

**2009 NSW Premier's Literary Awards and Translation Prize  
Shortlist  
Judges' Comments**

**Christina Stead Prize for fiction (\$40,000)**

**Helen Garner, *The Spare Room*, The Text Publishing Company**

Helen Garner's brief, fierce and unsparing account of terminal illness is barely a novel – more an artful transcription of real-life events. The narrator, Helen, invites an old friend, Nicola, to stay in her Melbourne home during a course of treatment for cancer. It soon grows evident that Nicola is flinching from the grave reality of her situation; she has fallen into the hands of quacks whose dubious methods only serve to increase her pain.

As the burden of caring grows, Helen, using a crisp, precise prose shorn of all sentiment, anatomises the moral sickness that can accompany physical decline. Nicola's refusal to accept her imminent death prompts Helen to ask some simple yet profound questions about the nature and limits of our responsibility to others.

It is not only the living who are obliged to the dying, she concludes; the dying also owe a debt of honesty to those who care for them.

**Kate Grenville, *The Lieutenant*, The Text Publishing Company**

Daniel Rooke, a quiet boy born to modest means in eighteenth century Portsmouth, has talents and ambitions that a lower-middle class future cannot satisfy. Gifted in maths and sciences, his chosen route to upward mobility is to join the marines as an astronomer, where he takes his chances on an expedition to the far-flung Australian colony of New South Wales. There, his methodical, sober temperament is put to the test as he finds himself mediating the complex relations with the indigenous people he encounters in his makeshift observatory at Sydney Cove.

*The Lieutenant* continues Kate Grenville's nuanced exploration, begun with the award-winning *The Secret River*, into Australia's settler origins. Its finely-wrought dramatic structure and penetrating re-enactment of early contact between indigenous and 'white' Australia provide a penetrating account of our origins as a nation, and deepen our understanding of our national identity.

**Julia Leigh, *Disquiet*, Penguin Group (Australia)**

An unnamed woman, accompanied by her young son and daughter, arrives at a French chateau after an arduous journey. In a narrative that unfolds with a stately pace, we enter a world of chilling family conflict where one unnerving scenario follows the next. In a meticulously staged series of revelations, we learn the woman's identity – Olivia, an Australian fleeing from her violent husband – and accompany her in her journey to find refuge for herself and her children in the home of her mother, a forbidding matriarch who has never met her grandchildren. Olivia's attempt to escape her past, however, is soon confounded as she finds herself caught up in a tangle of fraught, sinister relationships that provide no possibility of relief.

Julia Leigh's *Disquiet* is a strikingly original foray into the contemporary Gothic. Its precise, measured prose renders an atmosphere that is both claustrophobic yet luminous, the ideal environment for its archetypal characters to play out the themes of motherhood, death and loss.

**Joan London, *The Good Parents*, Random House Australia Pty Ltd (Vintage)**

Eighteen-year-old Maya de Jong has moved from a small country town in Western Australia to the sophisticated urbanity of Melbourne, where she begins an illicit affair with her middle-aged boss, Maynard. When her ex-hippy parents, Toni and Jacob, come to visit, flatmate Cecile informs them that Maya has gone away. Their bewilderment at her absence, the anxiety of not knowing what has happened, presents itself as some sort of cosmic testing, which separates the parents before reconnecting them.

Runaways and disappearances are recurring motifs which propel the narrative in this beautifully observed novel. Although Maya is unaware of it, running away with an emotionally risky man was also part of Toni's rites of passage. For both, their mode of escape from the values they grew up with becomes a prison.

Joan London's ability to completely inhabit each of her various characters is sublime, the multiple points of view creating both a sense of existential isolation and a web of connectivity. The events of the story test the tensile strength of the connections – between partners, parents, children, siblings, neighbours and friends. Nuanced details convey the large patterns of the novel while stately rhythms, elegantly structured sentences and restrained lyricism give rise to an underlying empathy and goodwill, a sense of the numinous in everyday life.

### **Steve Toltz, *A Fraction of the Whole*, Penguin Group (Australia)**

A boisterous roller-coaster ride of a novel, *A Fraction of the Whole* tells the story of the impressively dysfunctional Dean family. Martin Dean is a restless eccentric who pulls son Jasper along in the wake of his brilliant ideas. At the heart of Jasper's search for identity is the one abiding question – 'is he doomed to become the lunatic who raised him, or a different kind of lunatic entirely?' Life twists Martin's good intentions into devastating outcomes. Despite his almost plausible scheme to turn all Australians into millionaires, he becomes nationally hated. In contrast, his sporting hero brother Terry gains even greater status and affection as a criminal exacting vengeance on corrupt sportsmen.

This zesty, sprawling epic takes its characters from rural New South Wales to Paris, Central Europe and Thailand; through prisons, strip clubs, jungles, and across the ocean in an unseaworthy boat. Yet it maintains an Australian comic discernment, and sense of place at the end of the world.

Martin comes to the conclusion that 'most philosophy was petty argument about things you couldn't know', but this is an ardently philosophical novel, with adrenalin-charged cogitations on everything from love, death, freedom, the soul, to storytelling, celebrity and infamy. Steve Toltz explodes clichés and reassembles them into aphorisms that are fresh, ironic and astute, while unpacking assumptions and attitudes to reveal their fundamental absurdity.

### **Tim Winton, *Breath*, Penguin Group (Australia)**

Two adventurous teenagers escape the boredom and stasis of small-town Western Australia in the 1970s by learning to surf. Both are addicted to testing themselves against the ocean but only the narrator, 'Pikelet', younger and more thoughtful, sees the activity in its larger light: a rare opportunity for men in that time and place to unashamedly engage with beauty.

The pair falls into the company of an older man, Sando, a former professional surfer whose skill, grace and willingness to take risks set him apart from the locals. He pushes both boys to their limits and eventually Pikelet is found lacking.

It is the relationship that grows between Pikelet and Sando's wife Eva that is most dangerous, however; she lures the fifteen-year old into sexual waters too deep for him. In a language by turns poetic and urgent Tim Winton describes how Pikelet's sublime early experience of surfing, as well as the damage inflicted by this affair, enriches and deforms his adult life.

### **UTS Glenda Adams Award for New Writing (\$5,000)**

There is no short list for this Award. The winner will be announced on 18 May 2009.

### **Douglas Stewart Prize for non-fiction (\$40,000)**

**James Boyce, *Van Diemen's Land*, Black Inc.**

For a non-historian – possibly even for some historians – this book offers original and unsettling insights on Australian history. James Boyce avoids the ‘oddly resilient obsession with passing moral judgement’ on the convicts and positions them – not the much smaller number of free settlers – firmly as the building blocks of later Tasmanian society, forming as they did the basis of its labour market in almost all occupations. He emphasises the environment’s impact on these men and women rather than the reverse – though he cites ample evidence of the devastation wreaked on the land, its flora and fauna (particularly by imported hunting dogs) and its original inhabitants.

Boyce’s meticulous research reveals – often in shocking detail – both the degradation of the environment and the policies which led to the destruction of Aboriginal society. While the topography, wildlife and people of Van Diemen’s Land differed significantly from those of the mainland, much of what happened there resonates with developments in other parts of the country. Boyce argues convincingly that the true horror of Tasmanian history is the record of ‘government-sponsored ethnic clearances’ rather than violent clashes between Aborigines and settlers.

This is important environmental and social history, accessible to the general reader and elegantly written.

**Robert Gray, *The Land I Came Through Last*, Giramondo Publishing Company**

Robert Gray’s memoir is the story both of his parents’ life and his own. Much of the early section is played out against the sunlit landscape of the north coast of New South Wales, the brightness of which only serves to heighten the darkness that stalks the family as a result of the father’s drinking.

