

National Cultural Policy Submission

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As an artist

The Centrality of the Artist

I'm writing to support the call for a coherent strategy to protect the livelihoods of Australian authors and the integrity and sustainability of Australian literature. As an author, teacher, bookseller, and parent I understand the ceaseless pressure that the vast majority of writers face, as they attempt to carve out time to write, while working numerous, part-time, often poorly paid, jobs.

One issue, among many, that I see as being particularly hazardous to the health of our literary culture, has to do with the overreliance on prizes at the expense of a more sustainable and equitable funding model. Many writers correctly view prize winning as the only way to sustain a career. I myself have won a number, and to be honest, I don't know where I would be without them. Very subtly however, writers begin to shape their books in response to what they assume Judges and Prize panels will want. Slowly our artistic horizons shrink to suit the status-quo. This mindset – over time – leads to the creation of less challenging works, to a culture of repetition and monotony and eventually to the calcification of the form itself.