

DR ARNOLD ZABLE
Doctor of Letters, *honoris causa*

Dr Arnold Zable is an acclaimed writer, novelist and human rights advocate, whose work on the humanising power of story has had a profound effect on understandings of Australian culture and society across four decades.

His writings comprise profoundly moving, lyrical and ethical accounts of displacement, mobility, refuge, belonging and (un)settlement. These include the award-winning books *Jewels and Ashes* (1991), *Wanderers and Dreamers* (1998); *Café Scheherazade* (2001), *The Fig Tree* (2002), *Scraps of Heaven* (2004); *Sea of Many Returns* (2008); *Violin Lessons* (2011); *The Fighter* (2016); and *The Watermill* (2020). In his much-loved novels, memoirs, essays, articles, scripts and short stories, Zable has developed and shared an understanding of memory, history, displacement and community that evokes a profound ethics of care and a capacity, as noted by writer and reviewer Michael McGirr, to ‘hold pain with unsettling gentleness’.

Zable’s connections with the University of Melbourne span more than 50 years: he has a BA and a PhD in Creative Arts from Melbourne; he has been a Vice Chancellor’s Fellow, a lecturer in the Faculty of Arts, and has provided innumerable seminar, conference and symposium presentations for students and staff. He has been a fellow at the Melbourne Refugee Studies Program, the Melbourne Social Equity Institute and an honorary fellow in the School of Culture and Communication. Also spending time as a writer-in-residence at universities around Australia and internationally, Zable has worked in the USA, Papua New Guinea, China, and across Europe and Southeast Asia, with a noted commitment to writers workshops in Cambodia. In turn, he has written numerous stories based on his grassroots’ travels.

The son of Yiddish-speaking immigrants, Zable is a highly significant figure in Australia’s Jewish community; his place-based evocations of post-war Jewish community are widely acknowledged as a major contribution to Australian literature and history. This contribution to emplaced storytelling extends to wider migrant communities, and Zable is known also for his work with curators to produce the script for Victoria’s Immigration Museum. His novel and stories documenting the lives of Greek immigrants and their journeys to Australia, was recognised in 2012 by an award from the Greek Community of Melbourne ‘for his contribution to Hellenism through his writings’.

A tireless contributor to many cross-cultural projects and workshops for refugees and immigrants, as well as the homeless, the deaf, problem gamblers and survivors of the Black Saturday bushfires, Zable has used story as a means of assisting others to achieve self-understanding, most notably with asylum seekers from Afghanistan, Iran and Iraq, and other countries, in the wake of the SIEVX disaster, and with his stories and columns depicting the incarceration of asylum seekers in Australia’s onshore and offshore detention centres.

Over a lifetime of writing, activism and public service, Arnold Zable has established a distinguished record of achievement in Australia and internationally. He maintains a substantial program of public speaking engagements and advocacy for human rights. A past president of PEN International’s Melbourne Centre, an ambassador of the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre, a patron of Sanctuary and the Victorian Storytellers Guild, Zable’s outstanding contribution to human rights and literature have been recognised by Liberty Victoria in 2013 with the Voltaire Award for human rights advocacy and the promotion of free speech, and in 2021 by the Australia Council Lifetime Achievement in Literature Award.

Arnold Zable is a writer who provides a light in the dark places of migrant memory, bearing witness to profound historical traumas and, in so doing, encouraging others to speak of their own traumas in a way that builds new possibilities for connection.