Gray’s words rise out of the narrative to stay with the reader the way a poem or image presented in a painting might: the picture might be of his alcoholic father pausing to eat a lush persimmon or two before emptying the outside dunny can, or of the silvery sleekness of fissured logs in the bush at the edge of a tropical valley that he explores as a boy. As the book progresses, Gray the adult poet offers insights into the way he thinks, how he has lived and loved, and the friendships he has forged. His conjuring here of a crusty, aging Patrick White is a tour de force. The memoir winds up back with his parents, and the scenes with his mother, where her mind has gone but her body resolutely lingers on, are perhaps the most striking and haunting of the entire book. This is the circle of life; the land Gray has come through shown in all its sadness, ironies and beauty.

**Chloe Hooper, *The Tall Man: death and life on Palm Island*, Penguin Group (Australia)**

On 19 November 2004 Cameron Doomadgee, an Aboriginal inhabitant of Palm Island – off the coast near Townsville – was arrested by Sergeant Christopher Hurley for creating a public nuisance. Doomadgee was very drunk and, according to Hurley, was using abusive language. When they got to the local police station, Doomadgee punched Hurley on the jaw. They went into the station, they fell to the ground, and an hour later Doomadgee was found dead in his cell. A few days later, two hundred of the Islanders attacked the police station and set it on fire with several officers inside. This was the start of a lengthy legal saga: an inquest that was aborted when the coroner had to disqualify himself; a second inquest, interrupted by a court hearing about disputed evidence; and a trial of Hurley on a charge of manslaughter at which he was acquitted.

The clarity and sharpness of the writing in this book is perhaps its most striking feature. Whether describing the landscapes of northern Queensland or portraying the diverse cast of characters, Chloe Hooper creates a vivid impression of a world that most of her readers would never have encountered. It is never easy to write simply about complex legal issues but the book treats the inquest and the trial as arresting dramas while still maintaining a rare analytical skill. Always present in the narrative are the two protagonists – Hurley and Doomadgee – whose history and character are woven seamlessly into the story.

**Dmetri Kakmi *Mother Land*, Giramondo Publishing Company**

In Dmetri Kakmi's *Mother Land*, boyhood memories, the sense of a mythic past, and poetic language all intertwine to illuminate an aspect of twentieth century history – one perhaps not well appreciated, or even known, by many Australians.

Set on the Turkish island of Bozcaada, or Tenedos as it was once called, it is an account of a brief period of the author's childhood, from when he is eight and a half years old until he leaves for Australia in 1971, just before his tenth birthday. On this island, Greeks like Dmetri and his family live side-by-side with Turks in an atmosphere of distrust and hostility. His mother's hidden unhappinesses and often barely-concealed frustration with her marriage also impact on the boy, as do his fisherman father's periodic violent explosions of anger towards her.

By concentrating on this one period of his youth (except for topping and tailing it in the present), Kakmi immerses readers in his own emotional life and the drama of that period as surely as his island home was sea-surrounded. The immediacy of the descriptive passages makes them achingly real. Finally, although the narrative is above all pertinent to Kakmi's own and the reader's understanding of what transpired on Bozcaada at that time, *Mother Land* is also a poignant reminder of why many people may wish to start life over again in Australia.

**Jacqueline Kent, *An Exacting Heart: the story of Hephzibah Menuhin*, Penguin Group (Australia)**

Hephzibah Menuhin was born in 1920 in San Francisco. The dynamic of her family was the huge talent of her brother, Yehudi, who became an internationally famous violinist. Hephzibah was a serious musician in her own right and performed with her brother when they were young. But in 1938, aged just eighteen, she abandoned this career to marry a wealthy Victorian grazier and went to live on his property in the west of that State. In the late 1940s and the early 1950s Hephzibah resumed her career as a pianist, first in Australia and then on the international stage. Then in the mid 1950s she left her husband and children for another man, moving first to Sydney and then to London, which became a base for her worldwide musical engagements.

Jacqueline Kent skilfully traces Hephzibah's professional and private lives through a range of settings. The driven days of her childhood are sharply captured and contrasted with life on a grazing property in Victoria's Western District. The book explores, searchingly but sensitively, Hephzibah's complex relationships with the key persons in her life – her parents, her brother, her husbands, her children and her lovers. This is an intriguing story of musical talent and restless emotion, told by a biographer who has laid open the exacting heart of her subject.

**Christina Thompson, *Come on Shore and We Will Kill and Eat You All*, Bloomsbury Publishing Plc**

Despite its unconventional mix of serious history, personal and family memoir, travel, anthropology, and cross-cultural interaction – and a rather startling title, drawn from an historical incident and explained in the text – this book works admirably on all these levels. Christina Thompson strikes a skilful and engrossing balance between her various themes. She has been an academic in both Australia and the United States and has immersed herself in the history of the Pacific, its exploration and its peoples. Her book draws widely on historical sources, but wears its erudition lightly. Thompson has also been editor of *Meanjin* and the *Harvard Review*: her writing is straightforward and unadorned, though not without lyrical passages, and free of any hint of academic jargon.

On a personal level, her account of her unlikely meeting and later relationship with her Maori lover/husband Seven and his extended family, and of his with her middleclass American family, and the resulting cultural tensions, is both touching and instructive. Australian readers will learn much about the history and people of our neighbour across the Tasman, of which most of us know disgracefully little, from this diverting account.

## **Kenneth Slessor Prize for poetry (\$30,000)**

### **Michael Brennan, *Unanimous Night*, Salt Publishing**

Michael Brennan's second collection, *Unanimous Night*, fulfills the promise of his earlier work and shows growth in both emotional range and technique.

The poet's extended absence from Australia has undoubtedly had a bearing on his themes and ruminations. Marking definite points in consciousness and poetic mode are Brennan's familiar, and now generic, 'Letters Home' form. In this manner the poet writes to establish tangible reference points, rendering a kind of dream diary process to a shared or offered memory from the exile of his tongue. Brennan's formal innovations display a keen attention to influence – both Eastern European and Far Eastern – where scale ranges from epigrammatic fragment to prose poem.

'Twenty Studies' (Études) are each short six-line poems that work between the abstract and the definite, distilled to exquisite weight and balance. Here Brennan shows himself a virtuoso with the miniature form. The longer prose poems of the 'North Country Abstracts' are haunting narratives and vignettes owning a quality of vision sometimes hallucinatory, where perceptions are reduced to a fragile intensity.

### **David Brooks, *The Balcony*, University of Queensland Press**

What is life? What is art? Why is the artist always male? Why is the muse always female? And most relevantly, how on earth can a modern poet write seriously about 'love'? David Brooks is aware of the unfashionableness of his enterprise, 'one hundred love poems' ('Catullus 123'). But the resulting poems, a celebration of lust conjoined with love, at their best display the aesthetic infused by the erotic. In that display, the profane passions – of the flesh, of the word, of the world – are here each augmenting the other.

It is unsurprising that such poems turn to the language of sacred expression ('my skin/ is singing/ a wild, untranslatable *jubilate*'), giving its protagonists the divine attributes of atemporal existence:

10 pm  
on a midsummer evening  
and again  
we start to kiss on the balcony.  
Someone on the street  
whistles  
and a small group gathers. ...  
After a while  
the crowd  
stops jeering. People  
watch on in utter silence.  
When we look up  
no one is there,  
the leaves  
have fallen from the trees,  
the koels  
and swallows have departed,  
it is almost winter.  
(from 'The Balcony')

Perhaps protecting itself from accusations of hubris (and within the conventions of *fin amor*), the poetic persona represents the masculine as powerless, the female as the goddess-like force of nature:

She's still at the age  
where she thinks that she's immortal, ...  
hates, like she loves, unconditionally,  
always gets what she wants,  
wants me.  
(from 'Balkan')

In these brief and direct poems, Brooks reminds us to rejoice in one of the greatest and most traditional motivations of the poetic.

