



Melbourne
Prize for
Literature
2006

Finalist Exhibition
13 – 27 November 2006
Federation Square
Melbourne

Melbourne Prize for
Literature 2006 finalists

Helen Garner
John Marsden
Alex Miller
Dorothy Porter
Hannie Rayson

Best Writing Award finalists

Azhar Abidi
Ben Chessell
Neil Grant
Sonya Hartnett
Mary Ellen Jordan
David McCooey
Ross Mueller
Carrie Tiffany
Christos Tsiolkas
Henry von Doussa

The Melbourne Prize for Literature 2006 catalogue provides a review of the finalists for the following awards:

- / Melbourne Prize for Literature 2006
- / Best Writing Award

The exhibition of finalists will be held in the Atrium at Federation Square between 13 – 27 November 2006.

Further information on the Melbourne Prize Trust and Melbourne Prize for Literature 2006 please visit www.melbourneprizetrust.org or call 03 9650 8800

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The Melbourne Prize Trust would like to thank all supporters for their generosity.

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The Melbourne Prize Trust is delighted with the strong response to the Melbourne Prize for Literature 2006. The prize, made possible by the generous support of our partners and patrons, recognises and rewards literary excellence and creativity.

Demonstrating the value we place on our creative resources, the prize assists in positioning Melbourne and Victoria as a centre of great writing and opportunity for writers and provides the public with access to the wealth and diversity of talent we have in this state.

Simon H Warrender
Executive Director & Founder
Melbourne Prize Trust

A cornerstone of a vibrant and healthy economy and community is creativity, in all its forms, across varied sectors. The Committee for Melbourne is proud to be a founding partner of the annual Melbourne Prize as it fosters the development of our creative resources and demonstrates the value we place on talent and creative excellence. This year the quantity and quality of the response to the Melbourne Prize for Literature 2006, which is the most valuable literary prize in Australia, is evidence of the abundant writing talent we have in Victoria and firmly reinforces our position as a major cultural capital.

Janine Kirk AM
Executive Director
Committee for Melbourne
Director
Melbourne Prize Trust

I found the experience of judging this rich and innovative prize challenging, interesting and rewarding. The imaginative and formal diversity of entries across the two divisions of the prize, the quality of much of the writing, the confidence and willingness to take risks among the Best Writing entrants and the sheer class and substance of the established writers were all cause for great satisfaction and excitement in these times when our literary culture so often has to struggle in a philistine social and political environment. All in all, a wonderful undertaking splendidly administered and conducted by the Melbourne Prize Trust.

Professor Brian Matthews
Awarding Committee member

The City of Melbourne is a proud supporter of the Melbourne Prize for Literature 2006. The response to this year's prize is evidence of the literary talent we have in our community. The calibre of the shortlist, in both prize categories, demonstrates the strength and diversity of our writers and reinforces Melbourne and Victoria's reputation as the cultural capital of Australia.

Lord Mayor John So
City of Melbourne

The Melbourne Prize for Literature 2006 and the Best Writing Award, unlike other Australian prizes, are across genres and media. This makes judging rather a challenge but our reading and discussions over the shortlists were hugely enjoyable. The established writers we had to choose between are all great talents whose work is essential reading. The shortlisted writers for the Best Writing Award ranged widely and reassured us that highly original and risk-taking work has not gone away.

The Melbourne Prize for Literature 2006 is one of those generous initiatives that doesn't happen often enough. This one, with the potential to grow into a major national and then international award, will make its mark for sure.

Hilary McPhee AO
Awarding Committee member

The Melbourne Prize is unique amongst Australian literary prizes, not only for its generosity but also for its acknowledgement of the careers and contributions of Victoria's writers and for its recognition of our younger writers. It has been a great pleasure and privilege to be part of the Melbourne Prize. I've reacquainted myself with the works of some of my favourite writers and discovered some wonderful new writers and their works. The only drawback about the prize is that there can only be two winners. All the writers we shortlisted have made such wonderful contributions and there were many writers and works that aren't in the shortlist that also demonstrate the richness of Victoria's literary culture. I would like to congratulate them all and of course the Melbourne Prize Trust and its sponsors for this wonderful initiative.

Mark Rubbo OAM
Awarding Committee member
Managing Director
Readings Books Music Film

The Best Writing Award finalists represent a lively cross-section of writing styles and genres, from works of non-fiction to plays, poetry to novels. Age notwithstanding, that shortlist includes some of Australia's most adept writers. The shortlist for the Melbourne Prize for Literature 2006 is also incredibly substantial, having been drawn from a complete list of some of Australia's Most Wanted Writers. It is a credit to our literary culture that the task of narrowing them down was so tricky, and it's an absolute delight to have such gratifyingly meaty lists the first year of the prize.

Louise Swinn
Advisory Group member
Editorial Director
Sleepers Publishing

By any estimation Victoria is bursting at the seams with writing talent. The quality of entrants for the Melbourne Prize for Literature 2006 in particular was outstanding - it was a challenge, albeit a wonderful one, to compare and rate writers of such experience and diversity. The entrants for the Best Writing Award represent the future of our literary culture and in this regard there is much cause for celebration. All ten shortlistees excel in their chosen media and are producing works that are by turns daring, original and accomplished. Congratulations should also go to the Melbourne Prize Trust for their commitment to fostering and promoting those individuals whose artistic endeavours enrich our lives.

Rod Morrison
Advisory Group member
Associate Publisher
Hardie Grant Books

Sure, I remember where I was when Harold Holt drowned, and watching Cathy Freeman's lap of honour (draped in red, black and gold), and marvelling at pictures of Rachel Griffiths protesting topless at Crown Casino's launch. But when I recall first reading Porter's *Akhenaten*, or Garner's *Monkey Grip*, and falling headlong into Rayson's world at Theatreworks, I not only remember where I was, but who I was. Just as these artists have continued to, now perhaps it's also Hartnett's *Surrender* or Tsiolkas' *Dead Europe* which will watermark the me of now. The joy of reading for the Melbourne Prize was being reminded just how indebted I am to these writers for my very self-possession, and to know the award gives thanks on behalf of us all.

