

Media Release

2018 Miles Franklin Literary Award shortlist unveiled Celebrating the acclaimed authors and their heartbreakingly honest must-read Australian novels for 2018

Sunday 17 June 2018

Today's announcement of the shortlist for the prestigious Miles Franklin Literary Award 2018 includes two former winners, Kim Scott and Michelle de Kretser, and four other authors, all of whom have received literary accolades and are strong contenders to receive the \$60,000 literary prize in August.

Trustee of the award, Perpetual, alongside Copyright Agency's Cultural Fund, announced the six authors – four women and two men – on a shortlist that spans genres, histories and cultures. The novels offer readers a remarkable collection of stories dealing with disconnection, dispossession and violence as well as experiences of grief, hope and love. They reflect deeply and often humorously on Australian life in the past, present and future.

Distinctive to this year's shortlist is the literary talent present, including previous recipients of the award, two-time winner Kim Scott for *That Deadman Dance* (2011) and *Benang* (2000), and Michelle de Kretser for *Questions of Travel* (2013). Joining them is Eva Hornung, whose shortlisted novel *The Last Garden* won the Premier's Award in the 2018 Adelaide Festival Awards for Literature and has been shortlisted for the ALS Gold Medal; Gerald Murnane, who has been selected for the first time in his 44-year writing career despite having won much acclaim overseas; Felicity Castagna, for her first move away from her award-winning young adult and children's fiction with *No More Boats*; and Catherine McKinnon, an award-winning writer of novels, plays and short stories.

The shortlist shines true to the vision of esteemed *My Brilliant Career* author Stella Maria Sarah Miles Franklin, who established the award through her will to showcase significant and insightful literature that presents Australian life in any of its phases.

The 2018 Miles Franklin Literary Award Shortlist is:

- **NO MORE BOATS by Felicity Castagna (Giramondo Publishing):** A man, once a migrant himself, finds his world imploding. He is forced to retire, his wife has left him, and his children ignore him. The 2001 Tampa crisis is the background to his despair at the disappearance of the certainties he once knew.
- **THE LIFE TO COME by Michelle de Kretser (Allen & Unwin):** Revolving around three characters in Sydney, Paris and Sri Lanka, this novel is about the stories we tell and don't tell ourselves as individuals, societies and nations, and highlights how the past and future can change the present.
- **THE LAST GARDEN by Eva Hornung (Text Publishing):** When Matthias Orion shoots his wife and himself, on the same day their son Benedict returns from boarding school, a small religious community is shattered. Benedict is struck dumb with grief. Their pastor feels his authority challenged by the tragedy. Both must come to terms with the unknowable past and the frailties of being human.
- **STORYLAND by Catherine McKinnon (HarperCollins Publishers):** Set on Lake Illawarra, this is a compelling novel of five separate narratives which span four centuries. Ultimately all these characters are connected by blood, history, place and memory: together they tell the story of Australia.

- **BORDER DISTRICTS by Gerald Murnane (Giramondo Publishing):** Similar to the author himself, the narrator of this novel has moved from bustling Melbourne to a small town on the Wimmera Plains, where he intends to spend the last years of his life. Mediating on fragments of his past, exhaustively and compulsively, *Border Districts* explores the border land between life and death.
- **TABOO by Kim Scott (Picador Australia – Pan Macmillan Australia):** Set in present-day rural Western Australia, this novel tells the story of a group of Noongar people, who after many decades revisit a taboo area: the site of a massacre. *Taboo* explores how the Noongar and descendants of the family that initiated the massacre so long ago wrestle with the possibilities of reconciliation.

Speaking on behalf of the judging panel, Mitchell Librarian of the State Library of NSW, Richard Neville, said:

“The Miles Franklin 2018 shortlist engages with the complexities of Australian life in all of its phases, and the legacy of its timeless Indigenous past and its recent European present. All the novels explore how Australians connect with their complex stories, with their emotional histories, and with the legacy of colonisation. Each author in the shortlist considers what it means to live in a particular location, with unique and challenging vision. The vibrancy of contemporary Australian literature, and its relevance to thinking through the challenges of modern Australia, is confirmed with this diverse and intelligent shortlist.”

In addition to Richard Neville, the judging panel includes *The Australian* journalist and columnist Murray Waldren, Monash University book critic Dr Melinda Harvey, Sydney-based bookseller Lindy Jones, and Emeritus Professor Susan Sheridan.

Perpetual’s National Manager of Philanthropy, Caitriona Fay, congratulated the shortlisted authors.

