

One of the unique rewards of a women's literary prize is clear in the announcement of the third [Stella prize](#) shortlist. The [six finalists](#), announced yesterday, include three authors who have been shortlisted based on their first major works of fiction.

The space afforded to women writers by the Stella continues to reveal the strength to be found in the diverse voices of Australian authors. As Kerry Goldsworthy, chair of the judging panel [explained](#) :

The prize has brought writers – particularly young writers – to a degree of attention they might not otherwise see.

This year acclaimed authors Helen Garner and [Sonya Hartnett](#), who were included on the prize [longlist](#), are not among the finalists.

Among the debut works of fiction are Emily Bitto's novel [The Strays](#), which draws its inspiration from the history of the Heide artists' colony in Melbourne in the 1930s. Performance poet Maxine Beneba Clarke has previously published two volumes of poetry, but [Foreign Soil](#), which imagines the lives of displaced people around the globe, is her first a short-story collection.

Yugambeh woman Ellen van Neerven's genre-crossing story collection [Heat and Light](#) has already won the David Unaipon Award in 2013.

The other finalists include established author of children's literature, Sofie Laguna. Her second novel for adults, [The Eye of the Sheep](#), is narrated by a boy who likely sits on the autism

spectrum as he experiences family violence. While celebrated author Joan London's [The Golden Age](#) focuses on a young Hungarian refugee who is being rehabilitated in a convalescent home for child sufferers of polio in Perth in the 1950s.

The prize's inclusion of both fiction and non-fiction works has invited debate regarding the fairness of comparing such different forms of writing, especially after the award of the 2014 prize to Clare Wright for [The Forgotten Rebels of Eureka](#).

This year's shortlist includes one work of non-fiction. [The Invisible History of the Human Race](#), by Christine Kenneally, investigates how our DNA informs our social history.

The Stella shortlist is also heartening for its inclusion of writing published by independent Australian presses such as [Affirm Press](#), [Black Inc](#) and [University of Queensland Press](#), alongside those of comparative giants [Random House](#) and [Hachette](#).

Like the Stella Prize itself, these smaller publishers help to bring new and overlooked authors to our collective attention.

Michelle Smith does not work for, consult to, own shares in or receive funding from any company or organisation that would benefit from this article, and has no relevant affiliations.

Read more <http://theconversation.com/stella-prize-2015-shortlist-highlights-new-literary-voices-38785>