

Mr Bruce Victor Beaver AM

The honorary degree of Doctor of Letters was conferred posthumously upon Bruce Victor Beaver AM by the Chancellor the Hon Justice Kim Santow at the graduation ceremony held at 2.00pm on 30 April 2004. Mr Beaver died on 16 February 2004.

Citation

Chancellor, I have the honour to present Bruce Victor Beaver AM for the conferring of the degree of Doctor of Letters (*honoris causa*).

Bruce Beaver is one of the great poets of Sydney, and one of the foremost poets of Australia. He was born and educated in Manly, the streetscape and shoreline of which have become in his poetry a landscape symbolic of the borders between sanity and madness, the known and the unknown in a way that has placed them among the key sites of our literature.

At the age of 17, Bruce Beaver's formal studies were interrupted by illness, and thereafter his education took place outside the academy. Before establishing himself as a poet, he worked at a variety of jobs: on his uncle's farm on the south coast of New South Wales, as a surveyor's chainman in northern NSW, an arranger of radio programs, a proofreader for the New Zealand Herald, a fruitpicker, and a freelance journalist. He lived on Norfolk Island and in New Zealand, but returned to Sydney in the early 1960's and for most of the time since then has lived in the suburb of his birth.

He published his first collection of poetry, *Under the Bridge*, in 1961. Since then he had published eleven further collections, and is currently working on a twelfth. He has also published four works of fiction, and two autobiographical works. His fourth collection of poetry, *Letters to Live Poets*, published in 1969, was a landmark in our literary history, a flagship for those younger poets at the time who conducted something of a revolution in the writing of poetry in Australia in the early 1970's and who have subsequently become known as the 'Generation of '68', a generation Bruce Beaver also influences in his role as advisor and contributing editor to the journal *Poetry Australia*.

His presence, however, extends far beyond this group. He has, over the last forty years, been the most generous supporter of his peers and of younger poets, advising them, criticizing and encouraging their work, acting as a mentor despite general personal difficulties. Bruce Beaver has been key figure in the judicious reception and assimilation of the new American poetry and poetics of the post-war period, and of Confessionalism in particular. Knowledge of his work is now seen as central to an understanding of the development of Australian poetry since that time.

Perhaps even more significant is the fact that Mr Beaver has suffered, for much of his life, from manic depression, and has written about this with honesty and insight that have been inspirational, sometimes even life-saving, to others suffering from this and from similar conditions, a number of whom are also members of the Australian writing community.

Letters to Live Poets received, in 1970, the Grace Leven Poetry Prize and the Poetry Society of Australia Prize, and was third in the poetry selection of the Captain Cook Bicentenary Awards. Subsequently Bruce Beaver has received the Patrick White Award and the Fellowship of Australian Writers Christopher Brennan Award, both in 1982, and the C.J Dennis Prize for Poetry in the 1995 Victorian Premier's Literary Awards for his collection *Anima and Other Poems*. In 1991 he was made AM for his contribution to Australian literature.

Chancellor, I have great pleasure in presenting you, for admission to the degree of Doctor of Letters (*honoris causa*), the poet Bruce Victor Beaver AM