



## CAL Waverley Library Award for Literature 2011

### Shortlist of Finalists Winners of the Alex Buzo Prize 2011

#### Judges' Comments

Eileen Chanin **Book Life: the life and times of David Scott Mitchell** [Australian Scholarly Publishing]

The Mitchell Library is one of Sydney's most revered and valuable institutions, but how many of its users give a thought to the man it is named for? The library's very existence is owed to one of the largest single acts of philanthropy in Australian history, yet little is known about David Scott Mitchell beyond his extraordinary generosity. For all her diligent research, Eileen Chanin has found little to add to what is known about Mitchell as a wealthy man and book collector who never married, so her well-written biography is as much a history of Mitchell's times, of the development of public libraries, and of the book industry in Australia in the nineteenth century, as it is a straightforward account of an admirable, if enigmatic, life.

Delia Falconer **Sydney** [New South Publishing]

To sum up the character of a city in a single volume can be no easier to do than it would be to do so in a sentence. Evocative descriptions of places, a form of writing Delia Falconer excels at, make a start, but that is not enough, and that is why she recounts as well the stories of the people who have lived in the city of Sydney's landscape of jacaranda and sandstone, clifftops and water views. From Lieutenant William Dawes, a member of the First Fleet and perhaps an ancestor of the author, to Kenneth Slessor, Patrick White, Abe Saffron and Brett Whiteley, all of the best-known names are touched on, but we also come to meet the likes of Mei Quong Tart, a Chinese immigrant who wore a kilt and recited the poetry of Burns in a Scots accent when he was not playing cricket. This is a book full of detailed research and eloquent prose.

Alan Frost **The First Fleet: the real story** [Black Inc.]

It has become almost conventional for historians to echo Manning Clark's account of the departure from England of the first eleven ships destined to establish a colony at Botany Bay: "an indescribable hopelessness and confusion dominated the scene." By returning to the original documents and reports of the time, Alan Frost has been able to prove that in fact the scene was described successfully by several witnesses, and that it was not entirely without hope. The settlement that was to become Sydney did not come about as a result of a confused and unplanned accident, nor was the treatment of convicts on the long voyage as inhumane as has been portrayed by writers such as Robert Hughes. One of the pleasures in reading Frost's meticulous reconstruction of events through the eyes of those who were there lies in his vigorous rebuttal of the myths created by other historians.

Anna Krien     **Into the Woods: the battle for Tasmania's forests**     [Black Inc.]

The struggle over Tasmania's forests has lasted over thirty years. When Melbourne-based journalist Anna Krien decided to write about the struggle, she began by going to stay with a group of protestors who share a house in South Hobart: "You're such a journo," one of them told her. "You only come down when blood spills." Yet Krien did not go for the blood. She went to discover the truth about the conflict, and to do so even-handedly spent time with environmentalists who cheerfully describe themselves as "feral", politicians, mill owners, and timber workers alike. If her sympathy remains with the first of these groups, she clearly explains the difficulty in the fact that "Tasmania's forest battles are fought largely in the arena of images and semantics." The result is a compelling, yet highly personal, account of a complex and unresolved issue.

Mark McKenna     **An Eye for Eternity: the life of Manning Clark**     [Melbourne University Publishing]

The reputation of Manning Clark, both as historian and as a person, has fallen into eclipse in recent years, not helped by scholars such as Alan Frost who believe historians should pay attention to facts. Nevertheless, that reputation did not emerge without reason, and one of the most important achievements of Mark McKenna's meticulous biography can be found in the way it brings Clark's persuasiveness and personal attractiveness to life. Clark was a brilliant lecturer, while as a writer he had gifts better suited to fictional narrative than to history, gifts which were to excite the first readers of his histories as much as they did those students who walked along Macquarie Street in Sydney with him, hearing a story about each historic landmark. Yet he was an unfaithful husband, a self-deceiving hypochondriac, and a self-pitying boaster who betrayed his wife repeatedly only to beg her to return each time she decided to leave him. The other important achievement in this book is its portrait of the long-suffering Dymphna, whose intelligence and strength of character come through in many quotations from her letters. In effect, the book is a dual biography of two people cruelly yoked together in a life sentence.

Penny Russell     **SAVAGE OR CIVILISED? Manners in Colonial Australia**     [New South Publishing]

Shaking hands was, to Governor Arthur Phillip, "a universal gesture of trust", and he used it in his first encounters with the aboriginal people of the Sydney region. Yet when Prince Alfred, the Duke of Edinburgh, landed at Circular Quay in 1868 he was appalled when Henry Parkes advanced on him with hand outstretched: it implied that the future Premier saw himself as equal with royalty. Class distinctions, the concept of honour, the division of the sexes, and even table manners are examined in this wide-ranging study which casts light on historic events and personalities from an unexpected new angle. To read Penny Russell's well-written book is to understand how it felt to be alive at a time when words, actions, and morality all had a very different meaning.

Further information about the Award may be found at [www.waverley.nsw.gov.au/library/award](http://www.waverley.nsw.gov.au/library/award)