**Sarah Holland-Batt, *Aria*, University of Queensland Press**

Sarah Holland-Batt possesses a wonderful attentiveness to the telling detail; in poems of startling freshness and immediacy, she bridges the quotidian and visionary worlds in vivid acts of seeing, and reminds us of poetry's power to renovate, to restore delight in ordinary things. It is refreshing to encounter a young poet who values lyric clarity, and who, though gifted with the art of seeing and turning the ordinary into arresting metaphors, does not disdain to use plain speech for profound utterance.

Holland-Batt reveals a Keatsian apprehension of the world around her that yields up refreshing physical details. When this rich vein is balanced by a Chekhovian spareness, Holland-Batt reveals a mature mind that makes her one of the most compelling poets to emerge in recent years. This balance is most apparent in the family portraits like 'Exhaustion' and 'The Sewing Room', where the precision of detail works with lyric cadence and restraint to create deeply poignant tributes. There are also Zen-like poems that tune in to the mystery of the everyday, like 'Salem Song' and 'Not a Life, But Like One'. Here the ego disappears in beautifully observed details.

*Aria* displays a remarkable precision and economy of language, and a haunting acoustic, a captivating music that holds up the visual image. Reading a Holland-Batt poem, one is compelled to listen to the resonance, the silence, the meaning that echoes at the end of the last line. It is a collection to keep, one to re-read for its luminous detail and knowledge, and its tender, compassionate imagination that is always 'Letting the ordinary become the last'.

**L K Holt, *Man Wolf Man*, John Leonard Press**

L K Holt's *Man Wolf Man* is a wonderful example of the power of the lyric to slow time down to intense, expanded moments of seeing and feeling. In measured poems of decorum and grace, Holt weighs beauty against terror, art against the unspeakable, love against death. The exquisite music of these poems comes from a perfect mastery of form that is never content merely to deploy traditional templates like the sonnet or the sestina, but converts them into something that is contemporary, arresting, and Holt's own.

Death and its violent disruptions are taken up in different ways, most movingly in 'Long Sonnets of Leocadia', a sequence about Goya, the master of the abominable and grotesque. In a reinvented sonnet form and in stanzas effortlessly rhymed, love and loyalty are held in tenuous balance with horror and death. The poem, and the other three sequences, 'Unfinished Confession', 'Glove Story, Paraphrased', and 'Time of Houses', reveal a capacity for sustained exploration of the subject and a delicate, thrilling fusion of intuition and intellect. Holt wears her learning lightly, gracefully: Galen, Donne, Shakespeare, Kristeva, Primo Levi, Althusser – all cohabit harmoniously in a language and form that is intricate and sinuous. In total effect, the book has a wonderfully coherent feel to it, as inexpressible truths are intuited or glimpsed rather than overtly stated.

**Kerry Leves, *A Shrine to Lata Mangeshkar*, Puncher & Wattmann Pty Ltd**

Kerry Leves dedicates his collection to the memory of the late Vicki Viidikas, herself a poet. (Lata Mangeshkar is the name of the most famous Indian woman singer.) Together Leves and Viidikas travelled throughout India in the early eighties; these poems immerse us in the sensory cornucopia of that experience. Their coherence in place and time gives the collection a narrative strength, yet the individual poems are typically lyrical and evocative.

Leves' writing paints in swift strokes, effacing difference between physical and spiritual, speaker and spoken:

Down shadowy sidestreets, clay is articulate:  
on a temple wall, a daub of Hanuman scarlet  
flashes the heartbeat of the Goddess inside.

(from 'Varanasi')

The poetic persona, when it allows its 'I', is humble, sometimes wry, with an unsentimental eye observing itself and other similar observers (as in 'Isabelle's poem'). At its best, the language flows with the deceptive ease of speech, the restrained musicality of its sound patterns almost subliminal:

The gods shinny down guyropes of light.  
What is the name of the river  
that holds the river?  
Dumb in the gaze of the boatman  
we trail our hands in the holy flow  
where indistinction is all. ...  
Pilgrims step from the ghats as if drugged  
yet perfectly controlled.  
A winter raincloud covers the sun.  
My sandals slip on wet stone.

(from 'Ghats')

This is writing which refuses to equate pretentious with important, but insists on the integrity of the moment in its poetic momentum.

### **Alan Wearne, *The Australian Popular Songbook*, Giramondo Publishing Company**

With this collection Alan Wearne is again confirmed as one of Australia's leading poets. He has contributed memorably in the past to the dramatic narrative in Australian poetry, and in *The Popular Australian Song Book* he once more brings events, cultural icons and national character to memorable voice.

His mastery of intricate verse forms allows him to exercise a subtle ear and draw out the wit of the colloquial and domestic, the regional and the sometimes *almost* folkloric. Wearne can strut his stuff along the slow burn of his metre with spectacular dexterity, all the way gathering much in the demotic richness of our talk and times: pop and vernacular, tabloid and intrigue all find their place and are delivered to land with either belly laugh or gravel rash.

Wearne has no template or shortcut technique for the characters that inhabit this work. He gives us here credible figures – or good actors at a high end audition – and produces a wonderful assembly of singular free standing meditations on Australia's collective psyche.

### **Patricia Wrightson Prize for children's literature (\$30,000)**

#### **Ursula Dubosarsky & Tohby Riddle (illus), *The Word Spy*, Penguin Group (Australia)**

First and foremost this is a fantastic read. Unusual in a non-fiction text, particularly on the potentially dry subject of the use and history of words and the English language in general, this book brings together a wealth of literary information and readily engages the reader. It is fun. It covers the structure, use and intricacies of the English language with the added hook of the reader being a Word Spy. It is informative, in an educational sense, humorous, in an engaging way, and well presented. Although targeted towards Primary-aged children, anyone with an interest in the English language could be drawn into the text.

#### **Bob Graham, *How to Heal a Broken Wing*, Walker Books Australia**

The plot for this Bob Graham picture book has a simple storyline. Walking through the city with his mother, Will rescues a pigeon with a broken wing, tends to its needs, and releases it when it has healed. Yet it is far from a simple story. The complexity of the illustrations, the detail provided within them and the way in which the reader journeys with Will as he tends to his bird's broken wing provide other levels of understanding.

This is another delightful example of how illustrations and text blend to create a tender story about caring, hope and freedom. The words are few but well chosen. The calm watercolour illustrations are more than simply a complement to the story – they are integral to the narrative.

**Sonya Hartnett & Ann James (illus), *Sadie and Ratz*, Penguin Group (Australia)**

Sadie and Ratz are the names given to Hannah's hands. They invariably get her into trouble and, as Hannah notes, 'can behave like wild beasts'. As the story unfolds Hannah's little brother, Baby Boy, is starting to grow up and blame Sadie and Ratz for things that didn't seem to make sense to Hannah. She devises a solution that leads to a humorous conclusion.

Perhaps the most wonderful aspect of this book is that it is an exemplary piece of literature in an otherwise sadly neglected corner of the children's book market. There are so many quality books available for independent readers and a plethora of excellent picture books. This, however, provides an oasis in the wilderness of reading material for younger readers. It is engaging, easy to read and the content demonstrates depth of understanding of what it is like to be a child, a sibling and a deep thinker all-in-one.

