

**RE: McCrea Literary Award**

Jedrzejewski, Jan

**Sent:** 18 October 2015 17:16**To:** De Ornellas, Kevin; McArthur, Brian**Cc:** Sewell, Frank

Dear All,

Many thanks for dealing with this, Kev. Brian – what are the procedures for the announcement of this award?

Best,

Jan

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**From:** De Ornellas, Kevin**Sent:** 18 October 2015 17:11**To:** McArthur, Brian**Cc:** Jedrzejewski, Jan; Sewell, Frank**Subject:** McCrea Literary Award

Dear Brian,

I was asked to assess and comment upon on the suitability of two submissions for the McCrea Literary Award.

One is a volume of poetry called *The New Accord* by Paul Laughlin. Fair play to the candidate for getting the work out there: but I'm afraid that I cannot recommend a UU award for it. It just lacks the cerebral complexity necessary for serious poetry - and it lacks the freshness that would make occasional/light verse satisfying. The poems combine a sort of world-weary man-on-the-street, aphoristic tone with unimaginative verse forms and sometimes infuriating poverty of language and imagery, banal stanza constructions and predictable thought turns. The poetry is just not poetic enough.

The other item, though, a novel by Paul McVeigh called *The Good Son*, more than meets the standards necessary for this award. In terms of genre the material is not promising: it is basically a bildungsroman about a young Belfast man. The Irish coming-of-age genre has been delivered many times before - and done better - by the likes of Doyle, Patterson and McLiam Wilson et al. I have to say that the depiction of the Troubles background, glue-sniffing, joy-riding, grotty terraces, seemingly endless spitting, scatological discourse and adolescent sexual awakening is not to my taste - I've heard (and indeed, in real life, seen) all that before. But the narrative is coherent and progresses at a good pace. There are, notably, sparky flashes of dialogue: it is good to read a novel with genuine Belfast vernacular words being incorporated seamlessly without the sense of self-aware, self-'othering' that can proliferate in a post-colonial Ulster novel. In short: the prose works as a decent read and deserves recognition by the University.

Thanks and best wishes, Kevin De Ornellas