

AN AUSTRALIAN LITERARY LEGACY



PERPETUAL
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“I am going to buy a hi-fi set and a kitchen stove.” Patrick White had clear intentions for the £500 he received as the first winner of the Miles Franklin Literary Award in 1957. Today, smart phones and microwaves may be the contemporary choice, but the aim of the award remains the same – the “advancement, improvement and betterment of Australian literature.”

The Miles Franklin Literary Award celebrated its 60th year in 2017 – a significant milestone for what is regarded as Australia’s most prestigious literary prize, awarded each year to a novel of the highest literary merit. Reflecting on past winners shines a light on some of Australia’s most talented writers and absorbing topics.

Established for writers by a writer

The Miles Franklin Literary Award was established through the will of ‘My Brilliant Career’ author, Miles Franklin. Miles Franklin had first-hand experience of the struggle to make a living as a writer and was the beneficiary of two literary prizes. She was also extremely conscious of the importance of fostering a uniquely Australian literature, writing “without an indigenous literature, people can remain alien in their own soil.”

Over the years, the prize has been awarded to a wide range of novels but always remained true to the terms of Miles Franklin’s will: “[the] prize shall be awarded for the Novel for the year which is of the highest literary merit and which must present

Australian Life in any of its phases ...”.

The emphasis on Australian life has caused confusion and sometimes even outrage. Australian Frank Moorhouse was deemed ineligible for consideration in 1993 because his novel *Grand Days* was set in Europe in the 1920s. (Moorhouse later won the award in 2001 for *Dark Palace*.) On the other hand, non-Australians are eligible if writing about Australian themes. English writer Matthew Kneale was the first non-Australian to be shortlisted for the Miles Franklin with his book *English Passengers* in 2000.

The terms of Miles’ will also stipulate that if no novel is deemed to be of sufficiently high standard, the Award can be given to a play – though this has never happened.

A writer’s club of distinction

In our view, the list of award winners reads like a ‘who’s who’ of great Australian writers. Thea Astley and Tim Winton share the honour of having received the Miles Franklin Award most times, both with four wins each.

Commenting on Tim Winton’s novel ‘*Breath*’, winner of the 2009 award, the Judging Panel wrote:

“*Breath* is a searing document about masculinity, about risk, and about young people’s desire to push the limits. Winton is at the height of his powers as a novelist, and this is his greatest love letter yet to the sea, to the coast of West Australia, and a compelling testimony to the role of surfing in Australian culture...”¹



	2015	SOFIE LAGUNA The Eye of the Sheep
	2011	KIM SCOTT That Deadman Dance
	2007	ALEXIS WRIGHT Carpentaria
	1999	MURRAY BAIL Eucalyptus
	1992	TIM WINTON Cloudstreet
	1989	PETER CAREY Oscar and Lucinda
	1980	JESSICA ANDERSON The Impersonators
	1972	THEA ASTLEY The Acolyte

Topics that celebrate and confront

Just as some of our most celebrated writers have been featured multiple times, so too have topics that both celebrate and challenge Australian life.

Novels that explore life in suburbia, compulsive gambling and Australians abroad all feature. As does a strong indigenous theme, illustrated by Kim Scott winning an award for 'Benang' in 2000 and 'That Deadman Dance' in 2011.

Commenting on the 2011 award, 'That Deadman Dance', the Judging Panel wrote:

"A powerful and innovative fiction that shifts our sense of what a historical novel can achieve. Its language is shaped by the encounter of Noongar and Australian English, producing new writing and speech."²

Perpetual is proud to honour the legacy of Miles Franklin as Trustee for the Miles Franklin Literary Award.

^{1,2} [Miles Franklin Literary Award](#)