



CAL Waverley Library
Award for Literature
2008



**Shortlisted Finalists
Winners of the Alex Buzo Prize 2008**

Judges' Comments

Waleed Aly

People Like Us

[Macmillan]

The position of the Islamic religion in modern-day society poses a question of the utmost urgency. While much has been written about it, most has come from extremists of one persuasion or another. In balanced, elegant prose, Waleed Aly shows how tensions are brought about by the mutual inability of Muslims, Christians and secular Westerners to understand one another's motives. Habits of dishonesty and self-deception are to blame, he suggests, for this mutual misunderstanding, which can only be solved, in his words, by "people like us".

Paul Ham

Vietnam: The Australian War

[Harper Collins]

No war before or since has had such an impact on Australian culture as the Vietnam war. As Paul Ham puts it, "in the late 1960s the war touched everyone." Thus there is far more to this exhaustively researched account of Australia's military contribution to the war than recreations of battles and discussions of tactics, even though these are expertly done. This book is also a comprehensive portrait of the nation which had sent its soldiers abroad to fight for a cause not everyone could support, a nation increasingly divided against itself, where an unwillingness to face the truth added to the divisions.

Catherine Jinks

The Dark Mountain

[Allen & Unwin]

Louisa Atkinson was the first Australian-born woman novelist, and in her short life she was also a successful journalist and a respected naturalist. Yet her childhood was shadowed by the death of her father and her mother's unhappy remarriage. Using the historical framework of Atkinson's biography, and meticulous research into every aspect of 19th century life in Australia, Catherine Jinks writes in the persona of Atkinson's older sister Charlotte to create a novel of perfect construction and powerful themes, including murder, madness, and the lasting impact concealment of the truth can have on every member of a family.

Christopher Koch

The Memory Room

[Random House]

To become a spy, one must develop a taste for secrecy as well as learning the skills of concealment. Yet for Christopher Koch fascination lies in the nature of the psychological need which might propel a person into a life of espionage. In exploring the impulses which lead his characters, Vincent Austin and Erica Lange, from an innocent world of make-believe to real-life deceptions in the context of the last years of the Cold War, and then to tragedy, he has researched in convincing detail the actual operations of professional secret agents. His novel also depicts China with the same evocative richness found in his descriptions of Tasmania, Sydney, Canberra, and the Monaro.

Kathy Marks

Pitcairn: Paradise Lost

[Fourth Estate, HarperCollins]

In 1999, a police investigation of a rape on the remote Pitcairn Island set a chain of events in motion which ended with thirteen men, out of a population of forty-seven, facing more than ninety charges of rape and child abuse. Kathy Marks was one of only six journalists who were allowed onto the island to report on the trials. Her book is more than just a gripping account of a highly unusual series of court cases; it is also a well-researched history of the cliff-bound speck of land originally settled by the Bounty mutineers, and an atmospheric description of a uniquely isolated community, one which perhaps through necessity had long avoided facing the truth.

Babette Smith

Australia's Birthstain

[Allen & Unwin]

Though things have changed in recent years, for most of the time since Australia was founded it has been a source of embarrassment for many that the nation began as a convict settlement. For families with social pretensions, a convict ancestor was once a source of shame, though now it might be a status symbol. Among many interesting ideas in this densely researched account of Australia's long period as a convict colony, Babette Smith makes the point that one of the deepest motives in the campaign to abolish the transportation of convicts to Australia was homophobia: in the 19th century, it was felt that the convict colonies were "incubators of homosexuality". For that reason the truth about our past was covered up and mythologised for many years; in this book the myths and the facts are decisively disentangled.

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