

## 2011 NSW Premier's Literary Awards – Judges' Comments

### Christina Stead Prize

#### SHORTLIST

##### ***Peter Carey - Parrot and Olivier in America - Penguin Group Australia***

John Larrit, known as Parrot, is the forthright son of an English printer, and servant to a French Marquis in the late bloom of the July Revolution. Olivier is the sickly only child of an ancient aristocratic family. When Olivier sets sail for America, Parrot is sent as servant, spy and scribe. Alternating between the perspectives of the two protagonists, Peter Carey unwinds a story of love and politics, ambition and humility, and of an unexpected friendship.

With a cool eye, Carey dissects the aspirations of art and democracy, and the wild possibilities of reinvention that both offer. A vivid re-imagining of Alexis de Tocqueville's nineteenth century journey from post-revolutionary France to the new democracy of America, *Parrot and Olivier in America* is a profound musing on love in its many forms. Playful, fierce, by turns satirical and celebratory, *Parrot and Olivier in America* is a virtuoso work by one of Australia's foremost writers.

##### ***Stephen Daisley - Traitor - The Text Publishing Company***

In the chaos of World War I, wounded New Zealand soldier, David Munroe, and Turkish doctor and Sufi mystic, Mahmoud, are taken to the same military hospital on the island of Lemnos. An unexpected and deep friendship develops between the two, culminating in the pair's escape from the hospital. For his role in the escape, David is court-martialled and ordered to be executed. In its study of the friendship between David and Mahmoud and its aftermath, *Traitor* is a compelling exploration of the E.M. Forster quotation that prefaces the book: '*I hate the idea of causes, and if I had to choose between betraying my country and betraying my friend, I hope I should have the guts to betray my country.*'

In sparse, beautiful prose, Daisley describes the internal conflict that consumes a soldier who, in the midst of war, begins to question the notion of patriotism and who, post-war, finds himself increasingly disconnected from his country and community. In David Munroe, Daisley has created a memorably flawed character, damaged and disillusioned by military service and yet invigorated and transformed by the wisdom and gentleness of a man he is compelled to call his enemy. *Traitor* is an impressive work by this first time author.

##### ***Alex Miller – Lovesong - Allen & Unwin - WINNER***

An ageing writer returns to Melbourne from an overseas sojourn, intent on retiring from the business of making stories. Ken's last novel, after all, was called *Farewell*. Back home in a flat which no longer quite feels like his, with a daughter who feels increasingly like a stranger, he meets John Patterner, a returned expat, and his Tunisian wife, Sabiha. As John, desperate for someone to trust, reveals the details of their journey to Australia and to parenthood, Ken finds himself compelled, after all, to write one more story

In *Lovesong*, Miller has crafted a magnificent portrait of desire. With wisdom and searing clarity Miller viscerally creates longing on the page: sexual longing, the desperation of parental longing, the hunger for art and for story. A sense of place – Melbourne, Tunisia and especially Paris – is evoked as powerfully as is each of the thoroughly realised characters. Poignant insights merge with gripping storytelling in this luminous work by a master storyteller.

Deceptively simple, *Lovesong* carefully explores the human capacity for self-deception. Much more than, as Ken would have it, 'a simple love story', *Lovesong* delicately unravels the notion that love is ever simple. With Miller's customary compassion, he exposes our moral fragility. This is a stunning novel by one of Australia's finest writers.

***Lisa Lang - Utopian Man - Allen & Unwin***

Set in Melbourne between the 1880s and the 1920s, this is a delightful account of the eccentric entrepreneur, Edward William Cole. It tells the tale of Cole's rise to fame from his early life on the goldfields to his first retail ventures, culminating in the creation of the legendary *Cole's Book Arcade*, a book store where readers are encouraged to sit and read, never compelled to buy, and where brass bands, monkeys and a giant squid form part of the store's regular entertainment. It is also the story of the man who created a sensation by advertising for a wife in the local newspaper and who, in doing so, found the redoubtable Eliza, with whom he went on to have six children.

Imbued with a strong sense of hope and optimism, *Utopian Man* is an uplifting book that is both entrancing and compelling. Writing with humour and insight, Lang's great skill lies in her ability to breathe life into the historical figure of Edward Cole during a time of enormous social upheaval, both before and after Federation. Behind its levity, *Utopian Man* is a careful examination of a man who defies anti-Chinese sentiment in the lead up to the White Australia Policy, and a moving description of his great love for his family in the face of personal tragedy and threatened financial ruin.

***Kristel Thornell - Night Street - Allen & Unwin***

Inspired by the art and life of the Victorian artist Clarice Beckett (1887 – 1935), *Night Street* is the story of a painter who, having remained unmarried by choice, continues to live with her ageing parents. Hers is an existence which, from the outside, appears both restrictive and monotonous. In fact, it masks a vibrant and passionate hidden life. With a mobile painting trolley in lieu of a studio, Clarice makes her way through the streets and coastline of Melbourne at dawn and dusk where she creates sombre, enigmatic landscapes. Through her art, she enters into a world of sensuality and freedom, away from the constraints of a conservative and disapproving society.

Thornell is a beautiful writer. Her evocation of the painter Clarice, who fights against societal conventions whilst being pushed, to outwardly adhere to them, is powerful, eloquent and moving. The clarity and simplicity of Thornell's writing resonates through the book, highlighting its undercurrent of fervour and passion, as it propels the narrative forward with a masterful sense of poetic urgency.

***Ouyang Yu - The English Class - Transit Lounge Publishing***

At the end of the Cultural Revolution in China in the late 1970s, a young truck driver called Jing manages to teach himself English in adverse circumstances, and eventually passes the examination to get into a University English class. There he falls in love with the estranged wife of the English teacher and later finds his way to Australia.

This disturbing novel explores the aspiration of many to migrate to English-speaking countries, and examines the insidious effects of colonialism and deracination. But more than this, it is an evocation of the power of language to shape our identity and to make sense of ourselves in a dislocated world. Ouyang Yu's vivid account of a Chinese truck driver who aspires to the western life overturns barriers to intercultural understanding with panache, brutal honesty and insight.