“The Australian literary community continues to thrive as a result of Stella Miles Franklin’s trailblazing philanthropic endeavour more than 60 years ago. I’d like to congratulate the six shortlisted authors who, through their commitment and dedication, have created engaging novels that reflect Australian life. Perpetual is proud to act as Trustee for the Miles Franklin Literary Award, Australia’s most prestigious literature prize.”

The Copyright Agency’s Cultural Fund gives a \$5000 cash prize to each of the shortlisted authors. Chief Executive of the Copyright Agency Adam Suckling said, “What an exciting shortlist, with a great mix of emerging and established authors. Reading the shortlist is going to be a great pleasure and we are so pleased to be able to give these authors, representing the best of Australian writing, some tangible support for their stellar achievement.”

The winner of the Miles Franklin Literary Award 2018 will be announced in Melbourne on Sunday, 26 August 2018, and will receive \$60,000 in prize money for the novel judged as being ‘of the highest literary merit’ and which presents ‘Australian life in any of its phases’. Each of the 2018 shortlisted authors will receive \$5,000 from the Copyright Agency’s Cultural Fund.

For further information about the Miles Franklin Literary Award, visit <http://www.milesfranklin.com.au/>

For enquiries related to The Miles Franklin Literary Award, Perpetual, Copyright Agency’s Cultural Fund or to request an interview with finalists or judges please contact:

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About the Miles Franklin Literary Award

Perpetual is Trustee of the Miles Franklin Literary Award. The Award was established in 1954 in the will of *My Brilliant Career* author Stella Maria Sarah Miles Franklin to celebrate the Australian character and creativity. It supports the betterment of Australian literature by each year recognising the novel of the highest literary merit which presents Australian Life in any phase. The 2017 winner of the prize was Josephine Wilson for her novel *Extinctions*. Since first being awarded in 1957, the Award has distributed more than \$1.1 million to authors.

Copyright Agency's Cultural Fund has been a proud supporter of the Miles Franklin Award since 2004, granting more than half a million dollars to this premier Australian literary prize.

www.milesfranklin.com.au

About Perpetual Philanthropic Services

Perpetual is one of Australia's largest managers and distributors of philanthropic funds with \$2.6 billion in funds under advice (as at 30 June 2017). Perpetual is trustee for over 1,000 charitable trusts and endowments and provides individuals and families with advice on establishing charitable foundations and structured giving programs. Perpetual also assists charities and not-for-profit organisations with investment advice and management.

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About the Copyright Agency and Cultural Fund

The Copyright Agency is an Australian not-for-profit organisation that has been standing up for creators for more than 40 years. We enable the reuse of copyright-protected words and images in return for fair payment to creators.

The Cultural Fund is the philanthropic arm of the Copyright Agency, contributing meaningfully to a wide range of Australian cultural, educational and artistic programs and creators. Through its support it fosters greater understanding and engagement of national culture both locally and internationally.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION – 2018 MILES FRANKLIN SHORTLIST



Felicity Castagna
No More Boats

BIOGRAPHY:

Felicity Castagna won the 2014 Prime Minister's Literary Award for Young Adult Fiction for her previous novel, *The Incredible Here and Now*, which was shortlisted for the Children's Book Council of Australia and NSW Premier's Literary Awards, and adapted for the stage by the National Theatre of Parramatta. Her collection of short stories, *Small Indiscretions*, was named an *Australian Book Review* Book of the Year. Castagna's work has appeared on radio and television, and she runs the storytelling series Studio Stories.

JUDGES' COMMENTS:

This novel brings to life an Italo-Australian migrant family living in Parramatta, that historic town at the border of Sydney's western suburbs, on the river 'where salt water met fresh and the boats could go no further'. It is 2001, the time of the Tampa crisis when the prime minister intoned, 'we will decide who comes to this country and the circumstances in which they come.' His words resonate with Antonio Martone, unhinged by grief for his dead friend and his forced retirement from the building business they shared. When he paints 'No More Boats' on his front yard, his alienation from his English-born wife and adult son and daughter is complete.

Castagna skilfully dramatizes the generational conflicts as well as the everyday multiculturalism of the Martones' relationships with family and friends. Borders, boats and homes are powerful motifs in this novel. It conveys a vivid sense of a decisive historical moment, as the events of 9/11 loom – events that generated 'all those connections between Muslims in planes and Muslims on boats' that have marked Australian life ever since.



