

Media Release

Legacy continues as Perpetual awards Samuel Wagan Watson 2018 Patrick White Literary Award

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A 45-year legacy continues today as Perpetual announces multi-talented Samuel Wagan Watson as winner of the 2018 Patrick White Award. The Award, which carries prize money of \$20,000, acknowledges the poet, essayist, scriptwriter and performer for his contribution to Australian literature and culture.

The award recognises Wagan Watson's long history of poetry and writing that expresses powerful concepts of place and displacement, injury, resilience, healing, resistance and joy in formally inventive ways.

Reflecting on the achievement, Wagan Watson said: "I want to thank the judges of the award, and the greater literary community, for their support of my writing. I am humbled by their decision and it is difficult to convey the emotional impact of this prestigious award on myself, my wonderful family and my community.

"Patrick White is a major figure in Australian literature and I am honoured to be recognised alongside his name. It provides me with a deep sense of personal satisfaction for what I spend a great deal of my time thinking about and putting to the page for my readers.

"The award is a great motivator for me to continue writing and expressing how I perceive, and how we all relate to, the cultures and communities around us."

The Patrick White Literary Award was established by Nobel Prize winning author, Patrick White, to advance Australian literature "by encouraging the writing of novels, short stories, poetry and plays for publication or performance".

The award is managed by Perpetual as trustee of the philanthropic trust behind it, and many authors of different status and experience may qualify for consideration.

Perpetual General Manager – Community & Social Investment, Caitriona Fay, said: "Nearly five decades ago Patrick White used the proceeds from his 1973 Nobel Prize for Literature to establish this award, a simple act of philanthropy that has gone on to impact the lives of countless authors who have made an important contribution to Australian literature.

"We're honoured to be the trustee of the award and are proud to see Samuel Wagan Watson as the 2018 winner, who is a deep, captivating, and important voice in Australian literature and culture. We are also pleased to recognise the important contribution of Australian Indigenous writers to our art and culture."

The 2018 judging panel comprised of Dr Bernadette Brennan (Chair), Dr Julianne Lamond and Dr Felicity Plunkett.

Samuel Wagan Watson will be officially honoured for his contribution to Australian literature at the Patrick White Literary Award celebration at the State Library of Queensland's Talking Circle, on Wednesday 7 November 2018 at 5pm. Members of the public are welcome to attend. To RSVP email philanthropy@perpetual.com.au

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Note to editors

About the Patrick White Literary Award

The Patrick White Literary Award was established by the author with the proceeds of his 1973 Nobel Prize for Literature, and it is managed by Perpetual as trustee of the philanthropic trust behind it. The Award has been given annually to an author who has 'already made a contribution to Australian Literature' but who may not 'have received due recognition for that contribution'.

The broad terms of the Award mean that authors of different status and experience may qualify for consideration. Many winners have been older writers, but some have been younger, and all have been encouraged by it to continue writing. Poets, novelists, playwrights and short story writers have been among the now 44 recipients who have so far benefited from Patrick White's generosity and vision. Past winners include Christina Stead, David Campbell, Randolph Stow, Thea Astley, Fay Zwicky, Amanda Lohrey and Tony Birch.

The judging committee's current members are Dr Bernadette Brennan (Chair), Dr Julianne Lamond and Dr Felicity Plunkett.

About Samuel Wagan Watson and his work: The Judging Committee's citation

The winner of the 2018 Patrick White Literary Award is Samuel Wagan Watson.

Samuel Wagan Watson is a poet, essayist, scriptwriter and performer of Birri Gubba, Munanjali, German, Dutch and Irish descent. Born in Brisbane in 1972, he was just twenty-seven years old when his debut collection of poetry was awarded the 1999 Arts Queensland David Uniapon Award for 'the best writing of the year by an unpublished Indigenous writer'. The next year the manuscript - *Of Muse, Meandering and Midnight* - was published by the University of Queensland Press. Wagan Watson has steadily built a reputation as one of Australia's most exciting and talented poets.

Wagan Watson describes himself as a 'poet and raconteur'. His edgy and dynamic poems stretch between prose and poetry, bridge-like in their inclusion of allusions, documents, modes and tones. His work maps songlines – or poemlines – of place and displacement, and of injury, resilience, healing and resistance. The voice of these poems is mobile, imaginative, literary, wry and playful, all while negotiating the political and ethical subtleties the poems anatomise.

