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“Women’s crime writing has come of age”: Sisters in Crime’s 25th Davitt Awards winners announced

“Australian women’s crime writing has well and truly come of age,” says **Ruth Wykes**, the Judges’ Coordinator for Sisters in Crime’s 25th Davitt Awards for best women’s crime and mystery books, which were announced on Friday night [5/9] in Melbourne’s Angliss Restaurant.

“The Davitt Awards have transformed the literary landscape over the past three decades. Twenty-five years ago, when the Davitts were launched at SheKilda, Sisters in Crime’s 10th anniversary convention, seven books were in contention. This year there were 150.

“It’s not just the quantity, but the quality – the complex layers of the characters, the realism of the settings, and above all else, the magic of beautifully told stories. The themes are contemporary – environmental destruction, the nature of justice, queer romance, girl power, and, of course, sexual exploitation and violence against women. Now more than ever, we need a strong, vibrant writing community of Australian women storytellers, and, we need them to be fearless.”

Multi-award-winning author [Ellie Marney](#) presented the Davitt Awards after discussing her life in crime with another multi-award-winning author, [Cate Kennedy](#). Guests were invited to wear a splash of silver to mark the 25th anniversary and Marney and Kennedy went overboard, with some help from the Salvos Op Shop in Castlemaine.

Six Davitt awards were presented – Best Adult Novel to **Vikki Wakefield** for *To the River* (Text Publishing); Best Young Adult Novel to **Erin Gough** for *Into the Mouth of the Wolf* (Hardie Grant Publishing); Best Children’s Novel to **Judith Rossell** for *The Midwatch* (Hardie Grant Publishing); Best Debut Book to **Georgia Harper** for *What I Would Do to You* (Penguin Random House Australia); Best Non-Fiction Book to **Lucia Osborne-Crowley**, *The Lasting Harm: Witnessing the trial of Ghislaine Maxwell* (Allen & Unwin); and the Kerry Greenwood Readers’ Choice award to **Dervla McTiernan** for *What Happened to Nina?* (HarperCollins Publishers Australia).

A Highly Commended certificate was awarded to **Fiona McFarlane** for *Highway 13* (Allen & Unwin) in the adult fiction category. McFarlane was unable to attend.

Thanks to the **Ruffin Falkiner Foundation**, this year, for the first time, the prize winners received not only a beautiful trophy but also prize money.

The judges loved Vikki Wakefield’s adult novel *To the River* for its “tight, clever plotting, the deeply-felt sense of place on the Murray River, and the strong characterisation” and appreciated “its assured movement between a disturbing past and a present that holds both danger and the possibility of hope”.

Wakefield, who lives in Adelaide, is perhaps best known for her award-winning YA novels but her teenage fascination with writers such as Shirley Jackson, Ruth Rendell, Patricia Highsmith, and Thomas Harris, led her to a darker kind of storytelling and to writing adult crime novels. *To the River* is her second adult mystery.

She told the audience, “I still struggle to think of myself as a crime writer—perhaps I’m just a writer, one who tells the same story over and over but in different forms. Mostly I’m looking for a way to

give justice, hope and agency to characters who just might be fictional versions of some of the amazing people I'm blessed to know, and to represent voices who otherwise might not be heard.

"How apt, then, to accept this award in the company of Ellie Marney, a force in crime writing for both YA and adults, and Sisters in Crime, who give voice and recognition to Australian women crime writers. This means a lot."

The judges praised Erin Gough's YA novel, *Into the Mouth of the Wolf*, for its "capacity to juggle the book's multiple elements including corporate corruption, queer romance, community tensions and cold-blooded murder. These themes are carried forward by cast of intriguing characters who are diverse in age, identity and relationship to each other. Their entwined stories of love and grief, fear and hope, carry the emotional heart of the book."

Gough, who lives in Sydney, said, "*Into the Mouth of the Wolf* has been described as many things, but thinking of it as a crime novel is especially appealing to me. The novel features a murder mystery, but at its heart is a far greater crime: the way governments conspire with the rich and powerful to damage and disregard the environment."

Melbourne children's author Judith Rossell is a serial offender when it comes to Davitts, having notched up three previous awards. She has written sixteen children's novels including the bestselling, multi-award-winning *Stella Montgomery* trilogy, and illustrated more than eighty, including her new middle-grade novel, *The Midwatch*.