Stephen Armstrong
Advisory Group member
Executive Producer
Malthouse Theatre

My thanks to the Melbourne Prize for boosting the recognition paid to our homegrown (and world class) literary talent. These two prizes have given us an opportunity to celebrate and investigate a wide variety of literary creation sometimes divided by form, age, experience, content and style. Despite the difficulties in judging across (sometimes) arbitrary divides, the shortlists (and those left off them) well reflect the talent that originates in Victoria. We are lucky to have fostered such a range of writers in the past, and with the Best Writing Award I hope that we can continue to support and promote those who represent the future. Indeed, it's been a pleasure to be part of a prize that recognises, celebrates and promotes writers who are at both stages of their career, and these prizes have made me hopeful that we've writers from all generations who are willing to challenge the way we view ourselves.

Steve Grimwade
Advisory Group member
Director
Emerging Writers Festival
Program Manager
Victorian Writers Centre

Prize criteria: an outstanding contribution, by a Victorian writer, to Australian literature and to cultural and intellectual life.



Helen Garner, who was born in Geelong in 1942, is one of Australia's finest writers. She has been publishing novels, short stories, non-fiction and journalism since 1977 when her first novel, **Monkey Grip**, became an instant bestseller. Then came **Honour & Other People's Children**, which established Helen Garner as a realist with remarkable powers of observation. Subsequent works include the stories **Postcards from Surfers** and the collected stories **My Hard Heart**, and the novels **The Children's Bach** and **Cosmo Cosmolino**, as well as the screenplays for the feature film **The Last Days of Chez Nous** and Jane Campion's TV drama **Two Friends**.

Helen Garner's non-fiction works include the widely-debated and controversial **The First Stone**, published in 1995; **True Stories**; **The Feel of Steel**, a collection of her journalism and essays; and more recently **Joe Cinque's Consolation** - about the killing of Joe Cinque, and the trials of the two young women who were charged with his murder.

Published Works

- Monkey Grip
- Honour & Other People's Children
- The Children's Bach
- Postcards from Surfers
- Cosmo Cosmolino
- The Last Days of Chez Nous (screenplay)
- Two Friends (screenplay)
- The First Stone
- True Stories
- My Hard Heart
- The Feel of Steel
- Joe Cinque's Consolation

**Finalist – Melbourne
Prize for Literature 2006**

Prize criteria: an outstanding contribution, by a Victorian writer, to Australian literature and to cultural and intellectual life.



John Marsden's life recently took a new turn when he established a small alternative school just outside of Melbourne.

Candelbark School, with 75 students, embodies John's commitment to education that is imaginative, lively, spirited and invigorating. He has applied the same principles to his writing, which is now read avidly around the world, but never more eagerly than in Australia, where his sales have passed two million.

Recently John became only the fifth author to receive the prestigious Lloyd O'Neil Award. He joins Ruth Park, Tom Keneally, Morris West and Peter Carey.

Published Works

So Much to Tell You

The Journey

The Great Gatenby

Staying Alive in Year 5

Out of Time

Letters from the Inside

Take My Word for It

Looking for Trouble

Cool School

Creep Street

Checkers

**For Weddings
and a Funeral (ed.)**

Dear Miffy

**Prayer for the
21st Century**

**Everything I Know
About Writing**

Secret Men's Business

**So Much to
Tell You: the Play**

The Magic Rainforest

A Day in the Life of Me

The Rabbits

Norton's Hut

Marsden on Marsden

Winter

The Head Book

**The Boy You
Brought Home**

Millie

A Roomful of Magic

This I Believe (ed.)

I Believe This (ed.)

The Tomorrow Series

**Tomorrow, When
the War Began**

The Dead of the Night

The Third Day, the Frost

Darkness, By My Friend

Burning for Revenge

The Night is for Hunting

The Other Side of Dawn

The Ellie Chronicles

While I Live

Incurable

Circle of Flight

Finalist – Melbourne
Prize for Literature 2006

Prize criteria: an outstanding contribution, by a Victorian writer, to Australian literature and to cultural and intellectual life.



Alex Miller is one of Australia's best loved novelists. He has twice won the Miles Franklin Award and is an overall winner of the Commonwealth Writers Prize. He is the author of seven major literary works, a number of which have been published in the UK and the USA, and all of which are currently in print in Australia. His most recent novel is the critically acclaimed ***Prochownik's Dream*** (Allen & Unwin 2005)

Photo courtesy of Theodore Halacas

Published Works

Novels

Prochownik's Dream
Journey to the Stone Country
Conditions of Faith
The Sitters
The Ancestor Game
The Tivington Nott
Watching the Climbers on the Mountain

Essays and Short Stories

Prophets of the Imagination
Sweet Water
From the Other Side – A Patient's Perspective
The Wine Merchant of Aarhus
Why I'm Falling in Love with Madame du Terre
Impressions of China
My First Love
Rollover
The Limits of Democracy
Chinese Connections and Disconnections
Modern, European and Novel
This is How 'it's' Going to Be Then
How to Kill Wild Horses
Comrade Pawel

Plays

Getting Back to What Armageddon is Next Wednesday
Exiles
Kitty Howard

Prize criteria: an outstanding contribution, by a Victorian writer, to Australian literature and to cultural and intellectual life.



Dorothy Porter has published twelve books, including six collections of poetry, two novels for young adults and four verse novels.