Michelle de Kretser
The Life to Come

BIOGRAPHY:

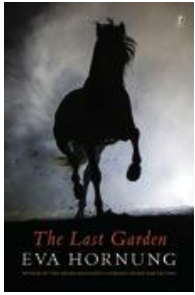
Michelle de Kretser was born in Sri Lanka and emigrated to Australia when she was 14. Educated in Melbourne and Paris, Michelle has worked as a university tutor, an editor and a book reviewer. She is the author of *The Rose Grower*, *The Hamilton Case*, which won the Commonwealth Prize (SE Asia and Pacific region) and the UK Encore Prize, and *The Lost Dog*, which was widely praised by writers such as AS Byatt, Hilary Mantel and William Boyd and won a swag of awards, including: the 2008 NSW Premier's Book of the Year Award and the Christina Stead Prize for Fiction, and the 2008 ALS Gold Medal. *The Lost Dog* was also shortlisted for the Vance Palmer Prize for Fiction, the Western Australian Premier's Australia-Asia Literary Award, the Commonwealth Writers' Prize (Asia-Pacific Region) and Orange Prize's Shadow Youth Panel. It was longlisted for the Man Booker Prize and the Orange Prize for Fiction. Her last novel, *Questions of Travel*, received 14 honours, including winning the 2013 Miles Franklin Literary Award.

JUDGES' COMMENTS:

The Life to Come is a keenly satirical novel that skewers and exposes contemporary fads and foibles. It is told through multiple perspectives, linked by the appearance or dominance of Pippa who is known to all the other characters, before the focus is passed on to the next person in the story. Pippa is a deeply unlikeable woman who is able to impress people because of her confident belief in her own empty talents but who is casually cruel and blithely unaware of others' feelings and motivations for all of her self-vaunted ability to empathise with them.

Through Pippa's flawed character, de Kretser critiques contemporary society's preoccupation with connections made through social media that are ultimately not about meaningful relationships but about posturing. Actions are done for effect but rarely for effectiveness, and the ethical high ground claimed without an underlying morality.

The author's deft perceptions extend towards the way Australians see themselves and the world and how the world sees Australians and Australia. Her clear-eyed and unsentimental observations of academia, the literary world and family units add a touch of ironic humour, while at times her graceful descriptions of place shimmer with jewel-like clarity. *The Life to Come* is a discerning, at times flaying, novel of contemporary Australian mores.



Eva Hornung
The Last Garden

BIOGRAPHY:

Eva Hornung, formerly published as Eva Sallis, was born in Bendigo and now lives in rural South Australia. Her first novel *Hiam* won the Australian/Vogel Literary Award in 1997 and the Nita May Dobbie Award in 1999 while *The Marsh Birds* won the Asher Literary Award in 2005. The highly acclaimed *Dog Boy* was shortlisted for numerous prizes and won the Prime Minister's Literary Award in 2010. *The Last Garden* won the Premier's Award in the 2018 Adelaide Festival Awards for Literature and has been shortlisted for the ALS Gold Medal.

JUDGES' COMMENTS:

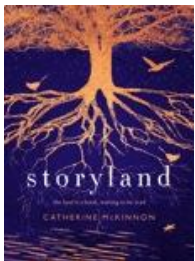
Thought-provoking ideas about faith, morals, violence, grief, the enduring spirit of animals and the strengths and weaknesses of people underlie this beautifully crafted tale that is compelling, profoundly affecting and philosophically challenging.

Warheit ("truth" in German) is a settlement of exiles whose parents fled persecution to await the Messiah's return in a new land. The wait has been long, however, and their spiritual leader is aware the townsfolks' faith is wavering.

A murder-suicide shatters the complacent community. Benedict, a 15-year-old returning home from boarding school, is affected most of all; in confusion and despair, unable to remain inside his dead parents' home and stricken dumb by the horror he has encountered, he isolates himself in the family barn to coexist with the horses and fowls.

The town's humane if self-doubting Pastor Helfgott watches over Benedict's grief as the seasons year by. Both boy and cleric have to learn to accommodate the enigmas of the past, the fragilities of the human condition, and the painful uncertainties of the future.

In forensic prose that has a richly poetic edge, Eva Hornung gifts the reader an assured, multilayered novel that is as moving as it is confronting, exposing human foibles with subtlety and empathy.



Catherine McKinnon
Storyland

BIOGRAPHY:

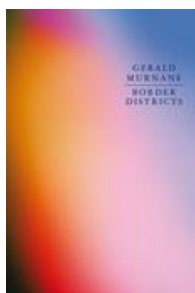
Award-winning playwright and novelist, Catherine McKinnon studied theatre performance and cinema at Flinders University, and worked for the Red Shed Theatre and later the State Theatre Company as a theatre director and writer. Her play *Tilt* was selected for the 2010 National Playwriting Festival, and *As I Lay Dreaming* won the 2010 Mitch Matthews Award. Her short stories, reviews and articles have appeared in *Transnational Literature*, *Text Journal*, *RealTime*, *Narrative* and *Griffith Review*. Most recently, McKinnon, along with four other writers, won the Griffith Review Novella 111 Award, 2015, and her novella 'Will Martin' was published by *Griffith Review* in October of that year. She currently lectures in Performance and Creative Writing at the University of Wollongong.

