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Media Release

## **π.O. (Pi-O) wins 2024 Patrick White Literary Award**

Perpetual, as trustee, has announced Victorian-based author π.O. as the winner of the 2024 Patrick White Award.

The award recognises π.O.'s achievements as a legendary figure in the Australian poetry scene. He is a publisher and editor, and the author of many collections, including the epic works *24 hours*, *Fitzroy: The Biography* and *HEIDE*, winner of the 2020 Judith Wright Calanthe Award and shortlisted for the Prime Minister's Award for poetry.

π.O. will receive \$20,000 in recognition of his outstanding contribution to Australian literature.

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'. It is awarded to an author who has made an ongoing contribution to Australian literature but may not have received adequate recognition.

The Award is managed by Perpetual as trustee, and many authors of different status and experience may qualify for consideration.

Perpetual National Manager, Philanthropy & Non-Profit Services, Jane Magor said: "Australian literature and Australian culture more broadly has benefitted enormously from the enduring legacy of Patrick White. For more than 50 years writers such as π.O. have been honoured to win this prestigious award, demonstrating the enduring qualities of philanthropy and the impact that philanthropic giving can have on so many people. Congratulations!"

π.O. will be officially honoured for his contribution to Australian literature at the Patrick White Literary Award celebration at Readings State Library Victoria, on Wednesday 13 November 2024 at 6pm. Members of the public are welcome to attend. To RSVP, email [philanthropy@perpetual.com.au](mailto:philanthropy@perpetual.com.au)

The 2024 judging panel comprised Ms Michelle de Kretser (Chair), Dr Kerryn Goldsworthy and Dr Sarah Holland-Batt.

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## Note to Editors

### About the Patrick White Literary Award

The Patrick White Award was established by the author with the proceeds of his 1973 Nobel Prize for Literature and is managed by Perpetual as trustee of the philanthropic trust behind it. The Award is 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 Award is intended to encourage and support ongoing creativity in its recipients.

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 to continue writing. Poets, novelists, playwrights and short story writers have been among the 48 recipients who have so far benefited from Patrick White’s generosity and vision. Past winners include Christina Stead, Fay Zwicky, Elizabeth Harrower, Tony Birch, Samuel Wagan Watson, Adam Aitken and Antigone Kefala.

The judging committee’s members are Ms Michelle de Kretser (Chair), Dr Kerryn Goldsworthy and Dr Sarah Holland-Batt.

### About $\pi$ .O. (Pi-O) and his work: The Judging Committee’s citation

#### The winner of the 2024 Patrick White Award is $\pi$ .O.

$\pi$ .O. is a poet, publisher and literary editor from Melbourne who was born in Greece in 1951. In 1954 his family immigrated to Australia, where they settled in Fitzroy. For the past forty years,  $\pi$ .O. has worked as a draughtsman to support his creative practice, which is informed by his working-class, non-Anglo background and his anarchist politics.

*Fitzroy brothel*,  $\pi$ .O.’s first collection of poems, was published in 1974. Since then  $\pi$ .O. has published twelve books of poetry, including *Big Numbers: New and Selected Poems* (2008). He edited *925* and *Unusual Work*, magazines focusing on experimental literature, as well as *Off The Road*, an anthology of performance poetry (1985).  $\pi$ .O. is also a publisher at *Collective Effort* press.

A pioneering practitioner of spoken word and performance poetry in Australia,  $\pi$ .O. campaigned for its acceptance as a valid poetic form. On the page, his poems continue to display a lively and witty interest in spoken language: migrant idioms, working-class speech and Australian colloquialisms jostle and unsettle standard English in his work. Similarly, an encyclopaedic range of sources – proverbs, science writing, historical documents, classical mythology and children’s games to name a few – provide disparate linguistic elements that are juxtaposed in his poems to brilliant effect. The range and diversity of his registers remind us that  $\pi$ .O. is always, and foremost, an intensely political writer.

Along with its deployment of the vernacular,  $\pi$ .O.’s poetry is characterised by the idiosyncratic use of punctuation and spelling. His concrete poems employ numbers, punctuation marks and other typographical devices in visually striking ways; see, for instance, *Missing Form: Concrete, visual and experimental poems* (1981). According to Andy Jackson, writing in *The Saturday Paper*,  $\pi$ .O.’s ‘invigorating use of punctuation and phonetic spelling reminds us that language is always vocal, accented and political’. In short,  $\pi$ .O. has always favoured a radical and experimental poetics, which for many years went unrecognised by mainstream Australian literature.

*24 hours: The day the language stood still* (1996) is the first volume in  $\pi$ .O.'s 'epic' trilogy. It was followed by *Fitzroy: The Biography* (2015) and *Heide* (2019). In *Fishing for Lightning*, Sarah Holland-Batt suggests that these works function, in fact, as anti-epics, as the poet chooses nonlinear histories and an array of characters over the epic's linearity and heroic single protagonist. Yet  $\pi$ .O.'s poems retain the sweep and scale of the epic, moving fluently backwards and forwards in time to uncover and scrutinise the echoes between present and past. Together, these three monumental volumes are consummate mappings of cities and their denizens: they seek to replicate the metropolis's kaleidoscopic and anarchic nature at the level of concept, language and line.

*The Tour* (2023),  $\pi$ .O.'s most recent book, chronicles the tensions within a group of Australian poets touring North America in the mid-1980s. Lucy Van, reviewing it for the *Sydney Review of Books*, calls it 'the achievement of  $\pi$ .O.'s life [because] it actively bears the burden of the orders and disorders of our national poetry'.

In recent years, prize juries have recognised  $\pi$ .O.'s significant contribution to Australian literature with awards and nominations. *Heide* won the 2020 Judith Wright Calanthe Prize in the Queensland Premier's Literary Awards and was shortlisted in the 2020 Prime Minister's Literary Awards, while *The Tour* was longlisted for the 2024 ALS Gold Medal. In addition,  $\pi$ .O. was a finalist for the 2021 Melbourne Prize for Literature; he is currently a finalist for the same prize. It would seem that Australia is finally catching up with  $\pi$ .O.

When considering  $\pi$ .O.'s body of work, the judges of the Patrick White Literary Award were particularly impressed by his unflinching commitment to an experimental poetics and engagement with place, along with the wit and energy of his work. They noted that at every stage of his career,  $\pi$ .O. has defied literary norms, forging a distinctive, idiosyncratic and profound contribution to Australian literature, expanding its boundaries and possibilities for all who follow him.

The judges congratulate  $\pi$ .O. on the award.

## About Perpetual Philanthropic Services

Perpetual is one of Australia's largest managers of philanthropic funds, with \$3.3 billion in funds under advice for charitable trusts and endowment funds (as at 30 June 2023). Perpetual is trustee for over 1000 [charitable trusts and endowments](#) and provides individuals and families with advice on establishing charitable foundations and structured giving programs. Each year Perpetual distributes more than \$129 million to community organisations on behalf of its clients. Perpetual also assists charities and not-for-profit organisations with [investment advice and management](#).

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