**Glenda Millard & Stephen Michael King (illus), *Perry Angel's Suitcase*, ABC Books**

The story is the third of Glenda Millard's Kingdom of Silk series, the two preceding tales being *The Naming of Tishkin Silk* and *Layla, Queen of Hearts*. Perry Angel arrives at the home of his new family, the Silks. He is a quiet, seven-year-old boy with a closely-held, tatty brown suitcase that is embossed with curious gold letters. The Silks are a warm unconventional family who are ready to welcome Perry into their lives – and patiently wait while Perry journeys to locate his place in this new situation. The genuine affection of the new family and their wonderful rituals are framed from the multiple perspectives of the characters, adding another level of complexity to this tale. Together the individual characters in this story nurture and encourage each other, revealing a heart-warming picture of how delightfully rewarding fostering can be for all concerned.

This third book in the Kingdom of Silk series is as engaging as the first two titles. Like the previous stories, it is wonderfully written and can be read as a stand-alone book which is not always the case for books in a series. Millard has a wonderful way of developing her characters, drawing the reader into the context of the story.

**Tohby Riddle, *Nobody Owns the Moon*, Penguin Group (Australia)**

This is an enchanting picture book about belonging and friendship. The fox, Clive Prendergast, has learned to adjust to life in the city. An array of humans and other animals also live in the city, some with limited success. Clive has an apartment and a regular job in a factory. Clive's friend, Humphrey, is a donkey with no home, intermittent employment and marginal success at living in the city. Together they enjoy an unexpected event that sweeps them into a new world, transforms their lives, deepens their friendship and empowers their simple existence.

Tohby Riddle's illustrations employ a combination of semi-photographic realism, collage and cartoon styles to ably enhance this carefully crafted tale. The depth of the story is its simplicity. It portrays two unlikely characters in an unlikely context. This story highlights the power of simple but careful texts to convey significant stories.

**Shaun Tan, *Tales from Outer Suburbia*, Allen & Unwin**

This tactile book contains a series of short stories with a quirky, eccentric quality. They provide the reader with a springboard of ideas for both conversation and further writing. Shaun Tan is a master of the picture book for big kids. His exotic images are fascinating and as powerful as the text. It provides a series of fabulous tales that are at the same time insightfully deep, superbly crafted and presented with creative flare.

At first glance this book may be dismissed as obscure, but it provides a wealth of opportunity for conversation about a range of topics from 'outer suburbia'. This, though, is not a book for the faint

hearted. Its appeal is for the more astute reader who is seeking alternative reading material with a surreal quality.

### **Ethel Turner Prize for young people's literature (\$30,000)**

#### **Dianne Bates, *Crossing the Line*, Ford Street Publishing, an imprint of Hybrid Publishers**

The subject matter of *Crossing the Line* is confronting, even gruelling. Sophie, as main character and narrator, moves in and out of therapy, in and out of relationships, craving affection and intimacy, yet simultaneously bristling, defensive and distrustful. Her strong presence dominates the novel.

Sophie falls into a transference relationship with her therapist, which leads to emotional obsession and stalking behaviour even more extreme than her acts of self-mutilation. What makes the story believable is the raw intensity of her voice and point of view. Sophie is a troubling and uncomfortable character, yet undeniably, overpoweringly real. Dianne Bates's book will be a valuable text to stimulate discussion, especially among teenage girls.

#### **Michelle Cooper, *A Brief History of Montmaray*, Random House Australia Pty Ltd**

The isolated, imaginary island kingdom of Montmaray, largely deserted as a result of lives lost in World War One and the emigration of much of the remaining population, is again threatened by the outside world, particularly the Spanish Civil War and the rise of Nazi Germany. Sophie FitzOsborne, the king's niece, records the events of late 1936 and early 1937 in her journal, a sixteenth birthday gift. She is a lively and engaging writer and her journal contains entertaining glimpses of the everyday life of a most unusual and interesting family, as well as events of high adventure and suspense, with a touch of the supernatural.

Sophie's reflections introduce other themes, among them the nature of history, the value of literature and traditional roles of women. These ideas are presented with a light touch, thanks to Sophie's sense of humour, but nevertheless leave the reader with much to think about, in addition to the excitement of the story.

#### **D. M. Cornish, *Monster Blood Tattoo Book Two: Lamplighter*, Omnibus Books**

D.M. Cornish is a wordsmith and a world-creator. Following on from *Foundling* in the *Monster Blood Tattoo* trilogy, the story of Rossamünd scales new heights in *Lamplighter*. In this second volume, the main action gets massively under way, the thematic implications come clear and the major revelation at the climax makes sense of everything that has happened so far.

*Lamplighter* is a masterpiece of high fantasy. In richness and complexity, the world of the Half Continent bears comparison to Tolkien's Middle Earth. In this case, the cultural parallels are post-medieval, more akin to a fantastical version of the eighteenth century. Cornish's love of words is also Tolkienesque, evoking a distinctive reality through inspired coinages. Here is a Young Adult book that will appeal equally to adult lovers of fantasy.

#### **Alison Goodman, *The Two Pearls of Wisdom*, HarperCollinsPublishers Australia Pty Ltd**

Inspired by ancient Chinese lore, *The Two Pearls of Wisdom* engages traditional elements of fantasy. There is the creation of a new world, battles against evil, a quest for good to triumph. Eon the hero, who is a girl disguised as a boy, meets the political and sexual conspiracies and complex obstacles that challenge her quest. Eon is seeking to become a Dragoneye, a lord able to master wind and water to protect the land.

Alison Goodman's narrative is very well written, filled with magic, rituals, the Orient, hardships, friendships, betrayals and adventure. Great strengths of *The Two Pearls of Wisdom* include the

engaging characterization of Eon/Eona, the pageantry, and life and death challenges. Ultimately it is an exciting narrative for young adult fantasy readers.

**Nette Hilton, *Sprite Downberry*, HarperCollinsPublishers Australia Pty Ltd**

Nette Hilton writes with sensitivity and warmth, exposing a family in crisis. While *Sprite Downberry* reaches into confronting issues including pedophilia, drugs, family breakdown, mental illness, and runaway children, the underlying theme is the child as carer of the family. These are serious issues, yet *Sprite Downberry* does not become didactic or dark. Nette Hilton's characters delight and engage readers. The love within the family shines through. The adventures of Sprite and her little brother Mozz and the runaway boy Luther, are convincing, exciting and emotional.

Sprite says at the end, 'They were survivors'. However this is a novel about more than survival. It is about the great capacity for young people to relate, love, care and find their place in the world. Although *Sprite Downberry* has relevance to all readers, its primary audience is from twelve to early teens.

**Joanne Horniman, *My Candlelight Novel*, Allen & Unwin**

Sophie is the older sister of Kate, the narrator of *Secret Scribbled Notebooks*, 'a reading girl' on a journey of self-discovery. The novel explores themes of abandonment and belonging and of the nature of love, through a variety of Sophie's relationships, old and new, and through the changing perspectives of the child and adult Sophie.

The richness and beauty of Joanne Horniman's language offer the reader a fresh appreciation of the value of everyday incidents and surroundings. There is great tenderness in Sophie's bond with baby Hetty and an invitation to explore the world of books so important to Sophie. This is a gentle, honest, well constructed and moving story which will be appreciated by older as well as Young Adult readers.

**Play Award (\$30,000)**

**Andrew Bovell, *When the Rain Stops Falling*, Scott Theatre**

*When the Rain Stops Falling* is an epic play spanning four generations and two countries. The action moves from the claustrophobia of a 1950s London flat to the windswept coast of Southern Australia and into the heart of the Australian desert.

The implications of the effects of climate change provide the canvas to the minutiae of people's lives: in 1959 London the emotional turmoil of newly-weds where the difficult adjustment to living with another person is exacerbated by one partner's psychological problem; emotional aridity caused by the denial of love; the turmoil of a suddenly burgeoning love in the Coorong; the spiritual impact of sunrise near Uluru; the long, slow devotion within an almost accidental marriage; and the loss and rediscovery of filial and paternal love.