## UTS Glenda Adams Award for New Writing

### SHORTLIST

#### ***Stephen Daisley – Traitor - The Text Publishing Company - WINNER***

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**This is a poetic, thoughtful critique of war and nationalism, written with great compassion and understanding for a soldier faced with the moral dilemma of choosing between friendship and loyalty to country. The work retains its contemporary relevance by grappling with issues of ongoing concern in a time of continuing global conflict. With a narrative distinguished by its lyricism and effective use of flashback, *Traitor* is a memorable work of literature that is both compelling and poignant.**

#### ***Ashley Hay - The Body in the Clouds - Allen & Unwin***

Three stories intertwine in this confident fiction debut. An 18th century astronomer, a steel worker on the Sydney Harbour Bridge in the 1930s, and a young Australian banker returning from London at the beginning of the 21st Century, are each transformed by a moment and by a piece of land. In weaving the three stories around the image of a man falling from the sky, Ashley Hay creates a reflection on freedom and hope.

With great skill, Hay's first novel invites readers into a heightened state and draws them into the awareness of small detail. Each character in *The Body in the Clouds* reaches for home, for belonging, and Hay creates this fundamental desire vividly. The descriptions of bridge building, in particular, sing with intensity. Hay captures key moments of personal change, and change in the life of a country, with quiet and steady clarity.

#### ***Lisa Lang - Utopian Man - Allen & Unwin***

Set in Melbourne between the 1880s and the 1920s, this is a delightful account of the eccentric entrepreneur, Edward William Cole. It tells the tale of Cole's rise to fame from his early life on the goldfields to his first retail ventures, culminating in the creation of the legendary *Cole's Book Arcade*, a book store where readers are encouraged to sit and read, never compelled to buy, and where brass bands, monkeys and a giant squid form part of the store's regular entertainment. It is also the

story of the man who created a sensation by advertising for a wife in the local newspaper and who, in doing so, found the redoubtable Eliza, with whom he went on to have six children.

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***David Musgrave - Glissando: A Melodrama - Sleepers Publishing***

This comic pastiche of a novel is a marvellous and witty tale of young Archie and his half-brother, Reggie, orphans who grow up fostered by the bizarre Madame Octave in an absurdist outback Australia peopled by exaggerated characters, hymned by wild music and ruled by ironic situations.

While Musgrave plays shamelessly with literary allusions, Colonial history, food critics, obsessive architects, and our view of Australia as a *tabula rasa* to be built on, there is serious intent in his writing when he speaks of Australia's black history and the lack of restitution in a pre-Mabo world. This is a thoroughly contemporary novel, where the Theatre of the Absurd becomes real life, and where events point a wise finger at our national illusions.

***Gretchen Shirm - Having Cried Wolf - Affirm Press***

This collection of interwoven short stories is set in a fictional NSW coastal town where Alice and Grace, friends from childhood, have grown into people with vastly divergent lives. A series of small town dramas draws their partners, families, friends and even strangers into a set of related circumstances where chance, connection and absence play out their parts, and the sometimes the inexplicable happens.

These subtly imagined stories capture the idea that the consequences of one set of actions inevitably cause others. These interconnected tales build on the strength of this genre which allows the one thing to be examined from many different directions. This first collection from Gretchen Shirm heralds an assured and natural talent.

***Kristel Thornell - Night Street - Allen & Unwin***

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## Douglas Stewart Prize

### SHORTLIST

***Malcolm Fraser and Margaret Simons - Malcolm Fraser: The Political Memoirs - Melbourne University Publishing - WINNER***

*Malcolm Fraser: The Political Memoirs* is a highly – even unexpectedly – engaging work that demonstrates how literary craft can transcend the usual limitations of political auto/biography. It documents the life of former Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser from childhood, through his time as an often controversial figure in Australian politics, to his senior years, including his work as founding Chairman of CARE Australia. The book challenges traditional forms of auto/biography by deploying a double-voiced narration that shuttles between Fraser and Simons, between past events and present reflections, between interviews and archival sources. The result is a rich interplay of perspectives that brilliantly negotiates the personal and the public, the historic and the experiential, the details of a singular life and the collective life of the Australian nation.

The book at once describes a life of privilege — Western District, Melbourne Grammar, Oxford University — but also complicates it, by tracing the ways in which values grounded in social justice and the public good have helped shape Fraser’s political vision. Given the ongoing controversies that mark public and political life in this country, with regard to refugees, immigration, Aboriginal health and land rights and the population debate, the book presents alternative and clear perspectives about just resolutions of these issues.

**The book is outstanding for the way in which the issue of moral leadership is powerfully worked into the narrative fabric. Fraser, as a former Cold War warrior, was a product of his era and social class, but in his early recognition of fundamental concerns around multiculturalism, immigration, refugees, and human rights, he was well in advance of his time. In addressing these issues, the book offers a forceful though implicit critique of current polity, it reinvigorates an almost forgotten strand of liberalism in Australian political culture, and offers a fresh perspective on what has often been a one-sided portrayal of a transformative period of Australian history.**

***Anna Krien - Into the Woods: The Battle for Tasmania's Forests - Black Inc***

*Into the Woods* is a compelling narrative about the bitterly contested issue of logging in Tasmania’s old-growth forests. It tells the story of protestors dramatic face offs with police and loggers, of corporate greed, desperate acts of defiance, and fiercely played political games. Presenting her story as personal reportage, the author displays a welcome honesty about her often uncomfortable and unexpected reactions to what she sees and is told. The writing is vivid, intelligent, sometime lyrical, and the author displays a mordant sense of humour that serves her book well.

Given the often violent emotions that accompany the issue, it is refreshing to find a writer who manages to cover every angle of the many-sided argument. Krien’s book skilfully avoids the stereotypes of environmental reportage, and poses some challenging questions not only about the ecosystem but also about the economic, political and social costs of the long-running forest war.

***Maria Tumarkin – Otherland - Random House Australia***

The genre of the diasporic return journey has suffered a degree of overexposure. It is Tumarkin’s great achievement that she has something fresh and compelling to say. What distinguishes her book is the manner in which she brings seemingly inconsequential details into sharp focus and links these effortlessly to the larger events that have inscribed the collective histories of Russia and the Ukraine.

Tumarkin interweaves the narrative of the diasporic return to the 'home' country with issues that are at once historical and global in their reach and effects. Her depiction of place is acute, yet she refuses to indulge in nostalgic scene painting; on the contrary, her depiction of place encompasses everything from the sordid (a filthy train toilet) to the tragic (the genocidal ravine of Babi Yar).

Tumarkin's characters are brilliantly sardonic and often poignant, so that even minor and transient figures are vividly realised. She mobilises the great Russian poets and historians to brilliant effect, in a way that illuminates the relation between the present and a violent past that has not been overcome or resolved. In her seamless interlacing of the personal with the political and historical, Tumarkin articulates a moving and unforgettable account of the irresolvable dislocations that continue to haunt the diasporic subject.

