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Short-list for Kibble and Dobbie Awards for women writers announced

Perpetual today announced this year's short-list for two of Australia's most prestigious writing awards, the Nita B. Kibble Literary Award for Women Writers and the Dobbie Encouragement Award.

The Kibble Literary Award recognises the work of an established Australian female writer, the winner of which receives a \$25,000 prize, whilst the Dobbie Award is worth \$5,000 and recognises the work of a first published Australian female writer. Since the inception of the Kibble and Dobbie Awards in 1994, Perpetual has distributed nearly \$300,000 on their behalf to some of Australia's leading female authors.

Short-listed for the Awards are:

Kibble Literary Award:

- **Georgia Blain** for *'Births Deaths and Marriages: true tales'*
- **Jacqueline Kent** for *'An Exacting Heart: the story of Hephzibah Menuhin'*
- **Kathleen Stewart** for *'The After Life: a memoir'*

Dobbie Encouragement Award:

- **Darleen Bungey** for *'Arthur Boyd: a life'*
- **Toni Jordan** for *'Addition'*
- **Claire Thomas** for *'Fugitive Blue'*

Perpetual's Group Executive for Perpetual Private Wealth, Mr John Nesbitt, said Ms Dobbie would have been honoured to know that the awards she established are now amongst the most highly sought after and prestigious writing prizes in Australia.

"As the trustee for Ms Dobbie, Perpetual is privileged and honoured to be associated with these awards," Mr Nesbitt said.

Chair of the Kibble and Dobbie Awards judging panel, Ms Jerelynn Brown, said the panel was delighted to receive 104 books this year, an all time high number of entries.

"The theme of the awards, women's life writing, was reflected in a strong representation of biographies and memoirs along with many remarkable works of imagination. The splendid field of entrants illustrates the depth of talent amongst Australian women writers."

The Awards were established in the will of Ms Nita May Dobbie, a librarian and writer who was concerned with the difficulties faced by female writers and recognised the need to foster women's writing in the community.

The objective of the Awards is to benefit women writers of a published book of fiction or non-fiction classified as 'life writing', to advance Australian literature and to help provide incentive for female writers. The work must be written and published during the period of the Award and describe day to day Australian life.

Ms Dobbie named the Kibble award after her aunt, Ms Nita Bernice Kibble, who raised her and was the first woman to be appointed a librarian with the State Library of New South Wales. Ms Kibble was also a founding member of the Australian Institute of Librarians.

The winners of the Awards will be announced on Wednesday 3 June 2009.

For further information, please contact:

Susan Morey

General Manager – Group Public Affairs and Investor Relations

Perpetual Limited

Telephone: 02 9229 3936 Mobile: 0409 746 385

APPENDIX

2009 Kibble and Dobbie Awards

Short-listed for the Dobbie Literary Award for a first published book

Darleen Bungey

Arthur Boyd: a life

Published by Allen & Unwin

This is a biography of rare insight and passion. It delves deeply into Boyd's life, as well as his art, and offers new insights into both. Written with the intensity and complexity of a fine novel, *'Arthur Boyd: a life'*, provides historical context and psychological authenticity in this comprehensive account of the artist's life and work.

Boyd comes alive in these pages, through his letters, his painting and his relationships with his family, other painters and notables of the era – and of course, his deep and abiding relationship with the Australian bush. As well as bringing a fresh eye to the work, the biography describes an important historical period in Australian art and letters.

Toni Jordan

Addition

Published by Text Publishing

Tony Jordan's first novel tells the story of Grace Vandenburg, a woman who, at the age of eight, began to count. Now in her mid 30s, her life is governed by counting: numbers, time, and measurements. No longer is Grace able to hold down a job, but she invents a rich secret life, *and* develops a vigorous relationship with a real man. At his suggestion, Grace goes to therapy to get to the bottom of her 'problem' and when that doesn't work, accepts the drugs as prescribed. This creates more problems than it solves. Finally, at crisis point, Grace takes control and begins to rebuild her life.

This novel is imaginative and thoughtful. Through Grace's voice Jordan expresses the depths of anxiety and trepidation; the heights of lust and joy, and the contrast between disappointment and triumph. *'Addition'* questions whether the treatment can be worse than the cure, and the answer to that equation goes to the heart of what makes a person tick.

