The Year in Review
Congratulations!

Writing & Society postgraduate research student Kristel Thornell has jointly won the Vogel Literary Award for an unpublished manuscript written by an author under 35. Kristel’s manuscript Night Street, based on the life of Melbourne artist Clarice Beckett, will be published by Allen & Unwin in 2010. The project forms part of the PhD Kristel is working on with Prof. Nicholas Jose. Adjunct Professor Jane Goodall shared the 2009 ABR Calibre essay prize. Professor Goodall’s essay ‘Footprints’ is based on the theme of the human footprint and its relationship to ideas of ecological sustainability. Chair in Writing, Professor Nick Jose is at Harvard for the 2009-10 academic year as Visiting Chair of Australian Studies, in the English Department, teaching a course this semester on Transnational Fiction. Nick’s absence on leave meant that he had to resign his membership of the Literature Board of the Australia Council. His last meeting was in July. Professor Gail Jones was appointed to the Literature Board in 2008 and served throughout 2009. Senior Lecturer Chris Fleming was voted National Finalist in the Australian Lecturer of the Year Awards, and Research Fellow Alexis Wright received an Honorary Doctorate in Creative Media, from RMIT University in December.

Writing & Society’s Giramondo Publishing has been recognised in many 2009 literary awards. Sara Knox’s The Orphan Gunner was co-winner of the Asher Prize for a novel on an anti-war theme by a woman writer. Evelyn Juers was joint-winner of the 2009 Prime Minister’s Literary Award for Non Fiction for House of Exile: The Life and Times of Heinrich Mann and Nelly Kroeger-Mann. Gerald Murnane, whose novel Barley Patch was published in October by Giramondo, won the Melbourne Prize for Literature. Robert Gray’s The Land I Came Through Last won the CAL-Waverley Library Award for Literature. Beverley Farmer (The Bone House) won the Patrick White Award for lifetime achievement. Lisa Gorton (Press Release, Giramondo, 2007) and Tom Cho (Look Who’s Morphing, Giramondo, 2009) were nominated in the New Writing category of the Melbourne Prize, for a published work by a writer under 40. Tom Cho’s Look Who’s Morphing was also nominated for the Age Book of the Year award for fiction, as was Kate Middleton’s Fire Season in the poetry category. Bronwyn Lea’s The Other Way Out was shortlisted for the Victorian Premier’s CJ Dennis Prize for poetry.

Author and playwright Hoa Pham, whose Doctor of Creative Arts with Writing & Society explores fictional Vietnamese archetypes, recently won a writer’s residency in Berlin. The exchange is sponsored by the Goethe Institut, the Copyright Agency Limited, the University of Technology (Sydney) and UWS. Hoa undertook a four-week language course in Berlin, before working at the Literaturwerkstatt Berlin for two weeks. She was paired with German author Antje Strubel, who was writer-in-residence with the Writing & Society Group in September 2009. Hoa gave a reading of her work at the Literaturwerkstatt and met with leading Vietnamese writer Pham Thi Hoai, who is now based in Berlin.
Publishing
In March HEAT, edited by Whitlam Chair, Professor Ivor Indyk, was awarded the prestigious A* ranking for the Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA), recognising the journal as a leader in its field of creative writing and literary research.

Chris Fleming was invited on to the Editorial Board of the UCLA journal Anthropoetics and Associate Professor Anna Gibbs has been made new writing consultant for Cultural Studies Review. Writing & Society also hosts the new online journal, soundsRite. Co-founded in 2009 by Professor Hazel Smith with Roger Dean from the MARCS Auditory Laboratories at UWS, the journal features sound works created for digital embodiment, and writing which is kinetic, generative or interactive. http://soundsrite.uws.edu.au/

The Macquarie PEN Anthology of Australian Literature (Allen & Unwin), of which Nicholas Jose is the general editor, was officially launched in July. The Anthology is the culmination of 6 years’ work and charts the development of Australian literature in all forms: fiction (including the work of Gail Jones and Alexis Wright), poetry, drama, diaries, letters and essays. The book was launched by the Governor-General at Admiralty House and celebrated with readings at Gleebooks and a symposium on Australian Literary Futures at the State Library of NSW. Nick Jose, Ivor Indyk, Gail Jones and Alexis Wright spoke at the symposium. Nick has been involved in subsequent celebrations and discussions at the State Library of Victoria, at the Byron Bay Writers Festival and Southern Cross University, and at Australia House, London, and Washington DC, New York and in Boston, where he gave a public lecture at the Boston Athenaeum and led a symposium at the Harvard Faculty Club, ‘Transpacific: Australian Literature and Beyond’. Needless to say, debate has raged about the book ever since it appeared. If the editors’ intention was to get Australian literature some attention, they have certainly succeeded.

