

Theodore Ell wins the Calibre Essay Prize

Congratulations to Canberra writer **Theodore Ell** on winning the fifteenth Calibre Essay Prize. Dr Ell was living in Beirut on 4 August 2020 when a port explosion devastated the city and shook a nation already teetering on the brink of economic collapse. Ell and his diplomat wife were badly affected, but survived. His essay, 'Façades of Lebanon', represents reportage and reflective essayism at their very best. The Prize is worth \$7,500, of which the winner receives \$5,000.

'Façades of Lebanon' will appear in the July issue. Placed second in the competition was **Anita Punton's** essay 'May Day', a poignant memoir about piecing together her Olympic gymnast father's life after his death. 'May Day' will appear in a coming issue.

The judges – distinguished historians **Sheila Fitzpatrick** and **Billy Griffiths**, and **Peter Rose**, Editor of *ABR* – chose 'Façades of Lebanon' from a record field of 638 entries from 28 different countries. Here are their comments on Theodore Ell's essay:

"'Façades of Lebanon' is a gripping piece of reportage and a powerful meditation on the bonds of community in a time of turmoil and upheaval. It builds slowly, ominously, from the eerie quiet of Beirut during lockdown towards the catastrophic port explosion. The author positions himself as an outsider, yet this façade of detachment is vividly and viscerally shattered by the end of the essay.'

Theodore Ell on winning the Calibre Essay Prize:

'I am astonished to receive this honour. This turn of events and the joy it has brought were inconceivable when the Beirut explosion struck ... I thank the prize judges for their decision, which I did not expect, and *ABR* for its wonderful support. I dedicate the award of this prize to my wife and to our friends from the Lebanon years, for all that we went through together.'

About Theodore Ell:

Theodore Ell is an editor, translator, and author of *A Voice in the Fire* (2015). After working in public service and foreign policy at the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, he accompanied his wife in 2018 on a diplomatic posting to Lebanon. His poetry and translations have been published in Australia, Lebanon, Italy and the UK. He is an honorary lecturer in literature at the Australian National University.

Calibre Essay Prize:

The Prize, now in its fifteenth year, is one of the world's leading awards for an original essay. We thank *ABR* Patrons Colin Golvan AM, QC, Peter McLennan, and Mary-Ruth Sindrey for supporting the Calibre Prize.

Interviews

Dr Theodore Ell is available for interview. Please direct requests to Peter Rose at editor@australianbookreview.com.au | (03) 9699 8822



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