***Ranjana Srivastava - Tell Me the Truth: Conversations With My Patients About Life and Death - Penguin Group Australia***

Fatal cancer is a dangerous subject, and authors who tackle this issue run a very high risk of sliding into the glibness of avoidance or the insult of self-help. Srivastava's great achievement is that her tone is exemplary, distinguished by lack of sentimentality and elegant, almost translucent prose. In her work as an oncologist, Srivastava describes her dealings with terminally ill cancer patients in a series of stories that never slip into clinical case studies. Not all the patients and their relatives are heroic: quietly and compassionately Srivastava describes real people faced with terrifying situations and impossible choices. Nor does she overemphasise her own role or expertise. The placement of the stories is particularly impressive, and the work has a satisfying rhythm and flow.

This book deals with much more than illness. It speaks about the meaning of a good life and a good death, the ethics of assisted suicide, the doctor's role as counsellor versus technician and, in one chilling chapter, the treatment of desperately ill refugees. Occasionally the author pauses to ask 'what can we learn from this' and given the subject such a question is appropriate.

***Tony Moore - Death or Liberty: Rebels and Radicals Transported to Australia 1788-1868 - Murdoch Books Australia***

*Death or Liberty* is a powerful retelling of the history of convicts transported to Australia for sedition. The book locates their stories in the war between labour and capital that emerged from the social and political upheaval of the industrial revolution, and sheds fresh light on the use of transportation as an instrument for crushing political dissent. Moore's impressive achievement is to have gathered together, in one book, the diversity of political activists that were transported to Australia from the United Kingdom. In the course of an engaging and spirited narrative, the book unfolds the stories of revolutionaries, dissenters and progressives who, in very different ways, fought for a just society. Some of these radicals returned to the UK to further their cause. Others took advantage of the opportunities afforded in the young colony, contributing to the political and social fabric of modern Australia.

In the compelling weave of narrative, testimonies and fascinating historical detail, Moore has produced an invaluable and important socio-political history in the tradition of Eric Hobsbawm and E.P. Thompson. The book offers an invaluable insight into the history of dissent, political activism and progressive thought that has helped shape Australian history.

***Brenda Walker - Reading By Moonlight: How Books Saved a Life - Penguin Group Australia***

*Reading by Moonlight* is an elegant, often poignant meditation about illness and death. It chronicles the author's encounter with breast cancer, from the first terrifying moments of diagnosis, through surgery, chemotherapy, radiotherapy, reconstructive surgery, and more. The book is also a journey into the writer's world of words. It sheds fresh light on the books to which Walker looked for support, and indeed for comfort. The stories of Dickens, Dante, Tolstoy, Nabokov, Beckett and Poe are skilfully woven through the narrative, illuminating the relationship of literature to life and death.

The writing is intimate, precise and measured, its meditative rhythm inviting the reader to pick up and put down the book from time to time in order to reflect upon the deeper currents that underlie Walker's words. The emotional indirection of the tone does not have a distancing effect. This is a moving and poetic reverie on many things: including time and illness, war and family, sadness, connection and survival.

**Kenneth Slessor Prize**

**SHORTLIST**

***Susan Bradley Smith - Supermodernprayerbook - Salt Publishing***

From Stradbroke to the Strand *Supermodernprayerbook* subsumes the reader into a forensically fierce range of experience encompassing rape, rage, regret, betrayal and bereavement. But this is ultimately a story of women's growth and survival. Here we have a collection that is as riotous, raucous, difficult, elegant and funny as life. This is an often intense, deeply personal journey. She subverts, reverts to and breaks away from gender clichés - female as mother, lover, wife. However, the poet maintains control throughout using forms such as prose poems, lists and sonnets to bring a focus that suits the polarising emotions of each poem.

This is a frangible, experiential book with the great versatility of language, marvellous imagery - "...you stroked me to sleep and wrote an entire book on my back...", "the moon smells like gunpowder" and readers are invited into the fullness, the fatality of existence. A courageous and vengeful prayer book for the 21st century from a newer voice in Australian poetry.

***Andy Jackson - Among The Regulars - Papertiger Media Inc***

Heartbreaking but controlled. There's no getting away from one's body and everything that is affected or effected by it. The language shapes questions and offers situations in which the body has to navigate through in order to keep moving and we move with it... a new type of movement. For many readers language becomes a way to connect to the world that, reading these poems, the poet, or his characters, are so often alienated from.

The words are written into parables, hymns and moving observations of relationships between people and then between the poet and himself or him - selves. Jackson's preoccupation with the body means there's no escaping the author's voice... poem upon poem, the reader is confronted by the political and private (one is the other, here) then forcefully invited to take notice of those things from which we often shy away. We take note and remember. It combines passion, originality and a control of form. He eloquently, emotionally tells his own story while never letting these strong emotions override the poetry - he is in total control of his matter. It is an intelligent but accessible collection.

***Jill Jones - Dark Bright Doors - Wakefield Press Pty***

Jones has long been seen as an exemplar of inner-city landscape writing. *Dark Bright Doors* does not disappoint as much of the book throbs with urban light/caliginosity and busyness. But throughout this publication we also see passion, the personal and the inquisitor of ideas. There is a solid vein of painting reference alongside a sporadic pop-country musicality in tone and focus that both serve to connect Jones' poetics with the reader. All this is done with the stringent skills of a consummate wordsmith.

This poet has a fearless eclecticism... *Night Visitor* works as a prose poem, *Broken Hour* is almost conversational. Some of the pieces have great clarity within a strong lyrical voice. She plays with, but is not played by, form. An intriguing complexity in much of the work beguiles the reader into consciously ill-defined, deeper spaces where their minds can flourish amidst unfenced language.

***Anna Kerdijk Nicholson – Possession - Five Island Press***

Taking up the story of Captain Cook and the Endeavour is a daunting task; one has to consider the ethics of re-telling the gruesome journey of this particular white invader/explorer. The poet must find a new way to re-tell and re-name the much mythologised events and people. In *Possession* the poet successfully explores and uncovers new visions and happenings related to Cook's voyage and the individual he was - or is.

The word 'possession' has symbolic legal, geographical and linguistic connotations that are all relevant to this work. There is no forgery in *Possession*, it is researched to the core and goes beyond charting the academics of colonialism, providing both an aesthetic and sometimes, supernatural version of exploration and invasion. This collection is not out to please readers or dumb down history - it swells with blood, skulls, cries and cracks.

