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LEON ROOKE WINS CANADA/AUSTRALIA LITERARY AWARD FOR 1981

The Department of External Affairs, the Canada Council, and the Australia Council announced today that the winner of the Canada/Australia Literary Award for 1981 is the Canadian fiction writer Leon Rooke.

The prize, which includes \$3,000 Canadian and a trip to Australia, is designed to familiarize Australians and Canadians with each other's writers. In alternate years an Australian writer receives the cash award and travels to Canada.

The inaugural award in 1976 went to Australian playwright John Romeril. Canadian writer Alice Munro was the winner in 1977. She was followed by Australian poet Thomas Shapcott (1978), Canadian poet Michael Ondaatje (1979), and Australian novelist Roger McDonald (1980). The prize is awarded for a writer's total production rather than for a single work and there are no restrictions on genre - novelists, playwrights and poets are eligible.

Canadian funding is through the Department of External Affairs as part of its programme for the promotion of Canadian literature in foreign countries. Australian funding comes through the Australia Council. The Writing and Publishing Section of the Canada Council administers the award for External Affairs. This year the Canada Council submitted works by six Canadian authors to the Australian jury. Next year a Canadian jury will judge the works of six writers submitted by the Australia Council.

The current winner, Leon Rooke, is best known for his novel Fat Woman (Oberon, 1980) which was nominated for the Governor General's Award in Fiction. Although Rooke has been writing short stories since the sixties, Fat Woman was his first novel. The work is the story of Ella Mae Hopkins, a woman not only large of body ("Gluttony, thy name is Hopkins"), but also large of soul.

In 1981 Rooke published a short story collection called Death Suite (ECW Press) and another novel The Magician in Love (Aya Press). A new novel, Shakespeare's Dog, will be out in September.

Rooke has written nearly a hundred short stories, and so it seems appropriate that he has edited, along with John Metcalf, the 1981 and 1982 editions of Best Canadian Stories. Rooke has had several plays produced as well, among them Ms. America, which was put on by Factory Lab Theatre in Toronto.

Born in North Carolina in 1934, Rooke has lived in Victoria since 1969 and is now a Canadian Citizen.