



Melbourne Prize for Literature 2006

Media Release

15 November 2006

Helen Garner wins the most valuable literature prize in Australia

The Melbourne Prize for Literature 2006 was today awarded to Helen Garner, who is published by Picador, in recognition of her outstanding contribution to Australian literature and to cultural and intellectual life.

The Melbourne Prize Trust, in conjunction with the Committee for Melbourne, today recognised the achievements of Helen Garner and other Victorian writers at an awards ceremony and exhibition-opening, at BMW Edge in Federation Square, Melbourne.

At \$60,000, the Melbourne Prize for Literature 2006 is the most valuable prize of its kind in Australia. Helen Garner will receive \$30,000 in cash, provided by the City of Melbourne to undertake an international travel scholarship, and \$30,000 in cash provided by Tattersall's and the Melbourne Prize Trust. An Italian language and cultural course is also offered by the Italian Institute of Culture.

Additionally, the \$30,000 Best Writing Award was awarded to Christos Tsiolkas for his work *Dead Europe*, published by Random House. 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. The Prize is supported by the Sidney Myer Fund, Readings and Hardie Grant Publishing.

Melbourne Prize Trust Executive Director and Founder, Mr Simon Warrender, declared the inaugural Melbourne Prize for Literature 2006 a resounding success, with a high number of entries across both Prize categories and a successful exhibition of finalists' works at Federation Square.

"The Prize has been made possible by a collaboration of forward thinking partners who have come together to offer a prize that will position Melbourne and Victoria as a vibrant centre for great writing," said Mr Warrender.

"The 2006 Melbourne Prize is unique in that it recognises literary excellence and creativity across various vocation stages and offers significant rewards for a Victorian writer's body of published and produced work, while identifying literary talent across all genres.

"As a community, it is vital that we demonstrate the value we place on excellence and creativity as an important part of our cultural tapestry. I hope the public exhibition of finalists' works serves to remind us all of the calibre of our writing talent and the written word's power to inform, educate, persuade and share experiences," said Mr Warrender.

Deputy Lord Mayor, Gary Singer, said the Melbourne Prize for Literature 2006 provided an opportunity to recognise the wealth of writing talent in Victoria.

"The Melbourne Prize for Literature 2006 acknowledges and celebrates our talented writers. We hope the City of Melbourne's \$30,000 international travel grant will assist the winner with their creative pursuits and that the Prize helps to position Melbourne as the cultural capital of Australia," the Deputy Lord Mayor said.

Executive Director of the Committee for Melbourne, Janine Kirk AM, was delighted the public had a chance to view the finalists' works at Federation Square's Atrium.



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"Through the unique exhibition of the finalists' works, all Victorians have the opportunity to experience first-hand the talent of our local writers and their contribution to our lives," Ms Kirk said.

A public display of the five Melbourne Prize for Literature 2006 and 10 Best Writing Award finalists' works is currently being held at the Atrium in Federation Square, the Trust's exhibition and event partner, until 27 November 2006. Attendees at the free exhibition have the opportunity to cast their votes for the \$3,000 Civic Choice Award, supported by the Melbourne Prize Trust. The word 'Literature' is spelt out across the Atrium in 2.4 metre high orange letters; the finalists' works are displayed both within the shadows of each letter and elsewhere throughout the display. The exhibition content can be viewed online at www.melbourneprizetrust.org

Mr Warrender said: "Given the quantity and quality of entries in this year's Prize, the Awarding Committee and Advisory Group's task was not easy. The team has done a great job and we are lucky to have such esteemed literary professionals to judge this year's winners".

The Awarding Committee comprises Hilary McPhee AO, Professor Brian Matthews and Mark Rubbo OAM and the Advisory Group consists of Louise Swinn, Steve Grimwade, Stephen Armstrong and Rod Morrison. There were 120 entries across both Prize categories.

Melbourne Prize for Literature 2006 – finalists included

- Helen Garner
- John Marsden
- Alex Miller
- Dorothy Porter
- Hannie Rayson

Best Writing Award – finalists included

- Azhar Abidi, *Passarola Rising*, Penguin Viking
- Ben Chessell, *The Heartbreak Tour*
- Neil Grant, *Indo Dreaming*, Allen & Unwin
- Sonya Hartnett, *Surrender*, Penguin Viking
- Mary Ellen Jordan, *Balandia: My Year in Arnhem Land*, Allen & Unwin
- David McCooey, *Blister Pack*, Salt
- Ross Mueller, *Construction of the Human Heart*
- Carrie Tiffany, *Everyman's Rules for Scientific Living*, Picador
- Christos Tsiolkas, *Dead Europe*, Random House
- Henry von Doussa, *The Park Bench*, Thompson Walker

The Judges' statements are included on page three.

About the annual Melbourne Prize

The annual Melbourne Prize is the prize of the city for the city and is run over a three-year cycle, commencing with the Melbourne Prize for Urban Sculpture in 2005, the Melbourne Prize for Literature in 2006 and the Melbourne Prize for Music in 2007. The cycle will commence again with the Melbourne Prize for Urban Sculpture 2008. A main prize of \$60,000 is planned for each year, plus other award categories tailored specifically to benefit each sector.

Listed on the Australian Federal Government's Register of Cultural Organisations, the Melbourne Prize Trust, in conjunction with the Committee for Melbourne, coordinates the annual Melbourne Prize along with three Founding Partners, including Cornwell, Ernst & Young and Minter Ellison. Sponsors and patrons provide additional generous support.

For further information please visit www.melbourneprizetrust.org

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Interviews available upon request.

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Melbourne
Prize for
Literature
2006

Judges' Statements

Statement on behalf of the Awarding Committee and Advisory Group on the winner of the Melbourne Prize for Literature 2006.

Helen Garner is a Victorian writer whose accomplished and versatile body of work has established her as one of Australia's greatest contemporary writers and prose stylists. Helen's work is striking and tackles universal truths with a distinctive local voice. Throughout her career, Helen has illuminated aspects of Australian life that are both confronting and inspiring and has made an outstanding contribution to Australian literature and to cultural and intellectual life.

Statement on behalf of the Awarding Committee and Advisory Group on the winner of the Best Writing Award.

Christos Tsiolkas' *Dead Europe* is a novel of great passion, energy and imagination, which evokes character, psychological complexity and a labyrinth of myth and history with intensity and immediacy. It is both fiercely political and personal and tackles some of the most pressing social issues of our time. The work is an outstanding example of clarity, originality and creativity by an enlightened young Victorian writer who never forgets nor fears his reader.