Her verse novels, *What a Piece of Work* and *Wild Surmise*, were shortlisted for Australia's premier award for fiction, the Miles Franklin Award, in 2000 and 2003 respectively. *Wild Surmise* was awarded the Adelaide Festival 2004 John Bray Award for Poetry as well as the overall Premier's Award – the first time this award has been given to a book of poetry.

Her bestselling crime thriller in verse, *The Monkey's Mask*, has been adapted for the stage and radio, and was released internationally as a film in 2001 starring Kelly McGillis and Susie Porter.

Dorothy Porter has also written two opera libretti with composer Jonathan Mills. Their most recent chamber opera, *The Eternity Man*, was a joint winner of the inaugural Genesis Foundation opera award in London 2004, and had its international premiere at the Almeida Theatre. Its Australian premiere was at the Sydney Opera House for the 2005 Sydney Festival.

In July 2005 a double CD, *Before Time Could Change Us*, a collection of love songs written by Dorothy Porter for composer Paul Grabowsky and sung by celebrated singer Katie Noonan, was released by Warner Records. It won the Aria (Australia's major music awards) for Best Jazz Album of 2005.

Dorothy Porter's new verse novel, *El Dorado*, will be published by Picador in 2007.

Published Works

Verse Novels

Akhenaten

The Monkey's Mask

What a Piece of Work

Wild Surmise

Poetry

Little Hoodlum

Bison

The Night Parrot

Driving Too Fast

Crete

Other Worlds

Young Adult Fiction

Rookwood

The Witch Number

Prize criteria: an outstanding contribution, by a Victorian writer, to Australian literature and to cultural and intellectual life.



Hannie Rayson is a major Australian writer with a strong international profile. Her work has been performed in every capital city of Australia by major theatre companies. Her plays have been produced at The National Theatre of Tokyo, The Duchess in London's West End, The National Theatre of Slovenia, The Centaur in Montreal, The Orange Tree in London, The English Speaking Theatres of Vienna and Frankfurt and The Helsinki City Theatre, Finland. She was one of six Australian playwrights to have works given a performed reading by the Comedie-Francaise in Paris.

Hannie Rayson is the recipient of many prestigious awards including The Premier's Literary Award for Drama in Victoria and New South Wales, The Helpmann Awards, the AWGIES (Australian Writer's Guild Award), The Age Performing Arts Award, The Sidney Myer Performing Arts Award, and Melbourne Green Room Awards. She was also nominated for The Miles Franklin and awarded The Magazine Publisher's Award for columnist of the year.

Hannie Rayson is a regular contributor to various magazines and publications.

Published Works

- Mary
- Room to Move
- Hotel Sorrento
- Falling from Grace
- Scenes from a Separation
- Competitive Tenderness
- Life after George
- Inheritance
- Two Brothers

D.H. Lawrence once remarked that if you tried to nail the novel down it would get up and run away with the nail. Despite the murmurings of some critics, he was right, because we continue to tell our stories. Some we make up, some we've remembered, some we research, others we've heard about. 'Story' – whether 'true' or imagined – won't lie down, and it resists all attempts to silence it, because it is in crafted narratives that the imagination works on real life and the human heart in ways that reveal truths, possibilities, joys and evils not otherwise available. And so, honouring, rewarding and valuing our writers of fiction and non-fiction, our dramatists and poets – as the Melbourne Prize for Literature 2006 does so generously and so stylishly – is vital for our cultural health, for the continuing nourishment of our spirit and our inner selves.

Professor Brian Matthews
Member of the Awarding Committee
Melbourne Prize for Literature 2006

Azhar Abidi
***Passarola Rising* (Fiction)**
Penguin Books/Viking

Finalist
Best Writing Award
Melbourne Prize
for Literature 2006

Prize criteria: a single work, in any genre, of outstanding clarity, originality and creativity by a Victorian writer 40 years or under.



Profile

Azhar Abidi was born in Pakistan. His essays and travelogues have been published in *Meanjin* and *Southwest Review*. His translations from Urdu have appeared in the Annual of Urdu Studies. His *Secret History of the Flying Carpet* appeared in ***Best Australian Essays 2004***. Azhar is an electrical engineer by training and works as a funds manager. He is married, with children, and lives in Melbourne. ***Passarola Rising*** is his first novel.

Summary of work

On the twenty-seventh day of the month of June, in the year of grace 1731, my brother, Bartolomeu Lourenço, rose on his airship from the ancient ramparts of St. Jorge Castle. I remember the day as clearly as if it were yesterday. . .

Thus begins ***Passarola Rising***, a fabulous historical tale of two brothers and their love of flight. Bartolomeu Lourenço builds the airship *Passarola* to escape the intellectually stultifying climate of eighteenth-century Portugal. He and his brother Alexandre journey from the salons of Ancien Regime Paris to the far reaches of the North Pole on their quest for scientific truth. They encounter many colourful characters, from the loquacious Voltaire to the irascible King Stanislaus of Poland.

Filled with evocative period detail, adventure and suspense, ***Passarola Rising*** is a picaresque tale about truth and the meaning of fraternal companionship.

Extract of work

It is too late now. I am an old man. Old age is not unhappy but it brings with it its own loneliness. I am tormented by my memories and sometimes, I am assuaged by them. The careless sleep of youth eludes me. I suffer from a recurring dream that I have become a shadow. People I know pass me by. I walk on a boulevard but I cannot enter any buildings. Doors that were open to me are now shut. I wake up gasping for air. I twist and turn in bed. I whisper the names of my childhood friends. When it rains, the moist soil brings to me fragrances long forgotten.

There are nights when I hear the clatter of a carriage downstairs. I hear the sound of glasses tinkling and laughter spilling out into the dark. I fling open my window to see who is out there. But the night is black. There is only the silent rustle of the forest. I fall back into my fitful sleep. But close to the summer solstice, when the sky is clear and a deep hush falls over the forest, I lie awake in my bed and wait for another sound – a solitary wail that comes from deep within the sky. It is this cry that reminds me of my brother.