***Andy Kissane - Out to Lunch - Puncher and Wattmann***

This collection is humorous, sharp, tender and generous. Each poem surprises with its ability to make meaning out of the everyday things or people. As if flicking through a photograph album or watching a series of home movies, the poems are talkative, reflective while traversing various landscapes and periods of time. The poet talks to us in different guises - as father, as surfer, doctor or time traveller. The conversations happen in a range of locales... a hospital, a cafe, on the beach, in a fibro shack.

Subjects are serious, often melancholy but they're also absurd, humorous and a rich imagining. A childlike perspective on life makes *Out to Lunch* a breath of fresh air in the solemnity of many other poetry collections that explore family dynamics and the elusive self. The poems are beautiful aural/oral creations... lovely to recite, perform and enjoy. Their trick, each time, is to throw in an unexpected or surreal idea, word or situation so the reader is never complacent or comfortable, even if we are out to lunch chatting in a companionable manner.

***Jennifer Maiden - Pirate Rain - Giramondo Publishing - WINNER***

*Pirate Rain* is an exploration of raw power in all its forms as delivered by piratical, natural and human forces explored with an intellectual and philosophical imagination unique to Jennifer Maiden. Themes of power, violence, art and love are explored through a range of personas, psyches and spaces ranging from her daughter Katharine to Hillary Clinton to Hurricane Katrina.



The poet's language is insidious and vicious; it is also beautiful and profoundly personal. With firm, confronting yet quietly determined words and personas, Maiden approaches themes normally reserved for journalists or non-fiction writers. We meet real and invented male and female characters involved in complex and curious relationships. In particular, the women are engaged in warped versions of the traditional mother and daughter roles that are shocking and shockingly funny. The male characters are terrifying in their casual approach to violence and destruction. There is no didacticism or ranting with Maiden. Her way of seeing things is alluring. This writing and language bring life to poetic forms; the epigrams bite, correspondences are killing, the monologues hysterical.

**The judges saw a great range of quality writing from our vibrant poetry community. *Pirate Rain* was selected as the best because this book calls us to examine, from multiple viewpoints and in a complex range of voices, the many private and personal universes we inhabit. Maiden's inventions of characters and contexts become launching pads for deep philosophical/poetic questioning that most other poets dare not risk, let alone triumph in engagement.**

### **Patricia Wrightson Prize**

#### **SHORTLIST**

##### ***Jeannie Baker – Mirror – Walker Books Australia***

How much does the day to day family life of a young boy in an inner Sydney suburb mirror the life of a boy and his family who live half way around the world in an isolated and fairly traditional North African Moroccan village? Jeannie Baker's stunningly beautiful picture book, *Mirror*, allows the reader/viewer to explore this question on a number of levels

Innovatively designed and crafted from the first simultaneous openings of both title pages, *Mirror* tells the boys' two stories in parallel through Baker's signature collages. Each collage has been meticulously researched to ensure its authenticity. The richness and detail of the representations enable examination of both the contrasts and the resonances between the two cultures and lifestyles. And the universal qualities of love and daily living are also evident in both families.

Just as each collage was built layer by layer, *Mirror* reminds us that while our outward layer may be very different, we are part of a global community and inwardly we really can be mirrors of each other.

##### ***Libby Gleeson and Freya Blackwood - Clancy and Millie and the Very Fine House - Hardie Grant Egmont***

*Clancy and Millie and the Very Fine House* (Libby Gleeson) is a touching yet subtle rendition of a young boy's need to cope with a difficult change in his life. Clancy has to leave his cosy old home and move to a new house. We see the house through Clancy's eyes. Alone and small, overwhelmed by vast, sparse spaces, he looks into the huge new rooms and remembers his comfortable old life. In the back yard he plays with empty cardboard packing boxes where he is joined by Millie from next door. Together they shape the boxes into fantastically towering houses for three pigs. These fall to the power of the big bad wolf. When they are satisfied that their last house is wolf-proof, Clancy invites Millie inside his new house, beginning its transformation into a home.

The text is flawless and spare, allowing plenty of room for the illustrations to describe Clancy's journey. The drawing is carefully rendered pencil and wash in muted colours. The children's expressions and actions are restrained, reflecting the mood of Clancy's cautious entry into the house and the tentative growth of a new friendship.

*Clancy and Millie and the Very Fine House* is a loving and timeless story about how one small person moves through a difficult passage of time.

***Cassandra Golds - The Three Loves of Persimmon - Penguin Group Australia***

It can be lonely if you are a rebel. Persimmon chooses to defy her family, suffer their rejection and set up a florist shop in an almost-entirely underground, ornate subway station. The story of her attempts to find love and companionship open up new worlds and help her understand that everyone is important.

Part parable, part surrealist fable, part love story, the best word to describe this book is beautiful. The characters are beautifully drawn, the setting beautifully original, magical and seductive and the language is exquisite.

Not every child will find *The Three Loves of Persimmon* to their taste, but the reader who invests the time to get to know the quirky and whimsical Persimmon, Epiphany, Rose and the rest, will be well rewarded and might even discover - or rediscover - a love for the beauty of language.

***John Heffernan - Where There's Smoke - Omnibus Books***

Bushfires are unfortunately a very raw issue for Australians. In John Heffernan's *Where There's Smoke* the threat of a bushfire at first provides the backdrop to the story of Luke and his mum's new life in Edenville.

Luke is concerned with leaving behind his violent father, whose potential return remains a threat throughout the novel; making friends; helping out with animals needing refuge; and, finding a way to counter the bullying he is experiencing at school. Besides, no one but his biker friend, Tiny, seems too concerned about the smoke. As it translates to a looming and then a devastating reality, however, the fire promises to destroy lives as well as the town itself.

Heffernan relates the story in a strong and assured voice while painting a vivid picture of the crackly dry landscape and the growing intensity of the disaster as it envelopes everything with incredible rapidity. Despite the unstoppable power of nature at such a time, the enduring quality of humanity is also well represented through the richly drawn characters of Luke, his mum, Tiny and Mrs Crawley. Each in their own way embody courage and a spirit of survival.

Dedicated to "those who lived through the hell of Black Saturday" this book will also appeal to many older readers.