The play interweaves a series of connected stories, as seven people confront the mysteries of their past in order to understand their future, revealing how patterns of betrayal, love and abandonment are passed on. Until finally, well into the future, as the desert is inundated with rain, one young man finds the courage to defy the legacy.

This haunting, poetic and timely play by one of Australia's most respected playwrights lives long in the memory for its grace, humanity and unconventional wisdom.

**Brendan Cowell, *Ruben Guthrie*, Company B**

On the surface, *Ruben Guthrie* is a play about the effects of alcoholism on every aspect of one's life. Ruben Guthrie is the creative guru at an ad agency and even his boss thinks that alcohol is the essential stimulus for his creative genius. Even his parents, who know his weaknesses, love to

have a drink with their son. Ruben lives the Australian stereotype of every social occasion starting with a drink. It is when he stops drinking that, ironically, his life seemingly begins to fall apart. All his security blankets are taken away and the journey through hell begins.

Playwright Brendan Cowell takes all the stereotypical characters and situations and breathes life and depth into them. As we know there are no easy solutions to this addiction and many solutions are raised in the play by his family, friends and colleagues. It is easy for them to encourage him forward, but he sees that they do not themselves do what they say. Alcohol has seeped so deeply into the fabric of Australian life that to say 'no' to it is almost unpatriotic. *Ruben Guthrie* takes us into an unsentimental journey of the main character's self discovery and his striving for a new lease on life. It is an almost impossible task for him, but a most involving experience for the reader.

**Tom Holloway, *Don't Say the Words*, Griffin Theatre Company, co-produced with the Tasmanian Theatre Company, Currency Press Pty Ltd**

*Don't Say the Words* is an 'epic in miniature' inspired by Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*.

After a decade under siege – a city has finally fallen. But ten years of fury have taken their toll. For an officer returning from this epic campaign, it is time to put the horrors of war behind him, and take back his place in the family home. For the officer's wife, it is time to begin again.

This exceptional, daring and confronting work is a rare beast – a contemporary tragedy that enacts rather than recounts its emotional and ethical conflicts. Tom Holloway's love of language – particularly the riffs and rhythms of colloquial Australian speech – is evident in every contorted, painful and specific phrase. The world of the play is a crucible of searing emotion and unpredictable response. *Don't Say the Words* is theatre at the forefront of change. Holloway's work never apologises for its content or form. This is a stunning work by a young playwright which anticipates an important body of work.

**Daniel Keene, *The Serpent's Teeth*, Sydney Theatre Company, Currency Press Pty Ltd**

The two one-act plays forming *The Serpent's Teeth* – *Citizens* and *Soldiers* are poetic, thoughtful and probing. The plays are self-contained yet imaginatively connected in their exploration of the effects of war, loss and resilience.

The first play – *Citizens* – is set at the dividing wall of an unspecified war-torn country. A series of grippingly juxtaposed events occur and a picture of life is revealed in the fragments. Over the course of the play, the fragility and nobility of the human spirit at its most vulnerable is carefully probed and laid bare. The second play – *Soldiers* – is set in an echoing Air Force hangar, where family members gather to receive the bodies of their sons, brothers and friends lost in an unspecified conflict abroad. The initial connection they share is the battle that claimed their loved ones.

Within the context of world events each scenario of both plays resonates with intelligence, emotion and character. Together with Daniel Keene's deliberate ambiguity there is space for each audience to write their own play within these performance texts. *The Serpent's Teeth* is an assured contemporary play in every way that well deserves its inclusion on the shortlist.

**Damien Millar, *The Modern International Dead*, Griffin Theatre, in association with Parramatta Riverside, Currency Press Pty Ltd**

*The Modern International Dead* delves into minds of a special group of Australians who every year abandon their comfortable lives down under and head straight into the world's hell spots to bring humanitarian or medical relief to the suffering. Why do they do this? What problems do they encounter? Playwright Damien Millar has digested hundreds of hours of interviews and interwoven those stories into the lives of his three main characters: Luke, the soldier who becomes an aid worker; Bridgette, who went from religion to counselling; and Rod, the scientist and weapons inspector.

The beauty of the work lies in depiction of the real world these workers face in the field. There is no sentimentality when the power of politics enters the arena and compromise becomes the only solution. The diversity of voices first appears random, but eventually the stories come together as a united voice crying out with anger and despair. This play truthfully displays the disbelief and frustrations of those who have gone out 'to save the world', but who have had to come to the realisation that they are not really able to change, or even affect in any way, the course of war.

**Tom Wright, *The Women of Troy*, Sydney Theatre Company**

In his adaptation of Euripides' *The Women of Troy*, playwright Tom Wright has distilled and modernised the language for our times. The play commences with the aftermath of the sacking of Troy. It delves into the inner thoughts and turmoils of Hecuba, Queen of Troy and the other women of the royal family, including Cassandra, Andromache and Helen. It is truly an anti-war piece which attacks the macho culture of soldiers and the dehumanisation of women.

Wright constructs a series of honest and viscerally stinging monologues for the characters to voice their anguish, regrets and anger. It is regrettable that the script probably cannot easily involve anyone who is not already familiar with Euripides' epic tale and its tragic characters. The play is a montage of unlinked emotional moments rather than a dramatic journey of discovery. The script does not include the words of the Chorus, but only lists them as 'singing'. What a pity to lose such a vital 'character' usually present in classic Greek drama. What remain are tremendously involving monologues searching for a play.

**Script Writing Award (\$30,000)**

**David Caesar, *Prime Mover*, Porchlight Films Pty Ltd**

*Prime Mover* is a boys' own adventure road movie film script. It is about the ambition of a young man to become his own hero, the woman he loves and the huge road trains that rumble through the outback. The pace is fast and furious but what sets this script apart are its moments of intimacy and endearing whimsy as we are taken inside the central character's imagination. It is an unusual technique, especially for this genre, and it lends an engaging humanity and humour to the ultimately bleak world that is depicted. Bleak, however, in David Caesar's screenplay is far from monotone or lifeless.

This is writing at the forefront of a genre that all too often feels overly familiar and tired. The screenplay is bold, confronting and full of life. Caesar's writing is wonderfully crisp and charged with an electric energy: the crackles stay with the reader long after the end is reached. The characters are alive and very real – they, too, do not simply disappear but hang around in one's mind. Caesar has expanded the vocabulary of screen language to deliver a script that is original and which reinvigorates the screen: it reads beautifully and makes one long to see the movie.

**Greg Haddrick, Felicity Packard & Peter Gawler, *Underbelly*, Screentime Pty Ltd**

*Underbelly* is television drama at its very best. For all its demotic language and popular appeal, this series is television drama at its *literary* best. The scripts held the judges in awe of the talents and skills of Greg Haddrick, Felicity Packard and Peter Gawler who have raised television drama to new heights.

Consideration was given to selecting just one episode but this proved impossible: just when we thought we had found the very best writing, the next episode by another of the three writers seemed even better. By the time we had read to the end of all 13 episodes – and who would have thought that reading thirteen episodes of what might have been simply yet another television crime series could be so compelling – it was obvious that all three writers together had created an artistic whole.

There were scenes that shocked or appalled us, our appetites for violence were frequently challenged, and our collective desire for what is popularly called 'civilised behaviour' grew ever stronger with each episode. With *Underbelly*, Haddrick, Packard and Gawler have introduced millions of viewers to the existence of literariness in a genre and a medium where many had never before thought to look. This is courageous writing which left us wanting more.