Picador published a new edition of postgraduate Matthew Thompson’s literary-reportage thriller, My Colombian Death, in August this year. My Colombian Death is the creative component of Matthew’s Doctor of Creative Arts thesis, which has been supervised by Ivor Indyk. It tells the story of his pursuit of risk in Colombia. Picador has commissioned a second book of literary reportage.

The academic book proposals of two of our early-career researchers have been accepted. Senior Research Officer Kathleen Olive proposed a selected translation of the document she studied for her PhD, the Codex Rustici, to the Toronto publisher Renaissance and Reform Texts in Translation. The document has not previously been edited or published, in Italian or English, but it is often referenced and recognised for its illustrations. Kathleen focuses on how the document shows the act of literary compilation can be about the formation of identity, and may be used to create a strong textual authority. Research Officer Melinda Jewell’s proposal to turn her Writing & Society PhD thesis on dance in Australian Literature into a book has been accepted by Peter Lang Publishing. Melinda’s proposal was accepted a few weeks before she announced the birth of her second child, Rainer Kelly Kennedy Jewell. Congratulations to them all!

Congratulations to Walter Mason, PhD student with Writing & Society, whose forthcoming book about religious sites in Vietnam will be published by Allen & Unwin. Walter is working on the research project ‘A New Life’s Purpose: Place and Popularity of Self Help Books in Australian Literary Culture.’
Alexis Wright’s acclaimed novel *Carpentaria* was published in translation this year in France and Poland, with translations in Catalan and Chinese to follow. Alexis completed a 6,000 word introductory essay for the new edition of *Grog War* by Magabala Books in December. This essay was written in collaboration with Julalikari Council in Tennant Creek. She also published ‘Be Careful About Playing With The Path Of Least Resistance’ in *Freedom*, an anthology of short stories for Amnesty International celebrating the 60th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The collection includes stories by Yann Martel, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Xisolu Guo, Nadine Gordimer, and Paulo Coelho.

In 2009 Allen & Unwin published ‘Greed,’ the lecture given by Doctor of Creative Arts candidate Christopher Kremmer for Sydney PEN in the Alastair Mackerras Theatre at Sydney Grammar School in July 2008. The Sydney PEN lecture series is an annual series that sees three leading literary figures consider important contemporary issues that affect Australians.

Senior Lecturer Chris Andrews’ translations published this year include Roberto Bolaño, *The Skating Rink* (New Directions) and *Amulet* (Picador), and César Aira, *Ghosts* (New Directions).

Research Fellow Mridula Nath Chakraborty’s story ‘Nibaran Chandra’s Last Rites’ in *The Table is Laid: The Oxford Anthology Of South Asian Food Writing* was published in paperback in 2009. The book was first published in 2007. Mridula’s story is translated by Ashapurna Devi.

Research Fellow Catherine Rey recently completed the manuscript of her novel *The Extraordinary Adventures of John Lofty Oakes*, to be published by Joëlle Losfeld, Paris. The text takes the form of a tale, in the tradition of Voltaire’s philosophical tales. John Lofty Oakes is a man born tiny, like Tom Thumb, who cries golden tears. His extraordinary journey will take him, in the company of his giant friend Bartholomé Propp, around Australia and India, and back to Western Australia where he was born. The novel explores his spiritual journey, and more widely, offers a spiritual investigation of religion, from Christianity to Buddhism.

Shanghai literary journal, and a translated story appeared in a Swedish collection of Australian Stories, Dromtidens Framtid, ed. Lars Ahlstrom. Gail has accepted a commission from UK-based postcolonial journal Moving Worlds for an essay on Michael Ondaatje, to be published next year. She is discussing the proposed film of her novel Sixty Lights with a producer and director.

