



CAL Waverley Library
Award for Literature

2010



**Shortlist of Finalists
Winners of the Alex Buzo Prize 2010**

Judges' Comments

Ken Hillman **Vital Signs: stories from Intensive Care** [UNSW Press]

A man with interesting blue feet, which have to be cut off; a woman with blood poisoning as a result of going for a ten kilometre run after shaving off her pubic hair; families at the bedsides of dying patients: these are among the scenes sketched for us in this remarkable memoir by the first Australian doctor to qualify as an intensive care specialist. While recounting his own experiences, he also discusses the ethical dilemmas faced by medical staff with the power of life or death in their hands, and supplies a well-researched history of the development of life-saving technology. Above all, though, this book is the story of man who has had to live with tragedy for much of his life – and who has been able, occasionally, to avert it.

Ben Hills **Breaking News: the golden age of Graham Perkin** [Scribe Publishing]

Just weeks before the dismissal of the Labor Government in 1975, Graham Perkin, the editor of Melbourne's Age newspaper, died of a heart attack at the age of 45. His last editorial, famously headed "Go Now, Go Decently", implored Gough Whitlam, the leader he had previously supported, to defuse the impending crisis by resigning. His plea went unnoticed, and the news of his death was overshadowed by the drama that followed. This book recounts the life of one of Australia's most influential and gifted journalists, but it is much more than just a biography. It is a detailed insider's account of the workings of a great newspaper, and an insight into the development of the mass media – not only newspapers, but magazines, radio and television – as we know them today. It is also a history of this country, as seen through a newspaperman's eyes, in the period between the Second World War and the end of the Vietnam War, written with the readability and clarity of a thriller.

Leta Keens **Shoes for the Moscow Circus** [Murdoch Books]

Taxidermists, boat-builders, book-binders, bat-makers, a blacksmith, a foundry, a tannery, a cricket ball maker, and a doll hospital, among many other unusual yet necessary occupations, are examined in patient, meticulous detail by the author of this fascinating book, which might best be described as an industrial miscellany. Interviews with craft-obsessed, sometimes cantankerous workers are combined with vivid descriptions of the settings where these varied and specialist trades are carried out. This is a delightful yet most unexpected book, wide-ranging in its research and lucid in its written expression.

Paul Kelly

The March of the Patriots [Melbourne University Publishing]

The story of Australian politics in the last two decades, it can be argued, is the story of two leaders whose differences were less than their similarities. Both Paul Keating and John Howard grew up in Sydney's south west suburbs, and both came from similar family backgrounds. Yet as politicians they presented themselves as utter opposites, even while supporting policies that were nearly the same. This epic work from the 1990 Graham Perkin Journalist of the Year is the first half of a two-part study of the events and political struggles that led to the making of modern Australia. There is no writer better qualified to portray this period, and the extensive research in this first volume is complemented by a series of interviews with the narrative's central characters.

Kristin Otto

Capital

[Text Publishing]

For its first twenty-seven years as a federation, the capital city of Australia was Melbourne. This eventful period took in the First World War, and many dramatic advances in technology and industry, as cars, aeroplanes, the wireless and the cinema were introduced. This handsomely illustrated book provides a series of snapshots of life in Melbourne in those years, as seen through the eyes both of ordinary people and of eminent figures such as Sir John Monash, Dame Nellie Melba, C.J. Dennis, Houdini, and Macpherson Robertson, inventor of the Cherry Ripe. Mac Robertson was responsible for Melbourne's first death by car accident, when he ran over a man in Gertrude Street, Fitzroy, while travelling at "seven or eight miles an hour". When the war ended, Melba had herself driven to the village of Lilydale, where she rang the fire bell; Dennis's illustrator, David Low, said of her that "she was a bullying woman who ate a great deal and swore a lot." There are similar illuminating anecdotes on every page of this evocative study.

Andrew Tink

William Charles Wentworth

[Allen & Unwin]

The figure of W.C. Wentworth looms over Australian history and politics to this day, particularly here, where a neighbouring electorate bears his surname. Thus it seems appropriate that his biography should be undertaken by an author with first-hand experience of the political life. All the same, research and writing skills are as necessary to the creation of a biography as is the empathy that results from a shared occupation. Both are present, here, in a book that recounts the life of the illegitimate son of a surgeon suspected of highway robbery, who became a celebrated explorer, poet, journalist, politician, newspaper proprietor, owner of the South Island of New Zealand, and founder of a dynasty. It is a life that cannot fail to hold the reader's attention, and a story deserving of the justice this elegantly written work has done it.

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