



CAL Waverley Library
Award for Literature

2009



**Shortlist of Finalists
Winners of the Alex Buzo Prize 2009**

Judges' Comments

Greg de Moore

Tom Wills

[Allen & Unwin]

While the name of Tom Wills is familiar to those who have studied the history of Australian sport, too little has been known about the man who was both one of the first celebrated cricketers of colonial times and a founding figure in Australian Rules football. As a psychiatrist, Greg de Moore's interest in his subject was awoken when he learned that this successful sportsman had ended his life at the age of forty-four by stabbing himself in the heart. In trying to find an explanation for what seems a senseless early death, de Moore's research took him from the Royal Melbourne Hospital to the Rugby School in England, and to a cattle station in Central Queensland, where invaluable documents had been stored for more than a century. The story he has uncovered provides a new perspective on relations between the aboriginal people and the settlers of the nineteenth century, as well as on the foundations of modern sport.

Robert Gray

The Land I Came Through Last

[Giramondo Publishing]

The distinguished poet Robert Gray set out to write a book about his family entirely from memory, but found, as we all do, that it is "impossible to be accurate about another's past or even one's own". Thus he was driven to research the family background that led to his own experiences, and it has taken him more years than anyone expected to complete one of the most beautifully written works of autobiography ever to appear in this country. At the centre of the book is the author's father, a feckless, gifted, irritable, occasionally charming drunkard, but there are many other memorable characters who take a less central role in the story, among them writers such as Bruce Chatwin and Patrick White. Gray's portrait of the latter brings an entirely new perspective to our understanding of the Nobel Prize winner's personality.

David Kilcullen

The Accidental Guerrilla

[Scribe Publications]

Terrorism, for many, is the most urgent problem facing modern society. The world's foremost expert on methods of dealing with it happens to be a former Australian army officer. In developing his ideas about the best ways for governments and the military alike to respond to insurgents and guerrillas, David Kilcullen's research has involved much more than mere academic study, though his reading has breadth and depth; the most original contributions he makes derive largely from first-hand experience of the battlefield. To reduce the threat of terrorism, he argues, it is essential first to identify the sources and the motivation of each local insurgency. His arguments are framed in an elegant yet straightforward prose style, a style that is present also in the fascinating excerpts from his field notes, quoted throughout this persuasive, highly significant book.

Marina Larsson

Shattered Anzacs

[UNSW Press]

More soldiers returned from the First World War alive but in some way disabled than those who died. Some were missing limbs or otherwise physically maimed, some suffered the life-long after-effects of gas or infection, and some were mentally scarred by their experiences. The suffering of these victims is obvious; but Marina Larsson decided to investigate the effect of that suffering on the families and friends of the returned servicemen. By interviewing the surviving children of Anzacs who came back as changed men, and by researching letters and memoirs held in archives and libraries around Australia, she has created a memorial to war that goes well beyond the usual accounts of battles and troop movements. She has also brought readers closer to a fully rounded sense of what it was like to live in a community both during and after the war, helped by an abundance of quotation from those who were there.

David Levell

Tour to Hell

[University of Queensland Press]

In the earliest days of the penal colony in New South Wales, rumours and legends circulated among the inmates that it was possible to escape on foot from the punishment they felt was a living hell. Some of the convicts were Irishmen who believed that they could reach China by walking north from Port Jackson. Others were convinced that there was a colony of sympathetic white men somewhere beyond the Blue Mountains, and others still that they could walk to Timor. As a result of these delusions, many escapees came to a gruesome end, and yet in the process they made an unacknowledged contribution to the early exploration of New South Wales. David Levell has uncovered many little-known facts about the early days of settlement, and transformed them into a compelling narrative, in this account of the misguided beliefs of the unhappy convicts.

John McDonald

Art of Australia

[Pan Macmillan]

Though he is best known as the art critic for the Sydney Morning Herald, John McDonald has always been far more than a mere journalistic chronicler of the local art scene. He has also been a profound and original student of Australian art history, and a notably independent thinker. Many years of research have gone into the ambitious project in which this book is only the first volume, yet research is not all this magnificent publication has to offer. The illustrations are numerous and handsomely reproduced, and McDonald is both a perceptive explainer of art, and a stylish writer with a shrewd sense of anecdote; while narrating the history of Australia's cultural heritage in a sequence from the adversity of convict days to the "blessed hope" of the end of the nineteenth century, he entertains the reader with revealing stories about the larger than life characters who helped to create that heritage.

Further information about the Award may be found at www.waverley.nsw.gov.au/library/award