Ben Chessel
The Heartbreak Tour
(Screenplay)
The Australian
Film Commission
& SBS Independent

Finalist
Best Writing Award
Melbourne Prize
for Literature 2006

Prize criteria: a single work, in any genre, of outstanding clarity, originality and creativity by a Victorian writer 40 years or under.



Profile

Ben Chessell studied filmmaking at the Victorian College of the Arts in 2001. Since then he has made short films in both Melbourne and Germany and continues to develop feature films as a writer and a director. *The Heartbreak Tour* is his first long-form work to be produced.

Summary of work

The Heartbreak Tour is about being twenty something and living in urban Melbourne. The stories come from my experience as a university student; becoming an adult in the terraces of Carlton and lanes of Fitzroy. It's a about the way a place can hold a memory, releasing it when you return. Memory is not history, and different people never recall exactly the same event. The film is bittersweet melancholy, neither comedy nor tragedy, both funny and sad. This is how I remember my own twenties and I guess that's the seed from which the script grew.

Extract of work

JACK'S BEDROOM.
NIGHT Flashback

Abandoned vodka bottle.
NICK and *JACK* on the floor,
arms around each other,
staring at the ceiling.

JACK (VO)
I used to have stars on
the roof of my bedroom,
you know: stickers, glow
in the dark.

NICK
Can I have a star?

JACK
Sure.

They look into each others'
eyes, and kiss, slowly.

INT. RYAN'S CAR – NIGHT
The Present

JACK looks at *NICK*, with
nostalgia, *RYAN* looks at
JACK with intensity.

JACK
An entire universe of
imaginary constellations
orbiting a sixty watt
supernova. I stared at
them when I fell asleep;
imagined galaxies, planets,
people on those planets
falling asleep looking down
at me. You know if you lived
on Halley's comet the earth
would come around every
seventy six years?

TIM
And it would be really
f-----g cold and incredibly
boring.

Neil Grant
***Indo Dreaming* (Fiction)**
Allen & Unwin

Finalist
Best Writing Award
Melbourne Prize
for Literature 2006

Prize criteria: a single work, in any genre, of outstanding clarity, originality and creativity by a Victorian writer 40 years or under.



Profile

Neil Grant was born in Scotland and has spent a large part of his adult life travelling and working in a variety of jobs, including instrument steriliser, forklift driver, banana picker, dishwasher and brickie's labourer. At heart, however, he is and forever will be a knee-boarder.

Grant's love of the ocean and wild places, combined with his own passage from boyhood to manhood, inspired him to write *Rhino Chasers* (Allen & Unwin, 2002) and *Indo Dreaming* (Allen & Unwin, 2005).

Photo courtesy of Ingrid Lehman

Summary of work

Indo Dreaming is a surf odyssey that reveals a rarely seen glimpse of Indonesia and its people. It is the story of Goog, who becomes compelled to follow the mysterious trail of a missing friend to the shadow-lands of Indonesia. What begins as a straightforward plan quickly disintegrates, as Goog's journey becomes intertwined with those he meets along the way.

Simultaneously funny, compassionate, angry, heart-pounding and clever, this gritty surf-odyssey will speak to anyone who has the spirit of travel wedged in their soul.

Extract of work

Dreaming of warm water isn't enough; you have to live it. Tucked in the nose of my boardbag is my ticket to paradise. But there is time for one last cold-water surf before I fly out tonight. I have been here just long enough to know this secret spot. This left-hander that burls over sand-covered reef. Winter-stripped grapevines crossing the hills like corduroy. Seals that twist under my board and come up, soft-eyed, to check me out.

The currents around here swirl down from below Indonesia but there is a touch of Antarctic ice in them.

A splash of Southern Ocean that makes a steamer a good idea at this time of year. I am out the back with one other guy, watching the grey bar where the ocean meets the sky. Waiting.

Sonya Hartnett
***Surrender* (Fiction)**
Penguin Books/Viking

Finalist
Best Writing Award
Melbourne Prize
for Literature 2006

Prize criteria: a single work, in any genre, of outstanding clarity, originality and creativity by a Victorian writer 40 years or under.



Profile

Sonya Hartnett is the internationally acclaimed author of several novels including *Sleeping Dogs*, *Thursday's Child*, *Forest*, *The Silver Donkey*, *Of a Boy* and *Surrender*. She has received a glittering array of awards and commendations including the Victorian Premier's Literary Award (Fiction), *Guardian* Children's Fiction Prize, Children's Book Council of Australia Book of the Year Award (Older and Younger readers), *Courier Mail* Book of the Year Award, *Age* Book of the Year Award and Commonwealth Writer's Prize, SE Asia and Pacific Region: Best Book. Her work has been published in the UK, US, Canada, Germany, Italy, Norway and Denmark. Sonya lives in Melbourne with her dog, Shilo and her cat, Idaho.

Summary of work

As life slips away, Gabriel looks back over his brief twenty years that have been clouded by frustration and humiliation. A small town and distant parents ensure that he is never allowed to forget the horrific mistake he made as a child. He has only two friends – his dog *Surrender*, and the unruly wild boy Finnigan, with whom he made a boyhood pact.

When a series of arson attacks grips the town, Gabriel realises how unpredictable and dangerous Finnigan is. Events begin to spiral out of control, and it becomes clear that only the most extreme of measures will rid Gabriel of Finnigan for good.

Dark and delicate, *Surrender* is a brilliantly told psychological thriller.

