

Media Release

Love, death, power and ego permeate 2017 Miles Franklin Literary Award shortlist

60 years ago, author Miles Franklin had a vision: to advance and better Australian literature. As the shortlist for the 2017 Miles Franklin Literary Award is revealed, it's fair to say Miles herself would be delighted to see five first-time nominees, each with their own distinct voice and writing style, recognised in the Award's jubilee year.

Announced today by Perpetual and Copyright Agency's Cultural Fund, the shortlist gives readers an emotional and entertaining insight into Australian life.

The 2017 Miles Franklin Literary Award shortlist is:

- **AN ISOLATED INCIDENT by Emily Maguire (Pac Macmillan Australia):** An intriguing exploration of two women, a murder, and media and masculinity set in a tough regional town.
- **THE LAST DAYS OF AVA LANGDON by Mark O'Flynn (University of Queensland Press):** A warmly empathetic portrayal of a misunderstood but spirited outsider who refuses to concede to society's conventional expectations.
- **THEIR BRILLIANT CAREERS by Ryan O'Neill (Black Inc):** A rich and entertaining satire featuring 15 biographies of imagined Australian writers whose bizarre and exaggerated lives are neatly slotted into real literary history.
- **WAITING by Philip Salom (Puncher & Wattmann):** A deftly executed and very human novel about a pair of odd couples, who are both waiting for something or someone to change their lives.
- **EXTINCTIONS by Josephine Wilson (UWA Publishing):** A clever and compassionate novel exploring ageing, adoption, grief and remorse; rescue and resistance to rescue.

Speaking on behalf of the judging panel, State Library of NSW Mitchell Librarian, Richard Neville, said: "Like all great literature, the five novels on the 2017 Miles Franklin shortlist explore the restorative power of love, the pernicious influence of the past upon the present, the tragedy of the present avoiding the past, the challenge of unconventional identities, the interweaving of lives across communities, the devastation of grief, and the warzone that is the media, masculinity and a small country town.

"Yet again the shortlist celebrates the diversity of voices and approaches to writing about Australian life. None of these novels draw on familiar tropes of Australian literature – yet each brings a distinctive pitch of truth and insight into the Australian experience."

Mr Neville is joined on the judging panel by *The Australian* journalist and columnist, Murray Waldren, Sydney bookseller, Lindy Jones, book critic Dr Melinda Harvey and Emeritus Professor, Susan Sheridan.

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

“Sixty years after the award was established, the Australian literary community continues to thrive as a result of the trailblazing philanthropic endeavour of Stella Maria Sarah Miles Franklin.

“I’d like to congratulate the shortlisted authors, who through their commitment and dedication to the literary community not only provide Australian readers with a must-read list of novels, but also continue the Miles Franklin legacy.”

The Copyright Agency’s Chief Executive, Adam Suckling, said: “We are so pleased to be supporting Australian writing through our longstanding Cultural Fund partnership. It’s always a joy to open the cover on a new reading experience and these five novelists have developed enticing and beautiful stories. In this 60th year especially, Miles Franklin would be pleased.”

Each of the 2017 shortlisted authors will receive \$5,000 from the Copyright Agency’s Cultural Fund.

The 2017 winner, to be announced on 7 September at the State Library of New South Wales, will receive \$60,000.

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 for the Miles Franklin Literary Award. The Award was established in 1954 by the estate 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 of its phases. The 2015 winner of the prize was Sofie Laguna for her novel *The Eye of the Sheep*.

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 31 December 2016). Perpetual is trustee for approximately 1000 [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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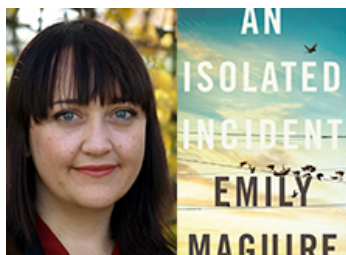
About the Copyright Agency and Cultural Fund

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.

The Copyright Agency provides simple ways for people to reproduce, store and share words, images and other creative content, in return for fair payment to creators. We are committed to encouraging the development of lively and diverse markets for published works with our range of [commercial licences](#) and through our [Cultural Fund](#).