***Sophie Masson - My Australian Story: The Hunt for Ned Kelly - Scholastic Australia - WINNER***

Through the eyes of young orphan Jamie Ross and his sister Ellen, an early professional photographer with designs on getting that 'one big shot' using her father's camera - a surprising narrative device which leads to a neat confluence of history and fiction - this story manages to strongly and clearly depict northern Victoria in the late 1800s, in particular the gossip and

speculation that followed celebrities then much as it does now. Rather than being ‘just (yet) another Ned Kelly book’, this novel provides a window into a part of our history that is commonly defined by legend, myth and caricature, but is in fact so much more.

To develop tension in an ending that we already know is no mean feat. In addition to its success as an exciting story this book would work well in the classroom, with the technical aspects of the writing and the historical context each offering much to discuss and explore.

***My Australian Story: The Hunt for Ned Kelly* works both as a piece of historical fiction, and also as an enjoyable page-turner, with dangerous characters, mystery, pathos, villains (but not always those whom you’d expect), heroes, and a gripping climax in which Masson has, once again, resisted the urge to bow to cliché and predictability. Like all good children’s books, *My Australian Story: The Hunt for Ned Kelly* possesses several layers, and will have much to recommend it in the eyes of the adult reader as well as the child.**

***Emma Quay - Shrieking Violet - Scholastic Australia***

*Shrieking Violet* is a heart-warming picture book for very young people about two sisters, told in the voice of the older one. It is her book all about herself. She proudly describes her achievements - shoe tying, bag-carrying, bulb planting and the like. She mentions, in an offhand manner, the inconsequential presence of a sister, Violet, who mucks about in the background.

The story is illustrated with bold inked lines, vibrant colours, nicely adapted text styles and positions and sparing use of background detail. The text is all the big sister’s soliloquy, confiding and funny. *Shrieking Violet* is a delightful look at sibling downs and ups, accurately observed as countless parents of young people will agree.

**Ethel Turner Prize**

**SHORTLIST**

***Michelle Cooper - The FitzOsbornes in Exile: The Montmaray Journals 2 - Random House***

Opening with a wry nod to its literary predecessor, Dodie Smith’s classic *I Capture the Castle*, *The FitzOsbornes in Exile* continues the journals of Sophie FitzOsborne, Royal Princess in exile from the tiny fictional island kingdom of Montmaray.

With Sophie and her family in exile in England in 1937, after Montmaray was all but destroyed by German bombers, we are treated to a well-researched and immaculately detailed portrait of pre-war life amongst the privileged classes. Over-shadowing the gaiety of frocks and ‘Coming Out for the Season’, the allure of potential romance and even a rather thrilling assassination attempt against Sophie’s cousin, Princess Veronica, is the rise of Fascism, the growing threat of war from Europe, and the apparent sacrifice of Sophie’s beloved Montmaray to the policy of appeasement.

*The FitzOsbornes in Exile*, peopled with a rich cast of historical and fictional characters, is by turns funny, lush and moving, beautifully observed and fascinating in its political and historical detail. It is a worthy successor to its 2009 Ethel Turner Prize winning prequel *A Brief History of Montmaray*.

***Cath Crowley - Graffiti Moon - Pan Macmillan Australia - WINNER***

*Graffiti Moon*, by Cath Crowley, and published by Pan Macmillan, is set in contemporary suburbia, and focuses on one memorable and action-packed night in the lives of three teenage friends. It is narrated from the distinctly different perspectives of Lucy, a dreamer who has just finished year 12; Ed, a graffiti artist; and Leo, a poet.

Lucy and Ed, the two apparently oppositional central characters, share their everyday joys and anxieties as well as their innermost thoughts and dreams, while Leo's poems are woven into their narratives. Lucy is obsessed with meeting the elusive Shadow whose graffiti art is everywhere. Ed, who is grieving for a dear friend and desperate to escape his stereotypes, promises to help her find him. Their passion for art inevitably changes their first impressions of each other. In evocative prose, Crowley skilfully constructs a fast-paced story that will readily appeal to young adult readers.

**In awarding this prize, the judges make particular note of the careful and expertly crafted novel created by Cath Crowley. It explores the important themes of friendship, love, loss and relationships, at a number of different levels. It also examines the many faces of art. Crowley tells the story with a humour and poignancy that is both moving, and unforgettable.**

***Kirsty Eagar - Saltwater Vampires - Penguin Group Australia***

In this gripping novel published by Penguin Books, Kirsty Eagar gives a uniquely Australian slant to the vampire thriller. The story follows teenage surfer, Jamie, and his friends, as they set out to enjoy another summer in the quintessential beach-side town of Rocky Head. But this year, vampires are out and about and they're heading for the annual music festival.

Using the historic backdrop of the 1629 wreck of the Batavia, in Western Australia, Eagar crafts a story that blends the contemporary lives and desires of a group of teenagers with the craven blood-lust of an ancient cartel of Dutch vampires.

With its clever and audacious plot, and the strong and believable characterisations of the principal teenage characters, this novel instantly engages and entertains.

***Belinda Jeffrey - Big River, Little Fish - University of Queensland Press***

Born 'backwards' at Big Bend on the Murray River in South Australia, Tom Downs's fifteen years have been difficult. He has always found that things like reading and writing did not come easy. It seemed natural to immerse himself in the wisdom of Old Mother Murray and he was happiest when caring for the vulnerable riverbank dwellers, feeding the neighbour's lambs, helping his foster dad fix a car or tractor or riding a Harley. Yet the unanswered questions surrounding his mother Lil, who died giving Tom life, his father's rejection and his adoption by Ted and Marge continually swirl around him. When the worst floods in a century threaten Swan Reach, Tom must come into his own.

Belinda Jeffrey uses different voices including those of Tom, his father Oliver, Ted his foster father and Murray, who found Tom as a baby, to weave an intricate plot with some surprising twists. Each character is depicted in rich detail and with great compassion. The pieces in the complex puzzle surrounding Tom's life are skilfully brought together in the final pages.

While attending carefully to the historical events of the flood, Jeffrey also evokes its physical power and inevitability. The personal and physical devastation wrought by the flood are described with great sensitivity, and the image of the river as the lifeblood of the town and its people is masterful.

**Melina Marchetta - *The Piper's Son* - Penguin Group Australia**

This is the eagerly awaited sequel to *Saving Francesca*, and Marchetta creates a fresh and vibrant story that focuses on Sydney's inner city suburbs and the life of a young and out of work musician, Tom Mackee.

Homeless and haunted by the death of his favourite uncle in a terrorist bombing in London, Tom desperately seeks to put his life back together by re-establishing ties with his aunt, his friends, and his long separated father. For him, it is a long and very hard road. Marchetta's insightful narration and wonderful cast of characters take her readers on an always fascinating ride through the gritty, pulsating streets of the city's inner west. The story culminates in an emotional and memorable conclusion.