Extract of work

I remember my first sight of him – the sound and scavenger look of him – surrounded by summer; I remember the stillness of the day and the density of the air. Neither of us was older than nine or ten. I was skimming a car along the garden fence when Finnigan crossed the brink of my vision. At first I feigned ignorance or disdain of his presence, but the car beneath my fingertips bunnyhopped and soon stalled. I slid a glance at him. At school we had seen a wildlife film projected onto a wall, and the boy who was watching me was a hyena. His dark eyes were set apart and seemed to have no arena of white.

He didn't move or say a thing but I knew, just from his watching, that he could sever my arm. We were the same height and the same age and built along similar leggy lines, but he was a hyena while I was a small, ashy, alpine moth. From the footpath side of the fence he stared at me, and my gaze floated grudgingly from the toy. He swiped a fly from his face. 'You're that boy,' he said.

Mary Ellen Jordan
Balanda: My Year in
Arnhem Land (Non-fiction)
Allen & Unwin

Finalist
Best Writing Award
Melbourne Prize
for Literature 2006

Prize criteria: a single work, in any genre, of outstanding clarity, originality and creativity by a Victorian writer 40 years or under.



Profile

Mary Ellen Jordan's writing has been published widely in Australia, including in *The Age*, *Australian Book Review* and *Best Australian Essays 2001*. *Balanda* is her first book.

Summary of work

Mary Ellen Jordan left her Melbourne life to work in Maningrida, an Aboriginal community in Arnhem Land. She made the journey with good intentions, expecting to work alongside local Aboriginal people. Once there, however, she was confronted by the sharp cultural divide between the two races, and would struggle to learn what it was to be a balanda ('white person') in Maningrida; a place that would challenge her perceptions of race, culture, art, language and whiteness.

This personal, moving and evocative story offers a unique insight into daily life in an Aboriginal community, and raises uncomfortable questions that go to the heart of black-white relations in Australia.

Extract of work

Just beyond the town, past the fire tower on the wide dirt road we call the highway, the Aboriginal world begins. Here in the town there are tame streets recently asphalted into permanence – the roadworkers left last week. Here in the town the grids laid out for houses force people to walk in straight lines, the same straight lines over and over again.

Town has its distinct pockets and we move between them regulated by the geometry of Balanda planning... This place used to be called *Mang djang karirra*: the place where the Dreaming changed shape.

Said fast, with the cling of familiarity running its syllables together, it turned into *Manayingkarirra*. And when the Balandas arrived, pale people from different places with tongues that couldn't make the right sounds, this word became *Maningrida*. It changes again when I say it to people in Melbourne: 'Maningrida', I say, and 'Maningrita', they reply.

David McCooley
Blister Pack (Poetry)
Salt Publishing

Finalist
Best Writing Award
Melbourne Prize
for Literature 2006

Prize criteria: a single work, in any genre, of outstanding clarity, originality and creativity by a Victorian writer 40 years or under.



Profile

David McCooley is a poet, critic and academic. *Blister Pack* is his first collection of poems. His poems, essays and reviews have been published in numerous national and international publications, including *The Age*, the *Sydney Morning Herald*, *Heat*, *Agenda* and *Australian Book Review*. He is the author of a prize-winning critical work, *Artful Histories: Modern Australian Autobiography*, and the 'Contemporary Poetry' chapter in *The Cambridge Companion to Australian Literature*. He is a senior lecturer in literary studies at Deakin University in Geelong, where he lives.

Summary of work

The poetry in *Blister Pack* is both lucid and open to the mysterious. It hopes to have something of the haunting resonance of music. While the work does not have a narrative, it does have an arc and a number of abiding concerns. Many poems in the book are 'elegies of the everyday'. The poems try to combine minimalism and intensity, elegance and emotion. As Jennifer Strauss noted in her review of the book in *Australian Book Review*, 'the pleasures of McCooley's poetry are both simple and complex'. The collection values wit, humour, and the surprise of original metaphors.

Extract of work

Days

The calendar discreetly
points out that our
days are numbered.

The mountain in the distance
writes its brutal
contract in stone.

All the nation's hospitals
are filled with
ancient pictographs.

The significance of
even these simplest of things
still keeps evading us,

The daylight that shines through
our house, the creatures
that bathe in the light.

Ross Mueller
Construction of the
Human Heart (Play)

Finalist
Best Writing Award
Melbourne Prize
for Literature 2006

Prize criteria: a single work, in any genre, of outstanding clarity, originality and creativity by a Victorian writer 40 years or under.



Profile

In 2002 Ross Mueller was the Australian representative at the International Residency of the Royal Court Theatre in London. In February 2006 he was short-listed for the New York New Dramatists Award. He has been commissioned by Melbourne Theatre Company, Playbox, Hothouse and ABC Radio National. His most recent play – ***The Ghost Writer*** – will be produced by the Melbourne Theatre Company next year in March / April 2007

Photo courtesy of Deryk McAlpine - Proof

Summary of work

Construction is a play for two actors and a voice over. The play is personal, political, public and private.

It engages with grief, loss and the conventions of storytelling in theatre. When I was working on this play – the experience for the audience was always central to the motivation of form.

Construction premiered at The Store Room in 2005 and was picked up by The Malthouse and the Melbourne Writers Festival for a remount season in 2006. It was directed by Brett Adam – my long time friend and collaborator. Without him ***Construction*** would not have had the breath to begin its life.

Extract of work

FOUR (Both off script – as an idea for a scene)

HER Okay – you go to Horacio's and drink Guinness in the middle of the morning - suddenly – I dunno – maybe you believe you're a passionate Hispanic playwright. The first email arrives at eleven am.

HIM If Tracey Emin and Sarah Kane had sex and had a baby it would be you!

HER Quite flattering actually.

HIM You're bewdyful. I know what you're thinking.

HER – You're pissed already.

HIM You're wrong.

HER What?

HIM I'm sober.

