

Report on New Zealand Society of Authors Janet Frame Memorial Award for Literature 2014: Elizabeth Smither

When I received news from Claire Hill that I had been awarded the Janet Frame Memorial Award for Literature for 2014 I not only felt exceptionally honoured – there is no other name that could adorn an award and give me more pleasure – but I also found myself treasuring personal memories of Janet, some notes I had received from her on green paper, a meeting at her home in Stratford (and the easy and rapid way we conversed). Since that time I also had the pleasure of launching her correspondence with Charles Brasch in *Dear Charles Dear Janet* at the Gus Fisher Gallery. Most of all though the award and what it signified brought me closer, not just to a greatly admired writer, but to one who understood fully how precarious a writer's life can be. The generosity of the grant of \$3,000 and the open-ended way in which the writer could decide to use it (on buying a computer or buying time or travelling) was the best kind of support a writer can receive.

I decided to do what I imagined Janet would do in a similar circumstance: simply keep going at the work in hand. In my case this included a new collection of poems: *Night Horse* which I am hoping to submit to Auckland University Press for 2017; writing some new stories; and working on a further draft of a novel which I had started in 2013, abandoned, and then decided to re-write. I worked on these three projects simultaneously, sometimes concentrating on stories, never letting the poetry writing lapse, and, once I was working on the novel producing a quota of words each week. Janet gave me the impression of working on different characters in different rooms in her house – I think she said as much when she was showing me around.

The other benefit of such a grant is an increase in confidence: I certainly felt this. Though I worked across several genres and wrote reviews and reports and went on mentoring students I did all these things with increased pleasure and application simply because I was the recipient of this award. It is an award that brings a welcome gravitas.

Now that the writing year is nearly ended I realise I am working in the same pattern as I was when I received news of the Janet Frame Memorial Award last October. The award has been both a recognition and a consolidation; I think it echoes the way I imagine Janet herself worked: writing as a task and a vocation, a steady application, concentration and attention to detail and accuracy.

It has been a great personal pleasure to have held this award. I don't think of it as being finite, or confined to merely one year: I am sure the benefits will last through my whole career as a writer.

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