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 2017 MILES FRANKLIN SHORTLIST



Emily Maguire

An Isolated Incident

BIOGRAPHY:

Emily Maguire is the author of the novels *Taming the Beast* (2004), an international bestseller and finalist for the Dylan Thomas Prize and the Kathleen Mitchell Award, *The Gospel According to Luke* (2006), *Smoke in the Room* (2009) and *Fishing for Tigers* (2012).

Emily enjoys a high-profile in Australia as a social commentator, with her articles and essays on sex, religion and culture having been published in newspapers and journals including *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Financial Review*, *The Big Issue* and *The Griffith Review*.

SYNOPSIS:

When 25-year-old Bella Michaels is brutally murdered in the small town of Strathdee, the community is stunned and a media storm descends.

Unwillingly thrust into the eye of that storm is Bella's beloved older sister, Chris, a barmaid at the local pub, whose apparent easy going nature conceals hard-won wisdom and the kind of street-smarts only experience can bring.

As Chris is plunged into despair and searches for answers, reasons, explanation – anything – that could make even the smallest sense of Bella's death, her ex-husband, friends and neighbours do their best to support her. But as the days tick by with no arrest, Chris's suspicion of those around her grows.

An Isolated Incident is a psychological thriller about everyday violence, the media's obsession with pretty dead girls, the grip of grief and the myth of closure, and the difficulties of knowing the difference between a ghost and a memory, between a monster and a man.

JUDGES' COMMENTS:

An Isolated Incident begins like a crime thriller – a young woman, Bella, murdered; a grieving sister; and a truck-stop country town. But the novel doesn't dwell on the crime, or its resolution. Instead it focuses on Bella's older sister, Chris, and May, a young reporter sent to sensationalise the story. Emily Maguire creates characters whose complexities and fragilities explore despair, loss and grief, and also the redemptive power of love and empathy, no matter how ineptly articulated.

Both Chris and May have back stories of failed relationships, but Maguire's narrative avoids cliché and sentiment. Chris relies on her ex-husband Nate to deal with the aftermath of the murder, while May struggles with the fallout from the sudden termination of her relationship with a married man. These are not censorious but emotionally real and visceral relationships. Chris plummets into deep grief: Nate's ministrations to her despair, despite the bitter failure of their marriage, form the tender heart of this remarkable novel.

Maguire's novel explores masculinity and violence, both personal and corporate, set in a tough regional town. Maguire mediates on the negotiations and compromises of power and sex, and the violence that circulates around them. At the heart of this absorbing novel are people, whose lives defy convention but in whom Maguire embeds us completely. Maguire writes her readers into the heart of Australian masculinity in this powerful novel of grief, loss and empathy.



Mark O'Flynn

The Last Days of Ava Langdon

BIOGRAPHY:

Mark O'Flynn's fiction and poetry have been widely published in Australian journals as well as overseas. His novels include *Grassdogs* and *The Forgotten World*, and he has published five collections of poems, most recently *The Soup's Song*. He has also published the comic memoir *False Start* and a collection of short fiction, *White Light*. He lives in the Blue Mountains.

Author photo credit: Barbara Fitzgerald

SYNOPSIS:

Ava Langdon is often not herself. Having fled her early life in New Zealand and endured the loss of her children, she now lives as a recluse in the Blue Mountains. Regarded by locals as a colourful eccentric, she dresses in men's clothes and fearlessly pursues her artistic path.

All that matters to Ava is her writing. Words offer beauty and a sense of possibility when so much has been lost. But can they offer her redemption in her last days?

Poetic, poignant, and at times bitingly funny, *The Last Days of Ava Langdon* takes us into the mind of a true maverick.

JUDGES' COMMENTS:

Ava Langdon is an eccentric recluse living in a dilapidated shack on the outskirts of Katoomba. The once critically acclaimed author of two published novels (and a number that weren't), she has a gender-fluid identity and puts on an Oscar Wilde persona to protect her fragile ego. Over the course of a day she posts her finished manuscript, stops a newly widowed woman from jumping off a cliff, slashes her way through town, has an accident and is reunited with her long-lost son.