**In Progress**

Sara Knox has been listening to hours and hours of Thomas Hardy on audiobook. This work is the basis for two pieces of writing on the phenomenology of the audiobook: one scholarly article for a book of essays on the culture of the audiobook, and the other a literary essay about the quality of voice. Sara has also been writing her new novel, The Midday Demon, for which she was recently in Scotland for a month doing research (funded by the Australia Council for the Arts). Alexis Wright has continued the very concentrated work required to complete the writing of her new novel The Swan Book — a kind of dreaming book about swans and a character portrait of much else.

Anna Gibbs has been co-editing a new anthology of Australian Feminist Experimental Writing, and Kathleen Olive was selected to participate in a competitive, online paleography course. As part of the course, a group of Italian Renaissance scholars will receive pdfs of original archival documents and they will have a week to work on a transcription, which is then graded. The archive contains all the documents sent to or by the Medici, with a focus on the fifteenth-century. Hazel Smith began a collaboration this year with UK ceramicist Joanna Still on a series of creative works. A video work resulting from the first stage of the collaboration was shown at the australYSIS Logic—Event—Chance and Structure performance at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music on 5th December.

Anna Gibb’s publications this year include ‘At the Time of Writing: Sedgwick’s Affect Theory,’ in Australian Humanities Review. Hazel Smith’s publications include Hazel Smith and Roger Dean (eds.), Practice-led Research, Research-led Practice in the Creative Arts, Edinburgh University Press, 2009. Her journal articles include, ‘Musical Imaginaries in Vikram Seth’s An Equal Music,’ Mosaic: a journal for the interdisciplinary study of literature, 2009.

Ivor Indyk, Research Fellow Louise Poland, and researchers Kath Mclean and Jacinta van den Berg completed their year-long study into the effectiveness, both critical and financial, of Literature Board subsidies to Australian publishers in the ten years 1995-2005. The study emerged from the ARC-funded project on Australian literary publishing and its economies, and like that project, concentrates on the ways in which most literary books in this country require subvention in some form in order to be published. To date, the research team has surveyed the field of titles and publishers, and interviewed 18-20 editors and publishers on how the availability of subsidies affected their decisions to publish particular works and develop or expand their lists. More than a dozen case studies of selected titles show the decisions that led to the appearance of these works, whether or not their publication depended on a subsidy, and, where they did, what benefits accrued to the author, the publisher and Australian literature.

**Academic Conferences**

Anna Gibbs was an invited speaker at the ‘Infectious: crisis, contagion and communication aesthetics’ symposium convened by the Centre for Contemporary Art and Politics at UNSW in September. She was also invited to open the accompanying exhibition ‘RealEmergencies’ at the Ivan Dougherty Gallery. Anna was an invited speaker at the ‘Remembering Eve Sedgwick’ symposium, hosted by the Modernism Research Group and the Department of Gender and Cultural Studies, Sydney University, and gave a paper at the International Association for Literature and Philosophy Conference, Brunel University, London in May. Hazel Smith gave two conference papers in the UK this year: ‘The Time of our Singing: biraciality and musical bifurcation in the work of Richard Powers’ at ‘Identity and Form in 20th and 21st Century Literature’ at Sheffield Hallam University in July; and ‘Glocal Imaginaries and Musical Displacements in the work of Richard Powers’ at ‘Glocal Imaginaries: Writing/Migration/Place’ at Lancaster University in September.
In June, Chris Fleming gave an invited paper at the Generative Anthropology Conference at The University of Ottawa in Canada. His paper will be published in *Anthropoetics*. Researcher Kate Fagan gave a paper at the Association for the Study of Australian Literature (ASAL) Conference at ANU in June. The paper reported on early findings from research that Kate is undertaking for W&S on poetry communities in Australia. Kate also convened a series of poetry readings during the ASAL conference, entitled ‘Poetry in Pairs: New Australian Poetry.’ Walter Mason addressed the Sydney Unitarian Church on the nineteenth century Scottish writer Samuel Smiles, who coined the term Self-Help in his 1859 book of that name. Gail Jones attended a conference on the work of French philosopher Maurice Blanchot at the Maison Francoise in Oxford UK in April and gave the keynote address, ‘Levinas and the Ethics of Proximity,’ at the Literature and Politics Conference at Sydney University in July. Gail also attended the inaugural Professors of Writing meeting in Melbourne, a one-day seminar and planning meeting at RMIT.

