

**Launch of Macquarie PEN Anthology of Australian Literature by  
Her Excellency Ms Quentin Bryce AC, Governor-General  
Admiralty House, Sydney  
30 July 2009**

Vice Chancellor  
Macquarie University  
**Professor Steven Schwartz**

General Editor of the Macquarie PEN Anthology of Australian Literature  
**Professor Nicholas Jose**

Publisher  
Allen and Unwin  
**Ms Elizabeth Weiss**

**Mr David Malouf AO**

Distinguished writers, editors, publishers, scholars, teachers, lovers of literature.

May I offer you the very warmest of welcomes to Admiralty House this evening for this special celebration, and the launch of this magnificent Anthology: a touchstone and a milestone of our literary landscape.

So many things come to mind when I think of Australian literature:

The classics we read at school in the late 50s: Joseph Furphy, Marcus Clarke and Rolf Boldrewood. I can still feel the pages of our Grade 12 text by Cecil Hadgraft. A small book but a very engaging and influential one in my life.

I used to climb through windows at my boarding school to read *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* by neon light on the roof, three stories high. (Our dorm was called 'The Astronomers').

Later, my friends and I discovered Jessica Anderson, Eleanor Dark, Miles Franklin. Devouring their novels in our own coming of age.

Then the intoxicating lyricism of Judith Wright, the force and passion of Kath Walker.

Earlier this month I saw Sam Watson's biographical play *Oodgeroo: Bloodline to Country*.

In the line it draws between past and present, we felt the electric thrill of a literary culture that is alive and flourishing.

My friends, we are witnessing a huge efflorescence of contemporary interest in writers and writing. Literary festivals attract thousands; author events, book clubs and booksales are a measure of how avidly we write and read.

Emerging from the consciousness of crisis, there is a national consensus that Australian writing matters.

The Macquarie PEN Anthology of Australian Literature blossoms in the midst of this energy, marking the place where we have richly and circuitously arrived, impelling new writerly journeys across our terrain.

Behind it is the historic work of PEN in advancing freedom of speech and cultivating literary community.

The founders of Sydney PEN – Dorothea Mackellar, Ethel Turner, and Mary Gilmore – grace these pages, as do many other members. Its legacy is entwined with the larger story of our expression.

In his 1997 afterword to *Johnno*, David Malouf wrote: “As for places...there is a sense in which they only become real to us when they appear in books.”

This anthology gives us our place, our country, in its many distillations, refractions, and melodious echoes.

We encounter in it territory that acquires familiarity.

It maps the multiplicity of what it has meant to be Australian. Men’s and women’s writing, European voices alongside Indigenous and Asian. The sung and unsung. Icons and iconoclasts. Words of protest, of irony, and of elegy.

Like the ancestral serpent in Alexis Wright’s *Carpentaria*, Australian writing “comes down from the stars laden with its own creative enormity.”

I am so proud to be part of its beginning. I want to see it take root in our schools, universities, libraries and communities.

It will be an invaluable resource for students and teachers, as well as an absorbing and engaging monument to Australian achievement, identity and soul.

Before I let it go, I can’t resist opening it to indulge in one of my favourite passages:

*Read from Macquarie Anthology The Preface from Christina Stead’s For Love Alone, p476-77.*

For keeping and sharing those lovely words and thousands more, I thank: Macquarie University, Allen and Unwin, Sydney PEN, General Editor Nicholas Jose, Advisory Publishing Editor Mary Cunnane, Project Coordinator Chris Cunneen, and Allen and Unwin publisher Elizabeth Weiss for their 6 years of work in bringing it into being.

My friends, it is my great delight to launch the Macquarie PEN Anthology of Australian Literature.