The beauty of this novel is in its lively and colourful language and the warmly empathetic portrayal of a misunderstood but spirited outsider (based loosely on the real-life author Eve Langley) who refuses to conform to society's narrow expectations. Her disregard for convention does not get in the way of her keen interest in how others live. Ava's mind is full of rush and creativity, imagination and fury, tenderness and contempt, of self-importance and self-abrogation. The material poverty she lives in does not equate to poverty of spirit. To others, her life might be sad and pitiful, but Ava never succumbs to self-pity, taking – and making – her joys wherever and however she pleases. Words have not failed her, as people have, and they provide her with an inner nourishment whatever her physical state may be. Gleeful, unrepentant, brave and admirable, Ava Langdon is a marvellous creation, and this vivid novel a tribute to the whole process of creating – art, literature, and life.



Ryan O'Neill

Their Brilliant Careers

BIOGRAPHY:

Ryan O'Neill is the author of *The Weight of a Human Heart* and *Their Brilliant Careers*.

He was born in Glasgow in 1975 and has lived in Africa, Europe and Asia before settling in Newcastle, Australia, with his wife and two daughters. His fiction has appeared in *The Best Australian Stories*, *The Sleepers Almanac*, *Meanjin*, *New Australian Stories*, *Wet Ink*, *Etchings* and *Westerly*. His work has won the Hal Porter and Roland Robinson awards and been shortlisted for the Queensland Premier's Steele Rudd Award and the Age Short-Story Prize. He teaches at the University of Newcastle.

Author photo credit: Rachel Saunders

SYNOPSIS:

Absurd, original and highly addictive . . .

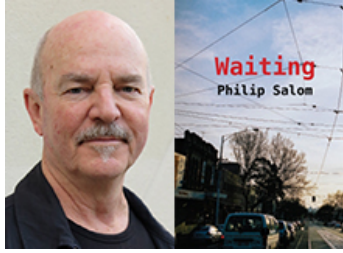
In *Their Brilliant Careers*, Ryan O'Neill has written a hilarious novel in the guise of sixteen biographies of (invented) Australian writers. Meet Rachel Deverall, who discovered the secret source of the great literature of our time – and paid a terrible price for her discovery. Meet Rand Washington, hugely popular sci-fi author (of *Whiteman of Cor*) and inveterate racist. Meet Addison Tiller, master of the bush yarn, "The Chekhov of Coolabah", who never travelled outside Sydney.

Their Brilliant Careers is a playful set of stories, linked in many ways, which together form a memorable whole. A wonderful comic tapestry of the writing life, this unpredictable and intriguing work takes Australian writing in a whole new direction . . .

JUDGES' COMMENTS:

The biographical narrative is a fundamental component of any history: it's a scaffold around which the status and authority of a text can be conferred. Ryan O'Neill's startling inventive novel, *Their Brilliant Careers*, is a rich and entertaining upending of this scholarly device, set in the field of literary history. O'Neill cleverly plays on the idea of a literary cannon and its often circular and self-referential foundations, in which luck – as much as talent – can develop, and end, a career. Indeed the novel's very title is a play on Miles Franklin's first novel *My Brilliant Career*. O'Neill has imagined some fifteen biographies of Australian writers – literary authors, poets, hacks, editors and academics – whose bizarre and exaggerated lives he neatly slots into real literary history.

But *Their Brilliant Careers* is much more than satire. It is a beautifully crafted, carefully plotted, maze of a novel which contests its genre, through wit, absurdity, and clichéd tropes of literature and literary life. O'Neill questions authorship, authenticity, whether talent is natural or nurtured, and the very origins of culture. O'Neill effortlessly captures the smooth detachment of the biographical format, but at the same time trips it up with outrageous insertions and risible comments. *Their Brilliant Careers* is a sparkling, intelligent and fun riposte to the manufacturing of history.



Philip Salom

Waiting

BIOGRAPHY:

Philip Salom is a poet and novelist originally from Western Australia. Several of his collections have won national and international acclaim, including the Commonwealth Poetry prize in London, and his two previous novels between them have won the WA Premier's Prize, a Canberra Times Book of the Year, and shortlisting for the ASL Gold Medal. His recent poetry collection *Alterworld* is a trilogy of his earlier major works *Sky Poems* and *The Well Mouth* and the new *Alterworld*. He was awarded the Christopher Brennan award for "poetry of sustained quality and distinction." His novel *Waiting* is set in North Melbourne, where he now lives.

