

## MULTI-AWARD WINNER FOR EX LIBRIS

Sonya Hartnett heads a star-studded guest list for this year's Ex Libris Port Fairy Book Fair. Avidly read by children, young people and adults, Hartnett wrote her first book, *Trouble All the Way*, when she was just thirteen and it was published when she was 15. Last year, more than 18 novels later, she won the world's most prestigious children's and young adults' literary award, the Astrid Lindgren Memorial Prize. The jury for the prize said, "She depicts the circumstances of young people without avoiding the darker side of life. She does so with linguistic virtuosity and brilliant narrative technique."

Her novel, *Sleeping Dogs*, won the inaugural Miles Franklin Kathleen Mitchell Award, a Victorian Premier's Literary Award and was an Honour Book in the Children's Book Council Book of the Year. Renowned children's writer Robert Cormier, author of *The Chocolate War*, said of the novel, "Hartnett invites us into a decaying Garden of Eden where the Willow family lives and where sin is somehow innocent ... the result is unforgettable".

Although she is often classified as a writer of young adult fiction, Hartnett herself does not consider the label entirely accurate. The novels usually have young adult protagonists but explore universal themes and she has many adult fans. Her latest work, *Butterfly*, is a "gripping, disquieting, beautifully observed novel that confirms Hartnett as one of Australia's finest writers."



In 2006, controversy broke out after *Landscape with Animals* was published under the pseudonym Cameron S. Redfern. The book contains many sex scenes and Hartnett was 'outed' as the author. Peter Craven, a reviewer who had previously described Hartnett's adult title *Of a Boy* as "the best new Australian piece of fiction I have read", lambasted *Landscape* as an "overblown little sex shocker", a "tawdry little crotch tickler" and lamented that Hartnett was "too good a writer to put her name to this indigestible hairball of spunk and spite". The book was defended by fellow reviewer Marion Halligan: "I haven't read many books by Hartnett, but I think this is a much more amazing piece of writing than any of them". She chastised Craven for missing the joke ("How could an experienced critic get it so wrong?") and wondered why female authors writing frankly about sex are frowned upon.

Hartnett will be accompanied to Port Fairy in September by her editor at Penguin Books, Dmetri Kakmi, who is himself a published author. Kakmi was a guest at last year's Ex Libris Book Fair and his book *Mother Land* has since been shortlisted for the non-fiction award at this year's NSW Premier's Literary Awards.

The full Ex Libris programme detailing times and titles of author sessions with both Hartnett and Kakmi will be available at the end of July.