**Jaclyn Moriarty - *Dreaming of Amelia* - Pan Macmillan Australia**

*Dreaming of Amelia* by Jaclyn Moriarty, is the latest in a sequence of novels set in two fictional secondary schools in Sydney's north-western suburbs, and combine an eccentric sense of humour and a wild pleasure in complex narrative structure, with a deep understanding of the shifting dynamics of the secondary school milieu.

Private meets public when two enigmatic ex-public Brookfield High students win scholarships to the firmly middle-class private school, Ashbury. The Ashbury students are abuzz with rumour and fascination — which even spills over into their HSC English Extension examination papers. Who are Riley and Amelia? Why did they leave their old school? Why does no-one at Brookfield seem to remember them? And who is the ghost haunting Art Room 27B?

Continuing in the style of her earlier novels, Moriarty weaves complex multiple narrative threads, employing a range of what her HSC student characters would know as 'text types', dancing around stereotypes and creating about a dozen completely distinctive narrative voices. By the end of the novel, the reader is breath-taken by Moriarty's narrative audacity, with not a single plot thread left dangling after more than 500 pages. *Dreaming of Amelia* may be Jaclyn Moriarty's most technically dazzling, deeply hilarious and emotionally satisfying novel to date.

**Play Award**

**SHORTLIST**

**Patricia Cornelius - *Do Not Go Gentle... - fortyfivedownstairs* - WINNER**

Lyrical, brutal, timely and timeless, this script is highly original and both unsentimental and uplifting. Its particular achievement is to tell parallel stories - one is of a group of older Australians in a nursing home and the other is of Robert Scott and his ill-fated voyage to the South Pole – with both stories played out by the same actors. On a literal level the narratives are utterly different: one concerns Edwardian men traversing the Ross Ice Shelf to the South Pole and dying on the return journey, knowing they had failed to get there first; the other tells of a disparate group of aged, afflicted Australians (one is younger, but suffering from Alzheimer's) in the quiet moments of time wasting in an institution before the foolish fond old people finally die. On a thematic level, however, these stories run in astonishing unison for in Cornelius's radiant conceit, they are both Scott and his men, and the inmates of a nursing home.

Pained, doomed, haunted, suffering at the cruel vicissitudes of inexplicable burdens, abandoned, lost and desperate, this is a savage and moving portrait of the those whose frail deeds might once have danced bright, and who – as her homage of a title refers - with fierce tears now must rage against the dying of the light. Nursing home dwellers are seen anew, majestic on an epic scale, an epic stage, while those on the ice shelf are made more human and their joy and pain is all the closer to us. All struggle, however futile, domestic or small, is heroic and glorious, bitter and constant.

For a play about loss, aging, unrequited ideals and taking stock, it is riveting, inspirational and deeply moving. The writing is sharp and honest, Cornelius's control of tone and form is breathtaking and the script is a wonderful gift for a creative team to turn into glorious theatre.

***Jonathan Gavin – Bang – B Sharp - Belvoir Street Downstairs Theatre***

An impressive drama of scale and complexity, *Bang* successfully weaves together several ostensibly disconnected narratives all of which conclude with an act of religiously motivated violence. We witness a series of random individuals on a train station – we hear their voices, their fears, amusing prejudices, domestic mental detritus and bitter, joyful, fragile memories. They are sharing the platform, however, with a suicide bomber, to whose voice and motivation we also bear witness. The bomb is ultimately detonated but not before we have moved fluidly through time and been given access to multiple layers of causation.

Gavin's vision is generous and thoughtful. He presents a series of competing belief systems, giving each a credible voice through rich, witty and sympathetic characterisation. The judges were excited by the theatricality of the form Gavin employs and were thoroughly engaged by the content.

***Jane Montgomery Griffiths - Sappho...In 9 Fragments - Malthouse Theatre; Currency Press***

All of the judges on the panel admired this work for its vast ambition, originality and elegance. Part translation of Sappho's poetry and part original modern love story, the play is constructed from a series of affecting monologues. The clear and precise passages of translation intersect easily with the sections of text conveying the contemporary tale. Indeed, Montgomery Griffiths deftly handles the various voices at play here, teasing us, taunting us, seducing us with the very notion of voice, reading, understanding and identity.

What is perhaps most surprising for a work of this nature is the wit of the writing, the clarity and relevance of Sappho's voice and the passion of the work as a whole. It is a play that is genuinely visceral, richly intellectual, bathetic and sexy. Assiduous research combined with a great imaginative leap makes this an intelligent and innovative dramatic text.

***Melissa Reeves - Furious Mattress - Malthouse Theatre***

*Furious Mattress* is a macabre, black comedy; truly an inventive psychological thriller and rich moral tale about marriage itself. A husband fired by the strictures of charismatic faith but troubled by the independent thoughts of his wife Else calls in a backyard faith-healer to help calm her racing demon of a soul. When they can't calm Else's spirit they call in the local exorcist, a young ex-plumber.

The humour and horror created by seemingly ordinary people within their extraordinary situation is brilliantly realized as naturalism gives way to heightened gothic horror. The opening scenes, with their comfortable depiction of two people united in mutually caring for the 'resting' woman, initially

give little indication of the turmoil they have experienced and inflicted. Reeves's wild imaginative daring is both surreal and sensational as she transforms the notorious Joan Vollmer case into this grotesque, disconcerting, hilarious and alarming script. This account of an exorcism gone wrong is technically demanding and effectively creates a mad, horrendous, mordant, chilling reality.

***Sue Smith - Strange Attractor - Griffin Theatre; Currency Press***

This is a confident, humorous and accomplished script by a writer of compassion and insight. Sue Smith's work is remarkable for its ability to take complex ideas and etch them into the real dilemmas of real people on the periphery of chaotic change. Here it's the ersatz community that has sprung up around the giant mines of WA's Pilbara. There's a young immigrant bartender, the old salt-of-the-earth train driver, a female engineer truckie and the young redneck, all of whom must explain how the safety officer died in a category four cyclone. Who exactly was to blame? Was it a set-up? Was it just a mix-up? And who is lying?

Written in the form of an imaginative detective story we follow in the steps of the company investigator. By placing her characters in the path of a real cyclone and right in the eye of the mining boom's twister of politics, ethics and economics she has created a work that speaks directly to now. Smith's play is an expert example of how theatre can capture the difficulties of lives lived at the nasty, dirty, bitter margins of capitalism.