All the judges said *The Midwatch* was the mystery they wish they could have read when they were children: "The Midwatch Institute for Orphans, Runaways and Unwanted Girls, and the city it belongs to, seem a world away from the lives of today's young readers but the issues faced by the young girls in this novel are as relevant now as ever and girl power gets a great new look and feel in this charming story. A squad of girls who band together to use their varied skills to outwit foes and solve mysteries; what's not to love? Judith Rossell's has created a new children's classic."

The Midwatch has been longlisted for a Historical Novel Society Australasia (HNSA) CYA Award.

Rossell said she loves creating books for kids. "When kids love a book, they will read it many times, carry it around with them, and even sleep with it under their pillow. And you'll be happy to hear the next generation of crime readers is coming along really well."

Georgia Harper's *What I Would Do To You*, the debut winner, is a confronting exploration of grief and revenge. It imagines a world where capital punishment is reintroduced in Australia, but the execution has to be done by a family member of the victim.

Harper, a psychologist who lives on the Sunshine Coast, told the crowd: "When I first started writing in 2020 – after following a voice that told me to believe in it and it would lead me good places – I didn't dream one of those places would be here."

Internationally bestselling author, Dervla McTiernan, said that to receive the Kerry Greenwood Readers' Choice Davitt Award—in the first year it bears Kerry's name—was deeply moving.

"Kerry meant so much to this community. I want to honour her remarkable legacy, and to acknowledge her partner, David Greagg, who is with us tonight.

"The first and only writing competition I ever entered was the Scarlet Stiletto [in 2015]. I didn't win, but being shortlisted gave me the courage to keep going. So, tonight truly feels like coming home."

McTiernan is the critically acclaimed and award-winning author of six novels, including the much-loved Cormac Reilly series and two Number One bestselling standalone thrillers, *The Murder Rule* and *What Happened to Nina?*, both *New York Times* Best Thrillers of the Year. She spent twelve years working as a lawyer in her home country of Ireland. Following the global financial crisis, she relocated to Western Australia where she now lives with her husband, two children and too many pets.

The judges were struck by the courage it took non-fiction winner, Lucia Osborne-Crowley, to sit through the trial of Ghislaine Maxwell, and to spend many hours talking to the victims of Maxwell and Jeffrey Epstein. She was one of only four court reporters allowed into the courtroom for every day of the Maxwell trial.

Osborne-Crowley is an award-winning writer and journalist and currently works as a UK Court reporter for Law360, a US newswire covering courts and crime across the world. She lives in London and was unable to attend.

Five raffle prizes were on offer – two \$699 vouchers offered by Tilnak Fine Art Photography and three \$350+ book packs, won respectively by **Hannah Makewski**, **Corolyn Beasley**, **Judith Rossell**, **Caroline de Costa**, and **Averil Robertson**. A Davitt Judge, **Romany Rzechowicz**, won the Be Immortalized in Fiction competition which means her name will go into the next novel by Wakefield.

A \$1395 Tilnak voucher for a photographic session was auctioned and went to **Vikki Wakefield**.

The 2025 Davitt Awards were again supported by the Swinburne University of Technology. **Carolyn Beasley**, the Course Director of the Masters of Writing, told the crowd, "It's always such a thrill to see the wide range of ways people can be murdered, 'unalived', 'undeaded', resurrected, defrauded, and disappeared (clearly no one should ever mess with a Sister in Crime).

"And it's inspiring to see all the ingenious ways that mysteries can be solved, resolved, investigated or buried, and the ways that deliberate and accidental perpetrators can be either brought to legal justice, cleared of wrongdoing, or just buried under the rose bush."

The judging panel for 2025 comprised **Ruth Wykes**, 2016 Scarlet Stiletto Award winner, author, editor and Sisters in Crime Review Editor; **Professor Emerita Christina Lee**, 1994 and 1996 Scarlet Stiletto Immortalised Award winner; **Moraig Kisler**, Sisters in Crime's Secretary, and former review editor; **Romany Rzechowicz**, 2023 Scarlet Stiletto Award winner and communications manager; **Dr Philomena Horsley**, winner of the 2018 Scarlet Stiletto Award and medical autopsy expert; **Ashleigh Meikle**, blogger; writer, editor, proofreader, book reviewer; and **Cecile Shanahan**, editor, proof-reader and former co-curator of the Bendigo Writers Festival.

The Davitts are named after Ellen Davitt, the author of Australia's first mystery novel, *Force and Fraud*, in 1865. The awards are handsome wooden trophies featuring the front cover of the winning novel under perspex.

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