SYNOPSIS:

Waiting is a story of two odd couples in prose as marvellously idiosyncratic as its characters. Big is a hefty cross-dresser and Little is little. Both are long used to the routines of boarding house life in the inner suburbs of Melbourne, but Little, with the prospect of an inheritance, is beginning to indulge in the great Australian dream, which has Big worried. Little's cousin, Angus, is a solitary man who designs lake-scapes for city councils, and strangely constructed fireproof houses for the bushfire zone. A handy man, he meets Jasmin an academic who races in her ideas as much as in her runners. Her head is set on publishing books on semiotics and her heart is turned towards her stalled personal life. All four are waiting, for something if not someone.

JUDGES' COMMENTS:

Philip Salom's deftly executed novel could be seen as a lyrical variation on the Lennon line, 'Life is what happens while you're making other plans'. *Waiting* centres on a pair of odd couples: the physically disparate duo of timid/tiny Little and pontificating heavyweight cross-dresser Big, who haunt the inner-city margins; and the mind/body mix of athletic academic Jasmin, a cynical semiotician, and solitary handyman Angus, who constructs public gardens to expiate the ashes of his past. All four are waiting, in Godot-like pauses and with greater or lesser awareness, for some thing or someone to change their lives.

Salom interweaves their tales, with walk-ons by an eclectic cast of eccentrics, to dissect the vulnerabilities of the human condition (loneliness, fear of intimacy, powerlessness, guilt), the power of the past to haunt us, the fear of the future to mire us, and the redemptive effects of love and acceptance.

Waiting is poignant, compassionate and droll; it is never maudlin nor idealised. Salom's prose, poetic and frequently playful, bestows a multiplicity of incidental insights en route, yet never condescends to its subjects nor patronises its readers. As rollicking as it is original and affecting, *Waiting* is a highly readable addition to Australian literature.



Josephine Wilson

Extinctions

BIOGRAPHY:

Josephine Wilson is a Perth-based writer. Her writing career began in the area of performance. Her early works included *The Geography of Haunted Place*, with Erin Hefferon, and *Customs*. Her first novel was *Cusp*, (UWA Publishing, 2005). Josephine has lectured and taught in the tertiary sector. She is the busy parent of two children and works as a sessional staff member at Curtin University, where she teaches in the Humanities Honours Program, in Creative Writing and in Art and Design history. She completed her Masters of Philosophy at Queensland University and her PhD at UWA. Her novel *Extinctions* (UWA Publishing, 2016) was the winner of the inaugural Dorothy Hewett Prize.

SYNOPSIS:

He hated the word 'retirement', but not as much as he hated the word 'village', as if ageing made you a peasant or a fool. Herein lives the village idiot.

Professor Frederick Lothian, retired engineer, world expert on concrete and connoisseur of modernist design, has quarantined himself from life by moving to a retirement village. His wife, Martha, is dead and his two adult children are lost to him in their own ways. Surrounded and obstructed by the debris of his life – objects he has collected over many years and tells himself he is keeping for his daughter – he is determined to be miserable, but is tired of his existence and of the life he has chosen.

When a series of unfortunate incidents forces him and his neighbour, Jan, together, he begins to realise the damage done by the accumulation of a lifetime's secrets and lies, and to comprehend his own shortcomings. Finally, Frederick Lothian has the opportunity to build something meaningful for the ones he loves.

Humorous, poignant and galvanising by turns, *Extinctions* is a novel about all kinds of extinction – natural, racial, national and personal – and what we can do to prevent them.

JUDGES' COMMENTS:

Fred Lothian is a man in denial: a brilliant engineer, now retired and widowed, he still believes that 'for an engineer there was a bridge for every situation' - that a problem which cannot be solved cannot be acknowledged. So he looks away from his son's tragic injury, his adopted Aboriginal daughter's cultural loss, and obsesses about his failing powers. Only the intervention of his next-door neighbour at the retirement village, Jan, forces him out of his self-absorption long enough to bring both comedy and pathos into the story, and some degree of redemption. The setting is Perth, a place of recent migrants and recently displaced local people. In this clever and compassionate novel, Josephine Wilson explores ageing, adoption, grief and remorse; rescue and resistance to rescue. Her subject is extinctions both human (the Stolen Generation as well as individual deaths) and animal (the species extinctions that Caroline Lothian is researching for her exhibition). Images of extinct birds alternate with Fred's images of the wonders of modernist design, suggesting the interplay of opposing forces that have produced the dilemmas of today – just as memory and love emerge as the countervailing forces to Fred's blind egotism.