Claire Thomas

Fugitive Blue

Published by Allen & Unwin

This is a beautifully written novel about the restoration of a small renaissance painting by an unknown artist, a painting distinguished by a patch of rare and expensive ultramarine pigment. As a young Melbourne conservator works to restore this fragment, finding her own truths in her contemporary life, possible stories of the painter and her tragic life begin to emerge, entwined with the hidden lives of those who might have owned the picture since.

Intricately structured, written with originality and poise, and ranging from renaissance Venice to present-day Melbourne, *'Fugitive Blue'* is a novel about art, the fragility of love and transformation. The fresh and vivid images evoked by Claire Thomas resonate with the reader long after the novel is finished.

2009 Kibble and Dobbie Awards

Short-listed for the Kibble Literary Award for women writers

Georgia Blain

Births Deaths Marriages: true tales

Published by Vintage, an imprint of Random House

In this outstanding Australian memoir, novelist Georgia Blain leaves the comparative safety of fiction to confront directly the memories of her bohemian family as it unraveled around her during the tumultuous 1970s. Blain is the daughter of feminist, broadcaster and author, Anne Deveson, and her father was a well-known ABC presenter, and so there is much here that is of more than personal interest: Deveson's decision to write a book about her son's drug addiction and his struggle with mental illness, her work for the Human Rights Commission and the significantly unnamed father's celebrity interviews, including a memorable confrontation with Germaine Greer at the height of her powers.

'Births Deaths Marriages' is also a beautifully crafted literary work that reflects deeply on many issues: the differences between fiction and memoir, the connections between private memory and forms of

representation such as photography, advertising, published writing and sound recordings; the connections between the lives of families and broader social history – explored in the patriarchal father's shell-shocked encounter with Greer; and the recurring patterns of everyday life that connect the generations. In a suggestive image, this subtly reflexive memoir is likened to 'a bolt of cloth ... rolled back to reveal more of a pattern that will repeat itself, with minor variations, over and over again'.

Jacqueline Kent

An Exacting Heart: the story of Hephzibah Menuhin

Published by Viking, an imprint of Penguin Books

American born and European educated Hephzibah Menuhin, a concert pianist esteemed by audiences internationally, married Australian Lindsay Nicholas, heir to the Aspro fortune, at the tender age of eighteen. The newlyweds took up residence at Lindsay's Victorian sheep property in 1938. They managed through the war, contributing to the community and raising their sons. During this period Hephzibah managed to keep her career alive and balanced this with meeting the needs of her young family, her marriage in the context of 1940s and 50s Australia; and her relationships, both personal and professional.

Jacqui Kent's biography of Hephzibah Menuhin combines her professional and empathetic approach with a brilliant and dynamic subject. The very best of biography tells a story, and crucially, shows the reader the meaning in it. Ms Kent has skillfully painted Hephzibah on the canvas of her time, but in very different social contexts as she travels between Australia, North America and Europe. In her nuanced and vital portrayal, Kent has revealed how a young woman of the world came to be a loving wife and mother, and why she moved on. *'An Exacting Heart'* is significant life writing and reflects the life of a woman who lived to the full.

Kathleen Stewart

The After Life: a memoir

Published by Vintage, an imprint of Random House

It is 2006, and from the hard-won peace of her Blue Mountains home, novelist Kathleen Stewart revisits the harrowing events of a single year in her adolescence: 1976. Those events include a toxic love affair with the dangerous Martin, rape, drug addiction, two suicide attempts and a spell in a psychiatric hospital. The crisis is fuelled by her father's own struggle for sanity and her mother's pathological competitiveness. If the child really is 'father to the man', then what kind of adult life is possible *after* 1976?

'The After Life' has the doubled perspective of a classic memoir, in which a woman looks back on her younger self while attempting to keep in play the very different perspectives of then and now. These layers resound from the opening line: 'Let me tell you about love'. As the ways of seeing shift restlessly across the thirty year gap separating innocence from experience, Kathleen Stewart recalls her own past with searing honesty in prose of forensic precision. And at every turn she is compelled to face the paradox of memory: 'surely, this is person is not me'.