HER No.

HIM Listen –

HER What?

HIM She would look like you and act like you and sound like you and do what you do.

She would lie –
like you.

You would be at home in their house.

Because for you and Tracey and Sarah

– it's all about getting lost inside your work.

And the work

is all about love,

lust,

anger and nightmares. Children and stories and

dedication pages. Words spew from the mouth

of your stolen characters – these people on your

pages are real people abducted from buses,

old boyfriends and one night stands isolated

voices – seriously represented

in a silent velvet blackness. Insight drips from your

laser printer – water drips inside me.

And you know what?

You're right...

I miss him like sunlight.

HER Love.

HIM Send.

Carrie Tiffany
***Everyman's Rules for Scientific Living* (Fiction)**
Picador Australia

Finalist
Best Writing Award
Melbourne Prize
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Prize criteria: a single work, in any genre, of outstanding clarity, originality and creativity by a Victorian writer 40 years or under.



Profile

Carrie Tiffany was born in West Yorkshire and grew up in Western Australia. She spent her early twenties working as a park ranger in the red centre and now lives in Melbourne where she works as a farm journalist. Her first novel, ***Everyman's Rules for Scientific Living***, won the WA Premier's Prize for fiction and was shortlisted for the Commonwealth Writers' Prize, the Miles Franklin Award, the Orange Prize for Fiction (UK) and the Victorian Premier's Literary Award.

Summary of work

It is 1934. Billowing dust and information, the government 'Better Farming Train' slides through the wheat fields and small towns of Victoria, bringing advice to people living on the land.

Amongst the swaying cars full of cows, pigs and wheat, an unlikely seduction occurs between Robert Pettergree, a man with an unusual taste for soil, and Jean Finnegan, a talented young seamstress with a hunger for knowledge. In an atmosphere of heady scientific idealism they settle in the impoverished Mallee with the ambition of transforming the land through science.

With failing crops and the threat of a new World War looming, Robert and Jean are forced to confront each other, the community they have destroyed, and the impact of progress on an ancient and fragile landscape.

Extract of work

We wake in the noisy half-light to the pernicky tread of ants and the tearing jaws of leafhoppers. And something else. The sound of movement beneath the earth. The roots of the wheat pushing through the soil?

Robert reaches his hand over my head into the stems and snaps one clean. A tiny brush drags at the back of my calf. A pause. The stem bends under folds of cotton and finds its path again; circling my thigh. Further rucking up of my nightdress, the muffled feel of it through cotton on my buttocks then skin again – the small of my back.

Upwards, slowly, tracing the triangles of my shoulder blades. Then the sound of him moving behind me and his sharp inhalation as he pushes the nightdress over my head. Turning me over – a hand on either side of my belly, my hair twisting and spraying a mist of dirt and wheat stubble across my face and breasts. Somewhere in the distance a magpie warbles.

Christos Tsiolkas
***Dead Europe* (Fiction)**
Random House

Finalist
Best Writing Award
Melbourne Prize
for Literature 2006

Prize criteria: a single work, in any genre, of outstanding clarity, originality and creativity by a Victorian writer 40 years or under.



Profile

Christos Tsiolkas's first novel *Loaded* was filmed as *Head On* by Ana Kokkinos. His other writing includes the novel *The Jesus Man*, the collaborative dialogue *Jump Cuts: An Autobiography* with Sasha Soldatow and a monograph on the Australian film *The Devil's Playground*. Tsiolkas' latest novel, *Dead Europe*, won the Fiction Prize in the 2006 Age Book of the Year Awards and was shortlisted for the 2006 NSW Premier's Literary Awards. His plays include the collaborations *Who's Afraid of the Working Class?* and *Fever* (with Andrew Bovell, Patricia Cornelius, Melissa Reeves and Irimi Vela), and also *Non Parlo di Salo* co-written with Spiro Economopoulos.

Summary of work

Isaac, an Australian photographer, is in Athens for an exhibition of his work. Disappointed by the reaction to his show, he commences a journey through the heart of Europe. The photographs he takes, however, begin to reveal a nightmarish world barely concealed underneath New Europe's common-market veneer. The further Isaac travels, the further he discovers his family's complicity in a curse that has its origins in the Old World's racial, political and religious hatreds. But as Isaac discovers, the ghosts that haunt our contemporary imaginations do not only belong to the past. They also belong to the present and also to the future.

Extract of work

High in the mountains, where the wind goes home to rest, lived Lucia, the most beautiful woman in all of Europe. Now one must not simply dismiss this claim as an exaggeration, a parochial and ignorant testament from the villagers and Lucia's kin. It is true that most of the village had not travelled far beyond the mountain ridges which formed their world. But the fame of her beauty had spread wide, from village to village, from village to town, from town to city, until carried in whispers through the roaming of commerce and war, it became a legend that began to cross even borders.

Word of Lucia's beauty circulated slowly, but it did circulate, and men and women began to swear by the moon-milk complexion of her fair skin, her slender long hands, the coal-black hair that swam down to her waist. By the time of her thirteenth birthday Lucia's myth had spread so wide that travellers would go miles out of their way, circumnavigate the precarious mountain ridge, to stop at Old Nick's café, order their coffee and chai, and sit in hope of glimpsing the radiant girl.

Henry von Doussa
***The Park Bench* (Novella)**
Thompson Walker

Finalist
Best Writing Award
Melbourne Prize
for Literature 2006

Prize criteria: a single work, in any genre, of outstanding clarity, originality and creativity by a Victorian writer 40 years or under.



Profile

Henry von Doussa was born in 1969 and brought up in the Adelaide Hills. In 2004 he completed a Masters of Arts in Creative Writing at the University of Melbourne. His fiction has appeared in *Traffic*, *Strange Shapes* and *antiThesis*.