JUDGES' COMMENTS:

Storyland is a cleverly woven novel spanning centuries, told through the perspectives of five main characters, who reflect different aspects of Australian history and experience. It is set firmly and recognisably in the Illawarra district of NSW and mirrors the stages in settler occupation of the region: explorer, convict, farmer, contemporary.

Whether the storyteller is the blustering cabin boy accompanying Bass and Flinders on their exploratory journey south, or the hardened convict desperately wanting to improve his situation, the determined dairy farmer in 1900 who faces discrimination because of her past and her siblings, or the curious young girl caught up in a neighbour's dramas in the late 90s, or the fearful woman of the near future who suffers the catastrophes of climate change and societal breakdown, their narratives also resonate with a strong Indigenous presence. The characters are connected by kinship or history, but all witness – or perpetrate – violence, and all are affected by the landscape which binds and influences their actions.

The structure of the novel breaks and bleeds as it progresses forward in time, until it reaches the far-distant future and retreats back through the years. The writing convincingly reflects the different characters' voices, captures the contours of the region and allows some mysteries to remain unsolved so that the reader has a full sense of the potency of story-telling. A vivid and evocative novel of place, time and Australian life.



Gerald Murnane
Border Districts

BIOGRAPHY:

Gerald Murnane was born in Melbourne in 1939. He is the author of eleven works of fiction, including *Tamarisk Row*, *The Plains*, *Inland*, *Barley Patch*, *A History of Books*, *A Million Windows*, and *Border Districts*, and a collection of essays, *Invisible Yet Enduring Lilacs*. He is a recipient of an Emeritus Fellowship from the Australia Council, the Patrick White Literary Award, the Melbourne Prize for Literature, the Adelaide Festival Literature Award for Innovation and the Victorian Premier's Literary Award.

JUDGES' COMMENTS:

The occasion for this novel is the narrator's move to a remote district near the border to be alert to what might be described as the landscape of his own mind. We are told that what we are reading is a 'report', intended only for the narrator's own files, on the series of mental images that are set in train by a very ordinary sight: a tiny church and its porch window that is passed daily on the morning walk to the shops and the post office. From here, we follow the narrator down certain rabbit holes into his history that centre on books read, people recalled, objects owned and locations visited.

The focus is on paying attention to the vines of thoughts and feelings, then and now, that wind around and cling to these things. The telling is lyrical, precise, highly self-aware and, at times, disarmingly humorous. The result is a subjective portrait of certain religious, geographical, architectural, social and cultural textures of life as it has been lived in Australia over the past seven decades. This novel, a consolidation of the idiosyncratic aesthetic programme Murnane has pursued throughout his career, gestures towards the capriciousness of consciousness, the relationship between fiction and fact and the purpose of writing itself.



Kim Scott
Taboo

BIOGRAPHY:

Kim Scott grew up on the South Coast of Western Australia. As a descendant of those who first created human society along that edge of ocean, he is proud to be one among those who call themselves Noongar. He began writing for publication when he became a teacher of English and has had poetry and short stories published in a number of anthologies. *That Deadman Dance* has won several awards, including the 2011 Miles Franklin Award and the 2011 Commonwealth Writers' Prize for Fiction – regional winner. Kim lives in Coolbellup, Western Australia, and is currently employed at the Curtin Health Innovation Research Institute, Curtin University.

JUDGES' COMMENTS:

Taboo is a compelling novel about an issue at the heart of this country – the possibilities of reconciliation between Aboriginal Australia and White Australia. Kim Scott builds his novel on the past, a terrible massacre of the Noongar people in southern Western Australia. This distant, but still living past, drives the narrative of *Taboo* which tells the story of a commemoration, initiated by a local historical society, of the massacre. This event draws into the orbit of the small country town of Kopalup, a cast of characters – Noongar and European – whose messy, sometimes tragic, always truthful and often spiritual lives, collide around its preparation.

Scott writes with deft, tight clarity about intergenerational trauma, memory and legacy. His rich and poetic prose is unsentimental: instead underpinning this story is a sensitivity, humour and candour which gives it its strength of truthfulness, and therefore hope. Scott suggests that ordinary lives – lived with flaws of authenticity, open to knowledge and the mysterious, and an acceptance of the vagaries of human beings – can heal the past. The complexity of this story unfolds with humour, pace and beautifully crafted prose which mixes this elixir of tragedy, survival and hope into a powerful tale of the possibilities of the wisdom of people and the potential for reconciliation.