

## A. Frances Johnson wins the 2020 Porter Prize

A. Frances Johnson is the winner of the [2020 Peter Porter Poetry Prize](#), worth a total of \$9,000. The winner was named at a ceremony at Boyd Community Hub in Melbourne on 16 January 2020.

This year's judges – John Hawke, Bronwyn Lea, and Philip Mead – shortlisted five poems by Lachlan Brown (NSW), Claire G. Coleman (Vic.), Ross Gillett (Vic.), A Frances Johnson (Vic.), and Julie Manning (QLD). The shortlisted poems were selected from almost 1,050 entries sent through from thirty countries.

In their report the judges noted: 'This year's record field demonstrates both the depth and stylistic range evident in this vital area of our literature. The poems were notable for the currency of their engagement with social issues. "My Father's Thesaurus" by A. Frances Johnson is an unsentimental yet emotive portrayal of the situation of the elderly and their carers.'

On learning of her win, Johnson commented: 'It was a complete honour to stand shoulder to shoulder with the fine poets on the Peter Porter Prize shortlist. These encouragements for writers in the current cultural and political climate cannot be underestimated. They spur us on to do more, to speak up. I hope my poem honours my late father, Tom, and offers a small bridge to others who have suffered or who are experiencing the terrible affliction of Alzheimer's. I acknowledge the great work of other Australian poets on dementia topics (Sarah Holland-Batt, Jessica Wilkinson, and others). Terrible mega-fires currently afflict us on the outside, but this illness is a bushfire inside the brain, impossible to contain, still under-resourced. Despite the confusions and word salads, in Dad's last months we were lucky that there were still ways of finding him, being with him, holding him. I know others have gleaned similar precious communication with loved ones in the last stages of this terrible disease, though sadly, it may not work out that way. Poetry and of course music are often used in aged-care settings to enable sufferers to de-scramble, to maintain a hold on language. Poetry has certainly helped me hold Dad close.'

### About A. Frances Johnson

A. Frances Johnson is a writer and artist. She has published three collections of poetry. A fourth collection, *Save As*, is forthcoming (Puncher & Wattmann, 2020). Her recent collection, *Rendition for Harp and Kalashnikov* (Puncher & Wattmann, 2017) was shortlisted in the 2018 Melbourne Prize for Literature Best New Writing Award and, in 2017, she took up an Australia Council B.R. Whiting Fellowship to Rome. Dr Johnson is a Senior Lecturer in Creative Writing at the University of Melbourne.

### Further information

The Peter Porter Poetry Prize is one of Australia's most prestigious poetry awards. It honours the life and work of the great Australian poet Peter Porter (1929–2010), an honoured contributor to *ABR* for many years. For more information about the [Peter Porter Poetry Prize](#), or to read the [2020 shortlisted poems](#), please visit the [ABR website](#).

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### Interviews

For more information, and interview requests, please contact *Australian Book Review*:  
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A. Frances Johnson  
(Photograph by David Johns)