Summary of work

For Lennie the grief and anguish of being abandoned hit hard. ***The Park Bench*** opens as he breaks up with Daniel and from the fallout emerges a mosaic of short fictions as Lennie loiters among the men he uses to loosen the grip of despair and desire. Ezy-Neil, The Tradie, Joe and the council gardener tending the hedges are precious diversions when an empty flat looms. The policing and surveillance of the body in public, the social and moral regulation of desire, the uneasy fit between public personas and private passions, as well as family, friendship and disappointing hair-do's are all confronted in the chance encounters and stranger-intimacies elicited from the park bench.

Extract of work

Usually just sex.
Perfunctory. A distraction.
Which is always so much more. A moment which rubs against loneliness and betrayal, smoothing out its edges that you catch yourself on throughout the day. Sometimes more than you expect: calling out and finding an answer where only silence and agitation had been minutes before. Usually just sex, I tell myself. A release. Other times a bit of a talk after.

Maybe a made up name, one time Andrew, another time Nigel. Sometimes 'By the way, my name is Lennie' and out with the truth, about all sorts. Sometimes a real warm feeling and a laugh.

Judging and Key Dates

The Melbourne Prize for Literature 2006 is coordinated by the Melbourne Prize Trust, in conjunction with the Committee for Melbourne. The prize recognises all literary genres, provides opportunity for writers and seeks to promote the diversity and calibre of Victoria's literary talent.

The Melbourne Prize Trust aims to increase public exposure of and access to the literary talent of our community. The following information provides an overview of the this year's prize, the criteria within each prize category and the judges.

Judging

Awarding Committee

Hilary McPhee AO
Professor Brian Matthews
Mark Rubbo OAM

Advisory Group

Stephen Armstrong
Rod Morrison
Louise Swinn
Steve Grimwade

Key dates

Entries open

15 May 2006

Entries close

14 July 2006

Finalists announced for Best Writing Award

13 September 2006

Public display at Federation Square

13 to 27 November 2006

Winners announced at BMW Edge

at Federation Square

15 November 2006

Selected titles are available from Readings – Carlton, Hawthorn, Malvern, Port Melbourne and St Kilda.

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Melbourne Prize for Literature 2006

\$60,000 (\$30,000 cash + \$30,000 cash for international travel scholarship)

Criteria – the Melbourne Prize for Literature 2006 is for a Victorian resident writer whose body of published/produced work has made an outstanding contribution to Australian literature and to cultural and intellectual life. The submitted work can include, for example, poetry, plays, screenplays, fiction, non-fiction and essays.

Melbourne Sister City International Travel Scholarship

The Melbourne Sister City International Travel Scholarship, offered as part of this prize category, will provide the winner with cash to choose his or her own itinerary and undertake international travel to benefit his or her creative work. As part of the itinerary, provision should be made for a stay in Milan, Italy.

An outline of the travel program will be required to be submitted to the City of Melbourne and Melbourne Prize Trust.

Supported by the City of Melbourne (\$30,000 Melbourne Sister City International Travel Scholarship), Tattersall's (\$20,000), the Melbourne Prize Fund (\$10,000), the Italian Institute of Culture (Italian language and culture course) and the City of Milan.

Best Writing Award

\$30,000 cash

Criteria – the Best Writing Award is for a piece of published or produced work in any genre by a Victorian writer, 40 years or under, which is an outstanding example of clarity, originality and creativity.

Supported by the Sidney Myer Fund, Hardie Grant Books and Readings.

Civic Choice Award

\$3,000 cash

A public display of the judges' selections, including the finalists in the Melbourne Prize for Literature 2006 and the Best Writing Award will be displayed at Federation Square between 13 and 27 November 2006.

The public will have the opportunity to vote for their favourite work during this event.

Supported by the Melbourne Prize Fund.

The public exhibition of finalists in the Melbourne Prize for Literature 2006, exhibited at Federation Square between November 13 and 27, is also available online at www.melbourneprizetrust.org

The Melbourne Prize Trust and annual Melbourne Prize

The annual Melbourne Prize was developed to meet the objectives of the Melbourne Prize Trust. These are to recognise and reward excellence and talent, to inspire creative development and enrich public life. The aim of the prize is to provide professional development, enable overseas travel, international cultural exchange and financial reward and to allow the winner to develop his or her creative work.

The annual Melbourne Prize aims to engage with the public through a display of the work of finalists. An exhibition will be held annually each November at Federation Square, Melbourne. Federation Square is the 'home' of the annual Melbourne Prize.

The prize is funded by a collaboration of public, corporate and private individual support, via the Melbourne Prize Trust and tax-deductible Melbourne Prize Fund. Please contact the Melbourne Prize Trust on (03) 9650 8800 for information on how to become a patron.

The annual Melbourne Prize is 'the prize of the city for the city' and is positioned, in most of the sectors of focus, as the most valuable prize of its kind in Australia. The prize runs in a three-year cycle, as follows:

- / Melbourne Prize for Urban Sculpture 2005
- / Melbourne Prize for Literature 2006
- / Melbourne Prize for Music 2007

The cycle commences again with the Melbourne Prize for Urban Sculpture 2008.

The Committee for Melbourne is a founding partner of the Trust and with its member organisations, has played a central role in the Trust's establishment. The Committee was founded in 1985 and is a private organisation interested in Melbourne's future. In supporting the Trust, the Committee's goal is to enhance Melbourne as a business and cultural capital and in doing so, secure its future as a city of world standing. The Committee's membership is drawn from senior executives across Melbourne's major corporations, institutions and organisations – business, scientific, academic, community and government.

The Melbourne Prize Trust is an Income Tax Exempt Charity listed on the Federal Government's Register of Cultural Organisations with Deductible Gift Recipient status.