**Anna-Maria Monticelli, *Disgrace*, Wild Strawberries Pty Ltd**

The relationships and situations in Anna-Maria Monticelli's screenplay, *Disgrace*, are stark. The characters can be unforgiving and at other times they are understanding and generous: one never quite knows how any of them will react to what either they themselves or others have done. Time and again, the sympathy skilfully created by the writer for one character or another is undone by their actions or reactions. This is more than ambivalence; the screenplay delivers wonderfully delineated characters at war with themselves in a society which, in turn, is at war with itself. Certainly the unease the characters feel and express offer a metaphor for the dis-ease in post-apartheid South Africa and contribute to an atmosphere which leaves the reader ill at ease. In even only slightly less talented hands this could lead to a screenplay that breeds a lack of caring in its readers. In this screenwriter's skilled hands and fertile yet scrupulous imagination, however, we get a screenplay of such high order that uncaring is not an option.

Is it the refusal of the narrative to take sides? Or the silences in which articulate and emotionally mature characters reveal themselves to be inarticulate emotional illiterates? It is difficult to tell and that is all part of Monticelli's literary skill: this screenplay, adapted from J.M. Coetzee's novel of the same name, is a very welcome addition to the Australian screenscape.

**Sean Nash, *All Saints* episode 447: *Not What You'd Expect*, Seven Network (Operations) Ltd**

*All Saints* is always a menagerie of tragic medical stories intertwined with personal dilemmas among the staff. Episode 447 does not disappoint in these departments. Amy feels the entire team is against her when she stares conspicuously at a very obviously disfigured patient. Mike heads to Melbourne for a 'blind date' which ends up in a club where his medical expertise is desperately tested. Jack's medical judgement is challenged by having to make treatment decisions for a self-medicating father who is at death's door.

Writer Sean Nash has created a tightly-knit, emotionally involving and intense drama that grows on you as it takes you into the detailed moments that the staff and patients go through every day under extraordinary circumstances. The dialogue is realistic and to the point; the scenes, revealing and moving. The episode is a shining example of TV drama that makes you laugh and cry at the same time.

**Louis Nowra, Rachel Perkins & Beck Cole, *First Australians*, Blackfella Films, SBS**

Reading a documentary script can be a serious and, in truth, often quite dull business because the genre itself is widely acknowledged to be a discourse of sobriety. But Louis Nowra, Rachel Perkins and Beck Cole, the co-writers of *First Australians*, refuse to ignore the value and often sheer beauty of tone, colour and nuance created by the sounds, moods and meanings of words and voices in conjunction with images.

To explain just why the judges decided to include the screenplay for all the episodes of this landmark series on the short list, here is a brief extract from this often challenging, always historically rigorous and extraordinarily beautifully written series. It is the opening scene from episode one:

*VISION: Night from the ocean looking through Sydney Heads.*

*The first words we hear are an Aboriginal woman's words, exasperated, as if explaining their meaning. She translates into English.*

VOICE: Tyera barr bowar aou— *I shall not become white*  
**Patyegang, Eora Nation,**

*Then we hear a firm Englishman's voice:*

VOICE: *You will endeavour by every possible means to open an intercourse with the natives and to conciliate their affections enjoining all our subjects to live in amity and kindness with them.*  
**King George the Third, 25 April 1787**

VISION: *Dark water, the cry of seagulls. Through the narrow heads there are a few faint glimmering lights, like fireflies, the remains of camp fires. Sound of clap sticks fading...*

From this moment the combination of words, images and sounds imagined by these screenwriters weaves a magic that captures the audience.

By writers who clearly understand the collaborative nature of filmmaking, this series makes an important contribution to the nation by helping explore and explain what it means to both Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals to be Australian.

### **Community Relations Commission Award (\$15,000)**

#### **Anna Haebich, *Spinning the Dream: assimilation in Australia 1950-1970*, Fremantle Press**

After the heyday of the White Australia policy but before the introduction of multiculturalism, assimilation was heralded as the solution to the challenges posed by Australia's increasingly diverse population in the post-World War II era. Anna Haebich's book provides a comprehensive overview of the policies and practices of assimilation as applied to both 'New' and Indigenous Australians, tracing government action as well as rhetorical constructions of national identity at a time of massive change in the social and cultural fabric of the nation.

Thoroughly researched, and never losing sight of the underlying issues of race and culture as they weave in and out of debates about nationhood, *Spinning the Dream* makes an important and timely contribution to the history of the Australian people. Assimilation, though often decried, has received considerably less scholarly attention than the White Australia policy and multiculturalism. This book provides a compelling account of how a policy devised to reconcile a diverse population with an ideology of national homogeneity ended up exposing the paradoxes which led to its own undoing. A particularly instructive aspect of Haebich's account is its comparative dimension: parallels between Indigenous and immigrant communities exposed to the ideal of assimilation and gradual loss of distinction.

#### **Philip Jones & Anna Kenny, *Australian Muslim Cameleers: pioneers of the Inland 1860s—1930s*, Wakefield Press Pty Ltd**

This book documents the little known history of the Muslim cameleers who were an integral part of the exploration and settlement of outback Australia for one hundred and fifty years, from the Burke and Wills expedition on. Camels were the only pack animals able to survive the harsh, arid conditions, providing supplies and communication to outback settlements, but they were best handled by experienced cameleers who arrived from Afghanistan and what is now Pakistan. Two thousand cameleers came, bringing twenty thousand camels. Most returned home after fulfilling their contracts and having passed on their skills and knowledge, but a number stayed, marrying indigenous or white Australians.

Many artefacts and photographs survive and have been brought together for the first time by historian and South Australian Museum curator Philip Jones and anthropologist Anna Kenny. The book constitutes an important record of the Muslim cameleers' contribution to Australia's cultural

landscape and economic development, the challenges and prejudices they faced, and their successful integration with Australian society, both white and indigenous.

**Jacqueline Kent, *An Exacting Heart: the story of Hephzibah Menuhin*, Penguin Group (Australia)**

Jacqueline Kent's biography of Hephzibah Menuhin examines the life of Yehudi's equally talented pianist sister, one of three Menuhin children who were all musical prodigies. Hephzibah defied all expectation by walking away from a brilliant career as a soloist on the world stage, marrying Australian Lindsay Nichols, heir to a pharmaceutical fortune, and joining him on his Victorian sheep property where she was to build a life for sixteen years and have two sons.

Life in rural Australia was predictably awkward for Hephzibah at first but she gradually saw opportunities to contribute to the community in which she lived and took them up with great enthusiasm and perseverance. Her humanitarian projects included starting up a travelling outback library, which she seeded and ran in a way that ensured it became self funding. However Menuhin was to abandon her life in Australia to embark on another and again very different phase of her life.

Kent's literary, contemplative style results in an engaging, gratifying book, as she invites us to consider the twists and turns of the life of a fascinating woman from an extraordinary family and the prevailing culture in which she lived, the dynamics and the personality that at times drove her to succeed but equally at times derailed her.

**Michelle Offen, *East West 101: Chapter Five – Haunted by the Past*, Knapman Wyld Television Pty Ltd, SBS Television**

Episode Five of the popular crime drama *East West 101* follows Detective Zane Malik on the trail of an unresolved crime: the shooting of his own father by a masked gunman. Haunted by childhood memories he struggles to maintain his professional distance, the case becoming further complicated when he discovers that his boss has secret dealings with the suspect. In a parallel plot line, past atrocities return to haunt perpetrators and survivors of Balkan war crimes.

The suspense, pace and intricate plotting of *East West 101* make for excellent television drama. This series combines personal and political conflict in its depiction of migrant characters and communities in Sydney's western suburbs coming to terms with their traumatic past. Steering well clear of sentimental multiculturalism and ethnic stereotyping, the portrayal of a Muslim detective in a culturally complex setting offers a credible alternative to the monochrome mainstream which populates most Australian television drama.

