



Footscray Institute of Technology

Ballarat Road, Footscray. P.O. Box 64, Footscray, Victoria, Australia 3011.
Telex:Fitlex AA36596. Facsimile:(03) 689 4069. Telephone:(03) 688 4200

Director
I.M. Herrman
Deputy Director
P.E. Clark

Department of Humanities

Telephone (Direct lines)
(03) 688 4453
(03) 688 4449
Facsimile (03) 688 4805

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The Editor
Sydney Morning Herald
SYDNEY

Dear Sir,

As I, with many others, continue to look on the Sydney Morning Herald as an exemplar of journalistic standards, I was amazed and dismayed to read in the issue of November 14 the snide remarks on the inaugural National Book Council Order of Australia awards, and in particular the remarks about the late Dr Stephen Murray-Smith, which were offensive and in the worst possible taste.

It is indeed a matter of regret that Dr Murray-Smith will not be present to receive an award. However, the award is for a book, not a person, and so the question of his presence is not an issue. The distress caused to his surviving friends and relatives is an issue, as are the derogatory remarks about the book's supposed chances of winning the award. Given the conditions of the contest, it must have at least as good a prospect as Oscar and Lucinda. That, however, is a matter for the judges. In the meantime, I would hope for an apology from both you and your columnist for this departure from your usual standards.

Yours sincerely,

John McLaren

cc: National Book Council