***Anthony Weigh - Like a Fishbone - Bush Theatre Company, London; Sydney Theatre Company/Griffin Theatre Company; Currency Press***

This is a masterful piece of theatre. Questions of belief, God, religion, truth and grief drive this tense psychological thriller. Weigh does not impose upon us as he artfully sets two world views against one another. His protagonists, two mothers, one sightless and committed to faith, the other blinded by her commitment to process and agenda, space and form, fight out an unwinnable argument. How do you design grief? How can you best plan a memorial for lost children?

A mother who has lost her child in a shooting tragedy at a regional school demands that everything be left where it is as the finest way to remember both the terror and the loss of such a catastrophe. An architect has other more graceful and intellectual ideas. The play dramatises their tussle. It is sinuous and surprising. Their conflict is beautifully written and exposes the fragility, and the certainty, of faith. Notions of design and responsibility, bereavement and recollection fire this clever, finely wrought drama.

**Script Writing Award**

**SHORTLIST**

***Shirley Barrett - South Solitary - Macgowan Films***

*South Solitary*, as the title suggests, is set in and around a lighthouse on a remote island. The screenplay conveys striking, often threatening visual elements of these surroundings and the struggles of the characters to cope with them. Meredith accompanies her Uncle George Wadsworth to South Solitary. He has been appointed new Head Keeper. They encounter a rather hostile welcome from the residents who feel their own man has been passed over for the job. Meredith becomes fascinated by the gruff, silent Fleet who suffers from war injuries. Disasters and difficulties accumulate leaving Meredith and Fleet virtually together to run the lighthouse. There is the expectation of this relationship developing into a powerful passionate drama, a love story. The

characters are intriguing and the situation tantalisingly tense as it moves towards the climax. There are hints of a possible breakthrough between Meredith and Fleet and he comes near to expressing the inner demons that have possessed him since the war.

*South Solitary* conveys the repressed emotions and stunted passions of its characters' lives which somehow seem to reflect their grim and desolate surroundings. That said, the script possesses often a wry humour and there are some touchingly comic incidents on the island that remain memorable.

#### ***Glen Dolman - Hawke - The Film Company***

Clichés about Bob Hawke's mannerisms and foibles abound, but this drama captures the inner man - at least the writer's expression of him - in a way that allows us to understand some of the deeper pressures that play into a leader's life. It manages a balance between the personal and political providing an audience with just enough of both to be satisfying as drama.

Hawke is depicted as a man torn between political ambition and his strong emotional connections to both family and to the mistress who was to become his second wife, Blanche D'Alpuget. The writer doesn't shrink from showing his sometimes callous treatment of people nor his readiness to grab the main chance when it appears. Hawke is shown to be tough, resilient and passionate about his concerns for workers and the ordinary people, which was why he was so popular. He had the 'common touch' and this script certainly conveys that quality. The surrounding characters are vivid, though Hazel Hawke is at times one dimensional.

The juggling of time, past and present and the use of actual footage at times add to the complexity of the structure. It is always hard to know how to end biographical dramas when the protagonist is still living, but the writer provides the perfect exit for Bob from the public stage.

#### ***Michael Miller – East West 101 Session 3: The Hero's Standard - Knapman Wyld TV, SBS***

Detective Zane Malik of the Major Crime Squad, faces the toughest challenge of his life when a very public crime has very personal ramifications.

The sophisticated hold up of an armoured vehicle, leaves four dead. One of them is an armed robber, with an enigmatic identity, leaving Major Crime to ponder the possibilities. Is this an ordinary bunch of thieves looking to get rich quick, or is there a more sinister motivation behind the robbery? Malik clashes with new cop, Travis, in his impassioned pursuit of those who have hurt him and his family. When a man is left dead, in a police shoot out, Malik wonders just what kind of cowboy he's working with...

The Hero's Standard tells a propulsive, colourful, tightly constructed story. In characterisation, narrative, and setting, it engages with the complexity of contemporary, multi-cultural, suburban Sydney in a manner all too infrequently seen in local television series.

#### ***John Misto - Sisters of War - Sisters of War Pty Ltd***

It is January 1942 and Japanese troops have captured Rabaul. Wounded Australian diggers and their nurses are evacuated to a Catholic mission station. This is a story based on real people and events. It is about the interactions of very different people and cultures: Lorna, the tough, brusque Australian nurse, Sister Berenice, a naïve young nun from a farming background who has much both to learn



and, by example, to teach, and the young Japanese and Australian soldiers caught up in a war not of their own making.

This is a screenplay which is well researched, full of compassion, and rings true. The characters come through as three dimensional, the dialogue fits them and the pace of the story progresses well. If ever the time came to compile a television drama history of Australians in World War II, *Sisters Of War* would make a worthy chapter.

***Debra Oswald - Offspring - Southern Star Entertainment***

*Offspring* is a very interesting screenplay from an accomplished writer. It is both a feature length telemovie and the first or pilot episode of a TV series and sometimes the competing demands of these two can lead to compromise. Not so here. While setting up characters and situations capable of being mined at length in the course of an ensuing series, it also stands up well as a feature film written for television. The craft skills necessary to accomplish these dual aims are both evident and impressive. And yet it is not just craft that we are seeing here. The writer immediately grabs us by the lapels and drags us into the world of Nina our obstetrician heroine, a world which is by turns confused, quirky, funny and sad. The characters are three dimensional, the dialogue brisk, and the story takes us with it as it drives forward. Dickens said “*make them laugh, make them cry, make them wait.*” *Offspring* fulfils all of these dicta.

**This screenplay succeeds at several quite separate tasks. It stands in its own right as a feature-length drama for television but also acts as the pilot script for a series, delivering richly detailed characters to explore down the track. We first meet our obstetrician heroine, Nina, failing in the slow lane of a swimming pool inhabited by faster swimmers, while she muses about the mystery of why sexual partners choose each other and why, therefore, are the babies she delivers born at all? But, in a hard cut to a delivery room, she tells herself that it’s not her job to wonder how the baby got in there, it’s her job to pull him out. With these two swift scenes, the tone is set for Nina’s journey through work, life, family relationships and love. This brevity in establishing the thrust of the story is the hallmark of a very accomplished screenwriter and we know from the beginning that we’re in safe hands. The story empathises with Nina, her family and her workmates: it is always engaged, often ironic, never sentimental as well as being vital, innovative and well judged in terms of character and structure.**

***Samantha Strauss - Dance Academy, Episode 13: Family - Werner Film Productions***

This series is generally very well written. Tara, the central character among a number of young ballet students attending the dance academy is the focus of most of the drama. In this episode Tara's family from the country come to visit her in Sydney. She is at first crippled with embarrassment at her father's country ways and often crude behaviour. Then when her mother breaks the news that they are in financial trouble and Tara may have to give up her study for at least a year, Tara is utterly devastated. Having set up these two elements, the writer skilfully juggles the humour of Tara's father's often agonizing manners, at the same time reflecting her emotional struggle with the decision of whether or not to give up her dancing - the thing she loves most - and go back to the farm.