Anna Gibbs was invited to give the Keynote Address to the LaTrobe English Department Postgraduate Research Day. She was an invited speaker on an international plenary panel at the Digital Arts and Culture Conference, Los Angeles, in December. Postgraduate student Josh Meyer presented a paper at the upcoming Crime, Media and Popular Culture Conference at Indiana State University in October, entitled ‘Scarlet Fever: contagious criminal identities and the threat of Communism in James Ellroy’s *The Big Nowhere’*. In December, Alexis Wright addressed the Joint Conference of the Law and Literature Association of Australia and the Law and Society Association of Australia and New Zealand in Brisbane, and Walter Mason attended the World Parliament of Religions in Melbourne.

The Writing and Society Research Group is exploring the possibility of establishing a postgraduate coursework and research degree, related to the arts and cultural production, to be called The Sydney Consortium, which would be closely aligned to and interact with an initiative of the University of London, Birkbeck: The London Consortium. Gail Jones and Associate Professor Anthony Uhlmann have been in contact with the Consortium’s director, Professor Steven Connor of the University of London, Birkbeck with regard to developing links with the London Consortium. The London Consortium is a highly innovative collaborative educational initiative, which connects the University of London with the Tate Modern, the Architectural Association, the Institute of Contemporary Arts, and the Science Museum (www.londonconsortium.com). The proposed Sydney Consortium would be based on and in partnership with the London Consortium, and would seek to mount cross-institutional events and postgraduate research projects between partner organisations. At this stage the initial partners are the Australian Museum, the Sydney Writers’ Festival and the Museum of Contemporary Art.

**Community Events**

In July Chris Fleming, Lecturer Dimitris Vardoulakis, and Ivor Indyk participated in Kafka’s Cages, Sydney Seminar for the Arts and Philosophy at the State Library of NSW. This event brought together a number of experts to discuss aspects of Franz Kafka’s life and work. Other speakers included distinguished Prof. Kiarina Kordela (US) and John O’Connor.

The Writing & Society Group hosts a series of public seminars. This year, guests included writer Brian Castro who spoke on migration, melancholy and resistance; Philip Mead on ‘Listening to Pam Brown’; Justin Clemens on Milton’s true religion; American novelist Susanna Moore on the fictional element in autobiography; Pakistani-American writer Kamila Shamsie, one of Orange’s 21 Writers of the 21st century, on fictions of history; Deirdre Coleman on the letters of Henry
Smeathman between West Africa and the West Indies in the 1770s; Steven Connor (Professor of Modern Literature and Theory, Birkbeck College London); and Kate Lilley on Susan Howe’s *The Midnight*.

In September Kate Fagan organised a one-day symposium for Writing & Society entitled Poetics, Critical Communities and the University, which brought together poetry scholars and poets from around Australia including group members Chris Andrews and Anna Gibbs, with Judith Beveridge (USyd), poet Pam Brown, Michael Farrell (UMelb), Martin Harrison (UTS), John Hawke (Monash), Jill Jones (Adelaide), Peter Minter (USyd), and keynote speaker Philip Mead (UWA) and Ann Vickery (Deakin).

Writing & Society postgraduate Claire Scobie participated in a number of popular public events at the 2009 Sydney Writers Festival. Claire’s travel-writing expertise was drawn on by the Writers Festival in two writing workshops, and she appeared in conversation with Monica Ali, author of the Booker Prize-nominated *Brick Lane*. Fellow postgraduate Hoa Pham participated in a Festival event that considered the writing of first- and second-generation Vietnamese Australians.

