

# Lal Medawattegedera wins the 2012 Gratiaen Prize

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The Gratiaen Prize for the best work of creative writing in English was awarded to Lal Medawattegedera for his unpublished novel 'Playing Pillow Politics at MGK' on 4 May 2013 at Park Street Mews, Colombo. This year's winner emerged from a tight contest from a strong shortlist line-up which included poetry, prose and drama.



Commenting on the judging process, Chairman of the judging panel Jayantha Dhanapala commended the quality of the submissions and reflected on the difficult task of judging between different genres such as poetry, drama and prose, all of which have differing aesthetic qualities. Dhanapala also commended the Trust for its committed service to the country's literary culture and Standard Chartered Bank for its commitment to substantive Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives.

Celebrating its 20th year, this year's Gratiaen Prize has an unbroken history of rewarding literary excellence in Sri Lanka. Themed around 'twenty years of Sri Lankan storytelling,' this year's awards ceremony had a retrospective segment commemorating past winners.

The current value of the prize is Rs. 200,000 and the H.A.I. Goonetilleke Prize for Translations which offers the same prize money is awarded every other year.

The prize was founded by Michael Ondaatje who was the joint winner of the Booker Prize for his novel 'The English Patient' in 1993. Guided by Ondaatje's vision of promoting Sri Lankan writing in English through a prize devoted to resident Sri Lankan writers, the Gratiaen Prize has supported, encouraged and rewarded Sri Lanka writing continuously for two decades with a number of Gratiaen winners gaining regional and international critical acclaim and popular success.

Anirvaran Ghosh Dastidar, CEO, Standard Chartered Bank, commented: "The bank is very proud of its long affiliation with the award which is now celebrating its 20th year. The prize has successfully provided an impetus to encouraging creative writing in English in the country, and we look forward to seeing even greater enthusiasm as the years progress."

The judging panel of the 2012 Gratiaen Prize included Jayantha Dhanapala, former career diplomat (chair), Sumathy Sivamohan, academic, writer, dramatist and filmmaker, and senior journalist Lyn Ockersz.

Speaking on behalf of the judging panel Dhanapala said that the winning entry was an innovative and eclectic mix of realist and allegorical genres which critically reflected on contemporary Sri Lankan society with sustained irony.

The other shortlisted works were 'It's not in the Stars' by Rizvina Morseth de Alwis, 'Kalumaali' by Ruwanthie de Chickera and Nadie Kammallaweera, 'Open Words are for Love-Letting' by Malinda Seneviratne and 'The Professional' by Saroj Sinnnetamby.

Previous winners of the Gratiaen Prize include Carl Muller ('The Jam Fruit Tree'), the late Nihal de Silva ('The Road from Elephant Pass'), Punyakante Wijenaike ('Amulet'), the late Tissa Abeysekera ('Bringing Tony Home'), Vivimarie VanderPoorten ('Nothing Prepares You'), Shehan Karunatilaka ('Chinaman') Prashani Rambukwella ('Mythil's Secret').

Named after the first Chair of the Gratiaen Trust and Sri Lanka's foremost librarian and bibliographer, the H.A.I. Goonetilleke Prize includes in its list of winners Sunethra Rajakarunanayake's 'Nandithya' translated as 'The Chameleon' by Vijitha Fernando, a collection of Liyanage Amarakeerthi's short stories translated as 'The Hour When the Moon Weeps' by Kumari Gunsekere, Eva Ranaweera's 'Sedona' translated by Edmund Jayasuriya and Simon Navagattegama's 'Samsaraye Dadayakkaraya' translated by Malinda Seneviratne.

## COMMENTS

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