**Malcolm Prentis, *The Scots in Australia*, University of New South Wales Press Ltd**

This well-researched contribution to 'migration history' demonstrates the wide-ranging contribution of the Scots to all levels of life in Australia. While looking to temper standard stories of triumphalism, it relates the many successful examples of Scottish influence on Australian life. In addition to outlining the contribution of Scots to the domains of law, medicine, architecture, education, literature and the arts more broadly, it is careful also to highlight their contributions to various aspects of popular culture, including sport and music, and one chapter considers the relationship between the Scots and Aboriginal communities. We hear of Sir Fergus McMaster's part in the foundation of QANTAS and also of Scottish contributions to poetry (from John Shaw-Neilson to Les Murray), music (Vince Jones, AC/DC, The Easybeats, 'Jimmy Barnes'), cinema (Peter Weir, Russell Boyd, Colin Friels), television (the Lamb family), and sport (golf, of course, with Peter Thomson as a main name).

**Eric Richards, *Destination Australia: migration to Australia since 1901*, University of New South Wales Press Ltd**

In its broad coverage of the period 1900-2000 *Destination Australia*, written by a 'ten pound pom' who arrived in 1963, offers a fascinating, detailed account of the many waves of nationalities whose arrival into Australia was central to a 'grand plan of immigration' that has led us to our

multicultural present. Richards' history crucially involves the two major twentieth century wars and the immediate post-war issues that confronted Australia on each occasion. He records the many changes in immigration policies across the period of his study.

Inevitably the story contains many examples of various harsh exclusions, racisms, and 'internal racisms' and Richards does not flinch from saying that at certain times it was difficult to be Japanese, Maltese, Bulgarian or caught up in the Tampa controversy (among others). Richards leads the reader through changes in economic arguments that underpin justifications for demographic projections and specific immigration policies, 'liberal', welcoming or otherwise. Many prominent political figures (Billy Hughes, Robert Menzies, Arthur Calwell, John Gorton, Gough Whitlam, Malcolm Fraser, Bob Hawke, Paul Keating, John Howard) figure in a story covering the history of the many interest groups, from politicians to unions to environmentalists, which have participated in the vigorous debates that shadowed official immigration policies. As it records the history as experienced by those people whose journeys to Australia provide the subject of the book, this wide-ranging study of 'the politics and demography of immigration' balances economic opinion and humanitarian obligation.

### **Gleebooks Prize (\$10,000)**

#### **James Boyce, *Van Diemen's Land, Black Inc.***

In this important contribution to the colonial history of Tasmania – and Australia – James Boyce argues that, unlike the mainland colonies, Tasmania was not just a convict settlement, but a convict society. The high percentage of convicts and former convicts in the island's population laid the foundation for a unique social environment, in which the former prison became the land of hope. The book, writes Boyce, is best described as environmental history, 'not because it explores how convict settlers changed the environment, but because its primary interest is how the environment changed *them*'. Woven into the story of Aboriginal-settler relations, this account of convict history goes beyond the history wars which have dominated public debates in the last decade to offer a compelling alternative narrative of colonial settlement and adaptation.

#### **Tim Flannery, *Quarterly Essay 31: Now or Never, a sustainable future for Australia?* Black Inc.**

Tim Flannery's *Quarterly Essay* presents an urgent plea for a sustainable future by means of fundamental questions: 'What is our purpose as a species? And how does Earth work?' If the standard definition of sustainability involves extending the Eighth commandment (Thou shalt not steal) to include not stealing from future generations, Flannery argues that any discussion of this issue must be underpinned by a broader moral and philosophical vision. Never losing sight of the big questions, his essay also concerns itself with practical solutions: what can we do before it is too late to reverse the despoliation of Earth's life-support system? Calling for a 'new industrial revolution' he goes on to detail possible measures to address the pressing issue of climate change: radical and ambitious, but do-able if political rhetoric is backed by political will.

Passionate as well as informed, Flannery has a unique capacity to present scientific complexity as if it were a voyage of discovery. His account challenges the reader and yet offers hope that humanity will become the means by which the Earth's self-regulatory system can be harnessed for the survival of the planet, and of human civilisation.

#### **Gideon Haigh, *The Racket: how abortion became legal in Australia*, Melbourne University Press, an imprint of Melbourne University Publishing Ltd**

Early in his compelling account of the long struggle for abortion to become legal in Victoria and NSW Gideon Haigh says: 'For much of Australia's history it has been easier to obtain an abortion than to use the word in print'. Haigh's story looks back to the nineteenth century in the United Kingdom, Europe and Australia before concentrating mainly on Victoria and NSW in the 1940s to the 1960s. His detailed description of 'the abortion scene' in Victoria is supplemented by a briefer account of the situation in Sydney – 'far rougher and more corrupt than in Melbourne'. Haigh's

book moves deftly among various social milieux, including a range of medical professionals, police, journalists, magistrates, judges, prostitutes, and criminals as it lays out a tale of corruption at all levels. Haigh's social history shows the intersection of ordinary personal lives with other more powerful persons and institutions by turns intractable and beneficent. We hear many stories of personal and familial devastation in a tale that is also an inspiring story of the courage of feminists, social reformers and well-meaning people of all kinds.

**Chloe Hooper, *The Tall Man: death and life on Palm Island*, Penguin Group (Australia)**

Chloe Hooper's analysis of the events that led to and followed from the death of Cameron Doomadgee while in police custody on Palm Island does for her Australian context what some of the writing from Janet Malcolm and Joan Didion has done for American contexts. Hooper's elegant study of a terrible event aligns ancient Aboriginal cultural myths, magic, stories and explanations with the fateful logics of the contemporary white Australian police and judicial systems. The mixture of the personal and the aggregated, the individual and the institutional takes us from lazy evenings and beautiful sunsets in a tropical paradise that exhibits dispossession everywhere, to long, hot days in trial courts as the reader negotiates a story of policing, the justice system of trials and coroner's inquest, suicides and violence.

Hooper's tale shows how a specific, violent Aboriginal death brings with it traces of the earlier violent settlement of north Queensland, and her contrapuntal presentation of Aboriginal and white traditions (contained in the ambiguity of her book's title) allows each perspective to have its full cultural force. There is a fascinating mixture of 'the ancient and the modern' in her depiction of the everyday violence and dispossession of life on Palm Island which leaves the reader in a productive state of information, anger and sadness. Both writer and reader struggle to balance the choice between an explanation that says a specific set of actions caused the fatal injuries or an alternative explanation made in terms of an 'accident' or 'a complicated fall'. We come to see what Hooper means by mentioning 'a kind of war' and her story tells of many broken hearts as it works away with intelligence and empathy at its reader's emotions.

**David Love, *Unfinished Business: Paul Keating's interrupted revolution*, Scribe Publications Pty Ltd**

In *Unfinished Business*, veteran economic and financial observer David Love examines the significance of the major economic reforms undertaken by Paul Keating in his role as Treasurer and Prime Minister from 1983 to 1996, and their part in the revolutionary vision that transformed the economy, modernised the country's financial system and put in place measures designed to guarantee national prosperity through national savings and thereby improve the lives of all Australians.

Love argues that the failure to appreciate the importance of Keating's goal and to finish the job Keating started has left our new-found prosperity vulnerable, particularly in the current economic downturn.

The reach and depth of the current global financial crisis has driven home the need for us all to better understand how the economy works. This engaging, informative and accessible narrative is a book that needed to be written: it makes an important contribution to public debate about – and understanding of – economic policy.

