

**Arts Minister Peter Garrett announcing the Prime Minister's Literary Awards short list on 6 August 2008 at the NSW State Library in Sydney.**

It's a real pleasure to be at the Mitchell Library today, one of the great reading rooms in Australia incidentally, for the announcement of the short list for the inaugural Prime Minister's Literary Awards and to be joined by so many authors, some of whom Australians who love their literature will already know about and others of whom perhaps they will know more about in the future.

I'll begin by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land the Cadigal people of the Eora Nation and pay my respects to custodians past and present.

The genesis of these awards began way back in opposition when we were analysing proposals which would recognise significant contributions that our authors make to Australian culture.

I am somebody who is easily captured in a book store and seldom walks out without purchasing something, easily captured in a music store and seldom walks out without purchasing something and then finds that they bring these two stores together and I walk into a music and a bookstore and I come out heavily laden.

These awards are a wonderful opportunity for someone, who I think is like me perhaps who loves their literature and their culture, to get a bit of a sense of what's on, what's around, what's being produced.

The awards for both fiction and non-fiction reflect the rich wealth of writing talent we have in the country. They're going to provide Australians with an opportunity to celebrate what's unique about our culture, telling stories with Australian accents perhaps to local and international readers, and always in some way or other, challenging us to think about what it means to be Australian. I additionally hope that the awards will inspire a new generation of readers and writers, I reckon they will.

I hope the short list I'm announcing today provokes discussion and debate, just like a good book. That people will be drawn by the scope and diversity of subject matters that have been addressed as much as by the calibre and strength of the writing. And I'm particularly delighted that the short-listed titles include debut works as well as works by some of Australia's most renowned and respected literary figures.

In a very real sense they represent the current strength and future potential of the Australian literary scene. All involve yarns told by Australians from an Australian perspective but several involve the experiences of Australians in foreign countries or deal with truly international subjects. While Australian literature has long been adept at finding new and intriguing, sometimes innovative ways to explore the national psyche, I think it's refreshing to see

Australian authors, both fiction and non-fiction, looking beyond our shores for inspiration.

Before we get to the short lists, I just want to acknowledge the work of the two judging panels and thank them personally and on behalf of the Prime Minister for undertaking the not onerous but enormous, in fact mammoth task of tackling 103 non-fiction and 91 fiction entries.

So thank you to Peter Pierce, Hilary Charlesworth, Margaret Throsby, and John Doyle, as well as John Marsden and Sally Morgan, not with us, who are still recovering from the ordeal.

And it now gives me great pleasure to announce the short list for fiction and the short list for non-fiction for the inaugural Prime Minister's Literary Awards.

And I'm sure if I was here in my former life, there would be a drum roll.

The short list for the 2008 Prime Minister's Literary Award for fiction in alphabetical order by author is:

*The Zookeeper's War* by Steven Conte; *Sorry* by Gail Jones; *Burning In* by Mireille Juchau; *The Widow and her Hero* by Tom Keneally; *Jamaica: A novel* by Malcolm Knox; *The Complete Stories* by David Malouf and *El Dorado* by Dorothy Porter

And the short list for the 2008 Prime Minister's Literary Award for non-fiction in alphabetical order by author is:

*Napoleon: The Path to Power, 1769-1799* by Philip Dwyer; *A History of Queensland* by Raymond Evans; *My Life as a Traitor* by co-authors, Zarah Ghahramani with Robert Hillman; *Shakespeare's Wife* by Germaine Greer; *Vietnam: The Australian War* by Paul Ham; *Cultural Amnesia: Notes in the Margin of My Time* by Clive James and *Ochre and Rust: Artefacts and Encounters on Australian Frontiers* by Philip Jones.

Congratulations to all the nominees and best of luck.