Wagan Watson's is a poetry of witness. There are poems about invasion, dispossession and violence – and poems about the ethics and angles of bearing witness. In 'Blacktracker... Blackwriter... Blacksubject', the speaker imagines himself as 'the blacktracker; following an ink-trail across a page of country, to find lost and wayward words', pursuing and pursued by moments of epiphany, betrayal and doubt, knowing that while the pen can be used to excavate truth, others have used the pen 'to overwrite the Dreaming'.

Place – rivers and jetties in Brisbane, the complex spaces of sung and erased histories, suburban acquisitiveness and urban flash and decay – is held in tension with motifs of wandering, itinerancy, mobility. Love – its power as wound and cure – circulates through the poems, especially in the 'No Naked Flames' sequence in his most recent collection *Love Poems and Death Threats* (2014). Childhood and memory are also central motifs. Lyn McCredde describes Wagan Watson's poetics in terms of an interplay between nostalgic and gothic modes of imagining which produces 'a haunting, uncanny, layered poetics of history.'

In 2001, following on from the publication of *Of Muse, Meandering and Midnight* a chapbook, *Hotel Bone*, appeared as part of Vagabond Press' Rare Objects series. In 2002 the University of Queensland Press published a second full-length collection *Itinerant Blues*. Wagan Watson's next UQP collection *Smoke-Encrypted Whispers* (2004) won the 2005 Kenneth Slessor Prize for Poetry and Book of the Year Award in the 2005 New South Wales Premier's Literary Awards.

In *Australian Humanities Review* Anita Heiss, reviewing *Smoke Encrypted Whispers*, notes the bridging in the work of an urgent need to speak against silence with a unique literary sensibility:

Much Indigenous poetry is written and indeed read because of what it has to say (rather than how it is written), because it provides the political voice that Indigenous people are denied in other areas of Australian society. Watson's writing is different though. He has mastered the craft of writing and also says what needs to be said as a blackfella. He is not guilty of what he charges other writers with in "Author's notes #2", *Some writers never cross beyond the second or third dimension of a page*.

Watson's insights and anecdotes are personal, almost voyeuristic to the reader, his topics universal and accessible, and his language is deliciously seductive. This reader wants more.

In 2004, Wagan Watson produced and performed an Opera, 'Die Dunkle Erde' (The Dark Earth), with composers William Barton and Stephen Leek: a gothic story of a German vampire who gets a taste for Aboriginal Dreaming. In 2006 it was selected by the ABC to represent Australia at the UNESCO International Rostrum of Composers in Paris.

Three legged dogs, and other poems was published by Picaro Press in 2005. *The Curse Words*, another chapbook in Vagabond Press' Rare Objects series, was published in 2011. *Love Poems and Death Threats*, Wagan Watson's most recent full-length collection, appeared in 2014. In this collection poems that satirise Australia's embrace of neoliberalism sit alongside others of great and quiet beauty. Poet and critic Michael Brennan describes the power and energy of the work when he writes of components in the poems that 'work perfectly as a bludgeon, vehicle and song of dissent against contemporary Australian ugliness'. Yet this critique is held in tension with the immense power of heart and imagination that energise this work, such that rage is directed, and does not short-circuit into rancour: 'his heart and humour are too large and sharp for that'. *Love Poems and Death Threats* was short-listed for the 2016 South Australian Premier's literary awards. *Monster's Ink*, a chapbook, was published in 2016 by Recent Work Press.

Wagan Watson's poetry ranges far and wide. It adorns the Eleanor Schonell bridge in St Lucia, Queensland and can be found in the International Space Platform! In 2005 Sam was commissioned to write haiku for the astronauts living and working there. Wagan Watson's poetry has been translated into seven languages including Bahasa Indonesia, German and Norwegian. His most recent essay 'Temporary Ghosts' captures some of the disorientation he experiences being feted around the world only to arrive back in Australia 'the static arena of a non-performance area, the non-exclusion zone for everything civil and unpoetic'.

The judges congratulate Samuel Wagan Watson on being chosen as winner of the Patrick White Award for 2018. He is a most worthy recipient. We look forward to his future publications.

About Perpetual Philanthropic Services

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