**Jonathan Richards, *The Secret War: a true history of Queensland's Native Police*, University of Queensland Press**

This is a well researched account by historian Jonathan Richards of the role played by Queensland's Native Police in white settlement history and in the violent dispossession of Aboriginal people. Richards reminds us that Aboriginal resistance to European invasion was not considered a valid or appropriate action, but killing as part of an armed defence of settlers' assets was seen as lawful and justified homicide. The book makes reference to documents that reveal massacres of Aboriginal men, women and children by Native Police led by white officers charged with guaranteeing security for advancing white settlers.

Richards argues that the indigenous recruits were part of a divide and rule colonising tactic used successfully elsewhere in the British Empire – native recruits were better at tracking down persons of interest than were white police, were cheaper, were not prone to succumbing to the ravages of climate and environment, and were used in areas at some distance from their own people. Many Native Police in Queensland were forced into service.

The book is a comprehensive study of a little known aspect of our history and makes a valuable contribution to our understanding of the tools and scale of dispossession.

### **The 2009 New South Wales Premier's Translation Prize (\$30,000)**

#### **Harry Aveling**

Harry Aveling established an international reputation from the early 1970s for his pioneering translations of Indonesian- and Malay-language novels, poetry, short stories, plays and essays. His earliest works include the important co-translated volume *Rendra, Ballads and Blues: Poems Translated from the Indonesian* (1974), and Iwan Simatupang's *The Pilgrim* (1975), which won the first ASEAN Literary Prize in 1977 for both the novel and the translation. He went on to translate more of the internationally acclaimed W. S. Rendra's work: *State of Emergency* (poetry, 1980) and *Mastadon and the Condors* (drama, 1980).

Aveling is one of the world's most prolific and talented translators of Indonesian and Malay literature. From Malay he has translated seven novels, including Khadijah Hashim's *The White Dove Flies Again* (1987), as well as numerous short story and poetry collections. His 261-page anthology *Contemporary Indonesian Poetry* (1975; reprinted 1985) and his 375-page anthology *Secrets Need Words: Indonesian Poetry 1966–1998* (2001) are landmark works of singular importance. His most recent work is a 328-page anthology, Toeti Heraty (ed.), *Rainbow: 18 Indonesian Women Poets* (2008).

#### **David Colmer**

The Dutch are well known for their long history of publishing translations from many other languages, but the publication of large numbers of Dutch authors in English translation is a phenomenon of recent times. Amsterdam-based translator and writer David Colmer is amongst those bringing the best of contemporary Dutch writings to English-language readers. His early publications include Max Dendermonde's novel *228 Seconds of Silence* (1994) and Bart Moeyaert's poetry collection *Let's Stick Together* (2000). Colmer won the David Reid Poetry Translation Prize for the best English translation of a designated Dutch poem in 2007 and again in 2008.

Since 2001 major UK and US publishers have taken over Colmer's superb translations, publishing seven novels, including Dimitri Verhulst's *Problemski Hotel* (2005), Adriaan van Dis's *Repatriated* (2008) and Gerbrand Bakker's *The Twin* (2008 – also published in Australia by Scribe). His other works of this period include Anna Enquist's *The Fire Was Here* (poetry, 2003) and Koen Vergeer's *Formula 1 Fanatic* (literary non-fiction, 2003). Colmer has three more novels scheduled for publication in 2009: Dimitri Verhulst's *Madame Verona Comes Down from the Hill*, Willem Jan Otten's *Specht and Son* and Martinus Nijhoff's *Awater*.

#### **Alison Entrekin**

Alison Entrekin's translations play an important role in highlighting Portuguese writings from Brazil to the English-speaking world. Her work is predominantly in fiction, and she brilliantly succeeds in articulating the wide range of voices found in her authors. Notably, her translation of Chico Buarque's novel *Budapest* (2004) about a ghost writer and his fascination for the Hungarian language was voted one of the ten best books published in the UK by the *Independent*, and was a finalist for the 2004 *Independent* Foreign Fiction Award.

Entrekin also rose to the awesome challenge of translating the rough language of teenage gangsters who populate Paulo Lins's *City of God* (2006), a novel of poverty, drugs, violence, love,

friendship and death in a Rio de Janeiro housing estate. José Rodrigues dos Santos's intriguing novel *Codex 632: The Secret Identity of Christopher Columbus* (2007), crammed with discussions of ancient texts, political and religious conspiracies and philosophical debates dating back to Columbus's time, fully demonstrates the extent of Entekin's linguistic agility as a translator.

### **Simon Patton**

Simon Patton began to establish his international credentials as a meticulous and highly gifted translator of contemporary Chinese writings in the early 1990s. He has brought to the English-speaking world a large corpus of poetically sensitive renderings of the best of contemporary Chinese poetry and fiction. Among the widely acclaimed authors he has translated are Yi Sha, Yu Jian, Zhai Yongming, Bai Hua, Han Dong, Chi Zijian and Eileen Chang. It is worth noting that women figure prominently amongst the authors he has chosen, and that he eminently succeeds in capturing their voices in his beautiful translations.

Patton's elegant translation of Eileen Chang's short story 'Steamed Osmanthus Flower: Ah Xiao's Unhappy Autumn' (2000) was included in Julia Lovell (ed.), *Lust, Caution* (2007), a volume devoted to this celebrated writer. His major publications also include Chi Zijian's *Figments of the Supernatural* (short stories, 2004) and Patton and Tao Naikan, *Starve the Poets!: Selected Poems of Yi Sha* (2008). *Starve the Poets!* is the first volume in English of Yi Sha's writings, and contains 142 poems by this pre-eminent and controversial 'non-official poet' whose work has influenced a generation of younger poets.

### **Kevin Windle**

A linguist and translation theorist by training, Kevin Windle has a rare gift for meticulous and elegant translation from several European languages. He established an international reputation in the late 1970s with his translations of Polish and Russian authors, and the larger part of his literary translations is from these two languages. His Polish translations include A. Brycht's novel *Zoom* (1978), and the screenplay *The Jesus Trial* by A. Brycht and Tadeusz Jaworski that was screened on Canadian TV in late 1978. His co-translations with Wojciech Dabrowski of Ireneusz Iredynski's plays were broadcast on ABC Radio and BBC Radio Three during the mid-1980s, and the collection of ten plays was subsequently published as the author's *Selected One-Act Plays for Radio* (2002).

Windle's Russian translations include Sergey Zalygin's novel *The South American Variant* (1979), as well as short stories by Eugene Dubnov, Alexander Vampilov and Valentin Rasputin that were published throughout the 1980s. The Russian writings he has translated since the late 1990s shed valuable light on Australia's early social history, as in the case of Vladmir Kabo, *The Road to Australia: Memoirs* (co-translated with Rosh Ireland, 1998), 'Murder at Mount Cuthbert: A Russian Revolutionary Describes Queensland Life in 1915–1919' (2008) and 'Konstantin Paustovskii, the "Communard Captain", and William Morris Hughes: An Australian Motif in an Early Work of Soviet Literature' (2008).

The judges for the 2009 NSW Premier's Literary Awards were Gillian Appleton (chair), Kim Cheng Boey, Christopher Cheng, Kate Colley, Marele Day, Kate Gaul, Susanne Gervay, Richard Harland, Rosemary Huisman, Noel King, Mary Kostakidis, Jon-Claire Lee, Anthony Macris, Jane Mills, Wenche Ommundsen, Jenny Overton, Nicholas Pounder, Patricia Rutter, Michael Sexton, Meg Stewart and Geordie Williamson.

The judges for the 2009 NSW Premier's Translation Prize were Mabel Lee (chair), Barbara McGilvray and Jeanne Ryckmans.

The Literary Awards adviser was Mara Moustafine.