He is an international poet in the fullest sense – Australian in voice, Asian in sensibility and European in influence. The freshness and originality of his perspicuous poetry are so immediately striking that there can be little surprise that he is establishing himself as a sought-after poet by organisers of readings in many countries. In recent years, he has been an acclaimed participant in the major Berlin International Literature Festival, and has read elsewhere in Germany, including the Dresden Literaturforum. A guest at festivals and other venues across the UK, he also travelled to Ireland under the auspices of the national poetry organisation, Poetry Ireland. Moreover, he is one of the select number of eminent Australian poets whose books are published in England as well as Australia; some of his finest work was first seen in UK journals. He has been a writer-in-residence at the prestigious Meiji university in Tokyo and is a translator of the poetry of the German poet, Joachim Sartorius. His own work has been translated into many languages and, at book length, in Holland, China and Germany.

With his Zen-influenced sensibility and his acuity as an observer of the natural world, there is some kinship between Gray and American poets such as Gary Snyder. But Gray's ingenuity as an image-maker sets him apart from other poets. As an example of his imagistic genius, I would instance 'The Fishermen', a poem of astonishing inventiveness and vividness; it is among the finest contemporary poems. Gray's range can be seen by contrasting this poem with another masterly example from his later work: 'The Dying Light', a brutally honest and deeply affecting poem about his ninety-year-old mother.

Few poets evoke landscapes more vividly or accurately than does Gray; an outstanding nature poet, he will doubtless be championed by adherents of the growing eco-poetry movement. His forthcoming *Collected Poems* will be a major event in poetry and, in showcasing all eight of his previous collections of poetry, will consolidate his reputation internationally as a pellucid poet of verbal radiance and visual precision whose work is distinguished by its emotional power, photorealist exactitude and lively engagement with the natural world.

Gray is himself a canon-making force in Australian poetry, co-editing three important anthologies, and now at work on a further comprehensive volume. And he is an independent, measured, authoritative critic, read and trusted at home and (via the internet) abroad. His riveting autobiography, *The Land I Came Through Last*, a new departure in his work, proved him to be a compelling narrator, astute observer, and elegant prose stylist.

Tirelessly devoted to the art of poetry - which he has practised with singular distinction, fastidiousness and commitment over many decades - Robert Gray would be the ideal recipient of an Emeritus Award. It would represent just recognition for his past achievements and a vital encouragement, at this crucial phase of his career, towards the masterworks he can be confidently expected to produce in the future.

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