For further information on the Melbourne Prize for Literature 2006, the Melbourne Prize Trust or annual Melbourne Prize program, please visit our website at www.melbourneprizetrust.org, call 03 9650 8800 or email enquire@melbourneprizetrust.org

Acknowledgments

The support of the Founding Partners of the Melbourne Prize Trust, including the Committee for Melbourne and its member companies, Minter Ellison, Ernst & Young and Cornwell, have been central in establishing the initiative. Janine Kirk AM, Executive Director, Committee for Melbourne has been a champion of the project from inception.

Minter Ellison and Ernst & Young were responsible for the successful application by the Melbourne Prize Trust to DCITA, to be listed on the Australian Government's Register of Cultural Organisations and registration as an Income Tax Exempt Charity from 2004.

The Committee for Melbourne has generously supported the human resource, office and administration costs of the Melbourne Prize Trust. Thanks to the secretariat.

The Melbourne Prize Trust would like to thank Lady Southey AC, Diana Gibson AO, Janet Calvert-Jones AO and The Scanlon Foundation for their generous donations to the Melbourne Prize Fund.

The commitment of the five finalists in the Melbourne Prize for Literature 2006 and the 10 finalists in the Best Writing Award and their publishers, in preparing for the public exhibition at Federation Square, is gratefully appreciated.

Steven Cornwell, CEO and Mark Patterson, Managing Director, Cornwell and their team including, Quentin Brown, Paul Monkivitch, Anna Johnston and Daniel Peterson are gratefully acknowledged for their creative excellence in developing the Melbourne Prize Trust's visual identity including, the exhibition at Federation Square including the letter forms and catalogue design, printed entry material, banners, advertising and website for the Melbourne Prize for Literature 2006. The 2006 prize winner's trophies were designed by Cornwell and cast by Fundere Fine Art Foundry, Melbourne, who also make the limited edition bronze miniatures of *The Magic Pudding* sculpture, located in the Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne.

The Melbourne Prize Trust would like to acknowledge and thank the key partner organisations, whose generous financial support has allowed the prize categories in the Melbourne Prize for Literature 2006 to be offered. These include the City of Melbourne, Tattersall's, the Sidney Myer Fund, Hardie Grant Books, Readings Books Music Film and the Italian Institute of Culture.

The dedication of the Awarding Committee for the Melbourne Prize for Literature 2006, including Hilary McPhee AO, Mark Rubbo OAM and Professor Brian Matthews, is greatly appreciated.

The Advisory Group, which supported the Awarding Committee, included Stephen Armstrong, Louise Swinn, Steve Grimwade and Rod Morrison. Their direction is gratefully acknowledged.

Kate Brennan, CEO and Kate Deacon, Program Manager, Events and all at Federation Square are acknowledged and thanked for their support to stage the public exhibition and awarding event and significant contribution to the construction costs of the exhibition display in the Atrium.

The generous support of *The Age* is gratefully appreciated. Thanks to Joel Becker, Director, Victorian Writers Centre, Emily Harms, Marketing Manager, Readings and other organisations and publications in the literature sector including, the Australian Publishers Association, the Australian Society of Authors, Australian Literary Agents Association, Melbourne Writers Festival, *Weekly Book Newsletter*, *Australian Book Review*, *Meanjin* and *Overland Magazine* for their support.

The Melbourne Prize Trust gratefully acknowledges support from Garry Singer, Deputy Lord Mayor, City of Melbourne, Professor Rob Adams, Director Design & Culture, Morris Bellamy, Manager Arts & Culture, Jeffrey Taylor, Team Leader City Culture & Collections, Jane Sharwood, International Relations Program Manager, the Arts & Culture Branch at the City of Melbourne and Fiona Macrae, Media Advisor. Jeff Taylor is thanked for his time and support as the City of Melbourne's Program Manager for the Melbourne Prize for Literature 2006. The support of the City of Milan, Melbourne's sister city, is appreciated.

Dr Marie Sierra, from the Victorian College of the Arts and Strategic Advisor to the Board of Melbourne Prize Limited, has made a major contribution to the direction of the 2006 prize.

The Management Committee of the Melbourne Prize Fund including Jack Smorgon AO, Director Escor Pty Ltd, Janine Kirk AM, Executive Director, Committee for Melbourne, David Blake, Partner, Ernst & Young, Anthony Poynton, Partner, Minter Ellison and Simon Warrender, Melbourne Prize Trust are thanked for generously providing their time.

The Melbourne Prize Limited Board, including Janine Kirk AM, Pamela M Warrender and Simon H Warrender are acknowledged for their guidance.

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William Buck, as auditor to the Melbourne Prize Trust, is gratefully acknowledged – thank you to Brad Taylor, Partner and Chris Vittas, Principal Tax.

The Melbourne Prize Trust would like to thank the exhibition partners who have generously contributed to the event at Federation Square.

Premier Graphics skilfully fabricated the public exhibition in the Atrium at Federation Square, including the letter forms and event signage. Walter Caune, Managing Director and his team are thanked for their significant support and partnership in the exhibition.

Bill Coleby of Coleby Consulting kindly provided event risk evaluation services and Dion Hall is thanked for his role as exhibition consultant. Evan Evans made the city street banners – thank you to Roger Cameron, Managing Director.

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General Information

The Melbourne Prize Trust is listed on the Australian Federal Government's Register of Cultural Organisations with Deductible Gift Recipient status and is an Income Tax Exempt Charity.

Please visit melbourneprizetrust.org for further information on the Melbourne Prize Trust and annual Melbourne Prize.

For information on how to make a tax deductible donation to the Melbourne Prize Fund or enquiries about purchasing a miniature of *The Magic Pudding* sculpture, located at the Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne, please contact the Melbourne Prize Trust on 03 9650 8800.

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