

PRESS RELEASE

Announcing the winner of the 2021 New England Writers' Centre Fellowship

In partnership with Varuna, The National Writers' House, the New England Writers' Centre is delighted to announce Armidale writer, **Dr James O'Hanlon** as the winner of the 2021 Varuna/New England Writers' Centre Fellowship.

The Fellowship, to be taken up in 2022, will give James a week's inspirational writing residency in the beautiful surroundings of Varuna, in the Blue Mountains. It includes full board and accommodation at Varuna, funds towards travel, a one-on-one consultation with a Varuna expert and more.

This is the third year of the Fellowship--the inaugural year, in 2019, was supported by a generous grant from the Copyright Agency, with the Fellowship winner being emerging speculative fiction author Anna Thomson. In the Fellowship's second year, the winner was non-fiction author, Helena Pastor.

Chosen by Varuna judges from a shortlist of two previously selected by judges from the New England Writers' Centre, James's winning submission included an extract from his manuscript *I Love Spiders*, which he will be working on during his residency. This book will introduce readers to the fascinating and misunderstood world of spiders. Drawing on ground-breaking research into spider biology and describing their behaviour, contribution to history and cultural importance, James will explore the concept of phobias, and why spider phobias are so ubiquitous, and through a light-hearted approach to the subject, describe the role of the spider as doting mothers, cunning problem-solvers and the masters of Earth's varied landscapes. The judges praised the originality of the concept and the potential to be transformative for readers, and James' writing style as vivid and immersive.

Varuna Executive Director Veechi Stuart said: "James's submission provoked lively and positive discussion around spiders. His writing is crafted and lyrical, and through his enthusiastic and warmly anecdotal style, we were drawn to his subject matter. His plan for Varuna was specific and achievable. We look forward to welcoming him to Varuna in 2022."

"James is a wonderful writer and artist, with the scientific background and communications experience to make this project a reality," said Sophie Masson, chair of the New England Writers' Centre. "We are delighted that he has won the 2021 Fellowship to work on his ambitious and important project."

Reacting to news of his win, James said, "I can't quite believe I have been selected for the 2021 Varuna NEWC Fellowship. I am so grateful for the opportunity. Working from home with a toddler is pretty difficult, so the opportunity to spend some time at Varuna is priceless and will push my writing to the next level and give me the opportunity to make enough progress on my book, *I Love Spiders* that I can begin approaching agents and hopefully start the publication process."

Varuna and the New England Writers' Centre warmly congratulate Dr James O'Hanlon for winning the 2021 Varuna/New England Writers' Centre Fellowship and wish him a wonderful week at Varuna in 2022. We also congratulate shortlisted finalist, Dr Jane O'Sullivan, on her excellent achievement and wish her all the best for her writing.