

# Dromkeen Collection Art Gallery



Photographer - Patrick Niland

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## Ruth Park

### Dromkeen Medal Citation 2008

Born in Auckland, New Zealand, in 1917, the daughter of a pioneering bridge builder Ruth Park grew up familiar with the New Zealand bush. Ruth made up for the lack of books in her home by observing, developing the visual and aural skills which would later become striking qualities in all her writing. Later years of the Great Depression sharpened her awareness.

She began writing early, regularly contributing poems and stories to the New Zealand Herald's children's page, the Auckland Star and overseas newspapers. As a young woman, Ruth left Second World War New Zealand in pursuit of a journalist career in San Francisco but the attack on Pearl Harbour forced her to travel to Sydney instead.

Early in her career the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC) accepted a series of radio plays and stories for the Children's Session, thus beginning her long association with ABC radio.

Through all of Parks writing there is a rich sense of place. Few writers can equal her lucid ability to create not just the visual impressions of a scene, but its smells and sounds and the powerful emotions they evoke. As for the human environment, she has a Dickensian zest for the odd and the comedic.

Fantasy has also been a strong element in Park's writing for children, mingled with whimsical humour and often with social realism and history. 'The Muddleheaded Wombat' series is written with children's interests and imaginations in mind, rather than adult perceptions of their needs. Although Park's novels are never didactic, they implicitly emphasize the values of sensitivity, imagination, independence and courage, especially the courage to aspire. Playing Beatie Bow, a remarkable 'time fantasy' which successfully juxtaposes Victorian Sydney in 1873 and contemporary Sydney and which was released as a film in 1985, continues as a best seller.

Her importance to Australian literature has been acknowledged by numerous awards, Honorary Doctor of Letters University NSW 1994, Lloyd O'Neil Magpie Award for services to the Australian Publishing Industry 1993, and Member of the Order of Australia 1987, Special Award from the NSW Premier for Distinguished Contribution to Australian Literature 2004. But there is now doubt that the more real and lasting acknowledgement will be Ruth Park's continuing popularity with Australian and overseas readers of all ages.

Ruth Park is a most worthy recipient of the 2008 Dromkeen Medal.