Alexis Wright contributed to a masterclass for exciting young local and interstate Aboriginal writers at the Campbelltown Arts Centre in July. The masterclass was developed as a collaboration between our research group and Djon Mundine, Indigenous Curator of Contemporary Art at the Campbelltown Arts Centre, and the *Young Indigenous Writers Initiative* – Federation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Languages. Alexis also participated in a panel discussion on Indigenous literature with IAD Press at the Dreaming Festival in June. The festival is a major celebration of Indigenous Arts and is attended by thousands of people each year.

Under its Western Sydney Writing Project, Writing & Society supports a writing workshop for new and emerging writers in Bankstown in collaboration with Bankstown Youth Development Service. For the past two years writers from the workshop have been featured in the Sydney Writers Festival. This year, *Alleyway Honour* was performed to a large audience at Bankstown Town Hall. The writers included Publications Officer Fiona Wright and postgraduate Luke Carman, with Ivor Indyk as critical consultant.

This year’s Melbourne Arts Festival saw the world premiere of *Dirtsong* performed by Indigenous musicians The Black Arm Band, sung mostly in traditional languages, with a libretto written by Alexis Wright. These songs evoke a new conceptual and emotional map of Australia’s heartland while gently awakening some of Australia’s sleeping languages. As Alexis tells us, ‘On both nights a five minute standing ovation of the full house followed the end of the performance.’ The musicians had worked hard to retrieve their own languages, languages that ‘have never been heard like this before, or even spoken for a long time. They had all come through an emotional journey and they all just sung with so much soul and feeling, just as though they were singing for country. It was extraordinary.’

With Caroline Wales, Anna Gibbs curated the exhibition *uncovered: art writing & the book*, Horus & Deloris Contemporary Art Space, Pyrmont. It featured the work of past and present Writing & Society postgraduates. In Anna’s words, the works covered ‘the variety of artists’ uses of the codex form of the book to subvert the dominant genres of the novel and narrative.’
In September the Group hosted its annual postgraduate soirée, with readings by group members Gail Jones and Fiona Wright, Tom Lee and Nasrin Mahoutchi. The event was held at Madame Fling Flong’s in Newtown. It is becoming increasingly popular with young researchers every year.

In March Kate Fagan spent four days in the Yarrabah Indigenous community in far north Queensland with her friend and fellow-poet Samuel Wagan-Watson. They were filming an episode of a documentary about poetry entitled *Bush Slam*, which aired on ABC TV in October. They wrote poems in response to their experiences and performed them on the show. The poetry will be published later this year in an ABC book. Kate also wrote a song for the episode. For Kate the visit was a privilege — humbling, joyful, intense, and very hard work! Definitely a highlight of the year.

Gail Jones served as a member of the Executive Committee of Sydney PEN throughout the year. In this capacity she hosted a special meeting in Sydney to establish an international translation program for Vietnam, to be sponsored by PEN. She also adjudicated the Emerging Writers Fellowships for the Australian Society of Authors; examined a doctorate by viva as international examiner for the University of London; and judged the Penrith City Council Essay competition for both children and adults, and the NT Literary Awards.

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In March Nick Jose and Ivor Indyk attended the Chinese-English Translation Workshop in Suzhou, China, and the Shanghai International Literary Festival, and presented a seminar for the Australian Studies Centre at East China Normal University. Their visit was part of Writing & Society’s Chinese-English Literary Translation Research Project. To date, some powerful new Chinese writing has been published in HEAT in English translation, and Shanghai 99 Readers Club has agreed to publish Julia Leigh’s two novels *The Hunter* and *Disquiet* in Chinese. Writing & Society also hosted Professor Ye Xin’s visit to Sydney for the Sydney Writers Festival. Ye Xin is a leading Chinese writer, Vice-President of the Chinese Writers’ Association and Director of the Institute of Literature, Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences. His visit reciprocated Gail Jones’ Shanghai residency. As well as chairing Ye Xin’s Sydney Writers Festival panel, Nick Jose took part in a weekend symposium on Asian-Australian writing at the Casula Powerhouse as part of the Festival.

Postgraduate Natalie Mosco performed in her play ‘A Brush With Georgia O’Keeffe’ for six months off-Broadway in New York and for a special matinee at The Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D.C. The play is an original work for three characters about the life of the celebrated female painter Georgia O’Keeffe. Natalie has been awarded her DCA, for her thesis which included this play.