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## CANADA/AUSTRALIA LITERARY AWARD WINNER

The Department of External Affairs, the Canada Council and the Literary Board of the Australia Council announced jointly today that the winner of the 1979 Canada/Australia Literary Prize is the Canadian poet Michael Ondaatje. The prize, valued at \$2,500.00 Canadian, is intended to help make better known in Australia and Canada the work of each other's writers. Ondaatje is the fourth recipient of this annual award. Australian playwright, John Romeril, received the inaugural award in 1976; Canadian writer, Alice Munro, was the 1977 winner, and Australian poet Thomas Shapcott won for 1978. Each year an Australian or Canadian writer is chosen by a panel of judges from the other country. This year the Canada Council submitted works by six authors to the Australian jury. Next year the procedure will be reversed.

The prize is not restricted to any particular category of creative writing; novelists, poets and playwrights are equally eligible. It is awarded for a writer's total output rather than for a single work. The prize is financed on the Australian side by the Australia Council and on the Canadian side by the Department of External Affairs as part of its programme of cultural relations with foreign countries. The award is administered for the Department by the Writing and Publishing Section of the Canada Council.

Born in Ceylon in 1943, Michael Ondaatje lived in England for several years before moving to Canada in 1962. He received a master's degree from Queen's University and now divides his time between a farm north of Kingston and Toronto, where he teaches English at York University. He is best known as a poet, but has also made documentary films and written literary criticism. His Collected Works of Billy the Kid, a

poetry-prose sequence, won a Governor General's literary award for 1970 and was later adapted for theatre by the writer. There's a Trick with a Knife I'm Learning to Do, composed of poems written between 1963 and 1978, reveals Ondaatje's continued technical experimentation and strong tactile imagery. This work won the Governor General's award for 1979.

As part of the Canada/Australia award, each recipient is invited to visit the host country. The winner for 1978, Australian poet Thomas Shapcott will be visiting Canada this fall as a guest of the Department of External Affairs.