The writer creates a moving and powerful story showing how young people can also be generous and understanding of their parent's financial problems. The story and the writer's sympathetic handling of sensitive situations endorse the values of family and commitment and sacrifice without ever becoming sentimental.

## **Community Relations Commission for a Multicultural Australia Award**

### **SHORTLIST**

#### ***Ali Alizadeh - Iran: My Grandfather - Transit Lounge Publishing***

Ali Alizadeh left Iran at fourteen years of age, after the Iran-Iraq conflict. *Iran My Grandfather* is a literary attempt to connect home and heritage, as Alizadeh struggles with his place in Australia. A black-and-white photograph of his grandfather impels the author to create a history, fusing the factual with the imagined - both of his family and the nation of Iran. In so doing, Alizadeh engages in the complexities and contradictions within modern Iranian history, the jostling between old and new, the dialectic of secular and religious. *Iran My Grandfather* importantly illuminates the character and history of a nation blurred in Western eyes by both external demonisation and internal demagoguery.

Alizadeh crafts, weaves and spins threads, narratives, gossip, prejudices in a politically intriguing carpet of prose and poetry. His historical analysis is structured through the personal as he conveys the tumult of the Iranian polity sensitively. In the first few pages, his meditation on art, politics and the role of the migrant writer are compelling as he infuses Sufi spirituality into his text. Recounting the chronology of his own migration, there is a sense of finality with his grandfather withering as a spectral figure. *Iran My Grandfather* provides a window into Iranian histories and sensibilities from a rarely heard diasporic perspective.

#### ***Anh Do - The Happiest Refugee - Allen & Unwin***

*The Happiest Refugee* is a memoir that tracks the life journey of Anh Do, a celebrated figure in Australian popular culture. As a child, Do fled war and political turmoil in Viet Nam with his family, thus becoming a refugee like so many thousand others in the 1970s. Experiencing the trauma of dislocation and deprivation, piracy and uncertainty, Do tells his story with pride and poignancy. On arrival in Australia, Do struggles with the inevitable challenges of settlement, magnified by the separation of his parents. He pays tribute to his remarkable mother who provided him with the inspiration and encouragement in his pursuit to become a comedian.

*The Happiest Refugee* tracks Do's journey to success with humour and candour. Weaving in and out of short sharp narratives, Do never loses sight of from where he has come. His infectious approach to life and all its travails underpin the tone of this book, making it an uplifting read that celebrates triumph in the face of hardship. Do's optimism, his seeming balance and lack of acrimony and self-pity, infuse his memoir with joy, despite the events that have shaped his life.

#### ***Maria Tumarkin – Otherland – Random House Australia***

*Otherland* is an exploration of memory, place and identity. Author Maria Tumarkin intertwines the personal with the political as a way towards understanding complex histories. Written with candour, Tumarkin lyrically captures the emotional landscapes and scarred geographies as she travels to the Ukraine and surrounding countries of the former USSR with her daughter Billie.

*Otherland* is a deeply considered work, delicately nuanced and finely detailed. It is both an exploration of 'the past as another country' and a psychological exploration of bonds – territorial and familial. Having spent the first fifteen years of her life in the Ukraine, Tumarkin's narrative journey seeks to reconnect with her history, with people and place and to inherit some sort of cultural

connection to her Australian-born daughter. She aims to enlighten and to explore the past; inevitably she finds friends and acquaintances have changed, moved, grown apart, become lost, as communities splintered. The stories of nostalgia upon return migration are dissected with a humour and an attentive sensibility to the internal thoughts of a filial relationship. Her prose is peppered with quotes from literary and cultural influences providing an illuminating journey into Tumarkin's past and present worlds.

***Yuol Yuol Akoi Majak, Monica Kualba, John Garang Kon and Robert Colman***  
**- *My Name is Sud (Soo-d)* - Blacktown Arts Centre**

Evocatively written by five authors, *My Name Is Sud* dramatises intergenerational relations between young and older Sudanese living in Australia. This script is a testimony to the complexities of settlement for new and emerging refugee communities in the multicultural landscape. Seamlessly merging the local with the global, *My Name is Sud* expressly captures the spirit of Sudanese Australian young people in all their diversity and vibrancy. In so doing, this text gives voice to the concerns and aspirations of a recently arrived community, sensitively exploring encounters between the different social and cultural milieux that young people navigate and negotiate in their everyday.

This play wrestles with the emotional and material, articulating the burdens of the young in nurturing and often potent exchanges between characters. "*I know who I am. I would like you to know who I am*" perhaps best encapsulates what *My Name Is Sud* is all about, and represents a poignant insight into the world of young Sudanese Australians in their own voices and on their own terms.

***Ouyang Yu - The English Class - Transit Lounge Publishing***

Jing, the protagonist in *The English Class*, fervently believes that learning English and migration will lead to a better life than the one he lives as a truck driver in post-cultural revolution China. As Jing struggles with the complexities of the English language, its many translational incompatibilities with his mother tongue and vice versa, his belief in the transformative power of English becomes a driving force. Yu's Jing is an anti-hero armed with a fragmentary and clever jouissance that ultimately confirms his melancholic disposition. His ambition ultimately leads to his downfall.

***The English Class* provides a portrait of an all-but-vanished Maoist China, before the embrace of private enterprise, as well as reflections on how race and language inflect identity and become exclusionary markers in Australia. This text also explores the fictionality of the world outside the literary fictional text. In Yu's italicised reflections, the process of writing, novel-making, reader expectations and most interestingly, writing in a second language and how it is received in the literary establishment become interstitial concerns: 'does second-language writing, if there is such a thing, reduce its importance ... does it make it second rate, secondary?' Yu's immersion and extrapolation of the self out of the text confirms the agonistic and playful nature of his writing. The mistranslations and misappropriations are cleverly placed to probe the fallacies and vagaries of exile in Australia.**