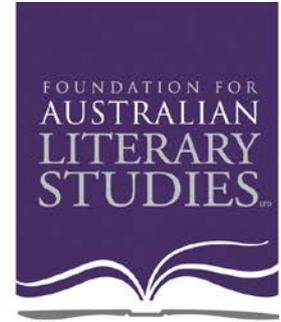


## MEDIA RELEASE



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NICOLE HAWKER  
Administration Officer

FOUNDATION FOR  
AUSTRALIAN LITERARY  
STUDIES

C/-JAMES COOK UNIVERSITY  
TOWNSVILLE QLD 4811

P 07 4781 5404  
E FALS@jcu.edu.au  
w jcu.edu.au/fals

## Top Australian authors shortlisted

Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2018

The finalists for one of Australia's longest established literary awards have been announced by the Foundation for Australian Literary Studies.

The shortlist of six titles for the Colin Roderick Award was chosen from over 200 nominations. Chair of the Judging Panel, Professor Stephen Torre said the judges were impressed by this year's submissions, which were of a very high standard across several genres including biography and memoir, history and social commentary, and fictional and imaginative work.

"The Colin Roderick Award is an unusual category of prize, in that it awards across genres and fields, from novels and imaginative works of various kinds to non-fiction aimed at a wide variety of audiences. Our judges have an extremely hard time of this as the number and quality of submissions is high and the diversity is wide. It's an exciting contest," said Dr Victoria Kuttainen, Executive Director of the Foundation for Australian Literary Studies.

The Colin Roderick Award, an annual literary prize, is named after the late Professor Colin Roderick, author and academic who established the Foundation for Australian Literary Studies in 1966.

The winning author will receive \$20,000 in prize money and the H. T. Priestley Memorial Medal, in recognition of their contribution to Australian literary culture.

The H. T. Priestly Memorial Medal remembers the influential service that founding chairperson Deputy Chancellor Tom Priestley had on the Foundation in its early years. The medal is presented to the winner of the annual literary award for their outstanding contribution to Australian literary culture.

The 2018 award and medal will be presented to the author of the best book, in the judges' opinion, dealing with any aspect of Australian life and published within Australia during 2017.

The shortlist of six books for the 2017 publishing year is:

**Claire Aman, *Bird Country***

**Tony Birch, *Common People***

**Lois Murphy, *Soon***

**Jock Serong, *On the Java Ridge***

**Kim Scott, *TABOO***

**Alexis Wright, *Tracker***

The judging panel consists of Professor Leigh Dale, Emeritus Professor Alan Lawson, Adjunct Professor Stephen Torre and Ms Mary Vernon.

The Foundation for Australian Literary Studies is based at James Cook University and aims to foster the study and appreciation of Australian literature. The Foundation is funded through the generosity of Mrs Margaret Roderick in memory of her husband the late Colin Roderick CBE.

The winner of this year's award and medal will be announced at the Foundation's annual dinner event to be held in Townsville, Tuesday 30th October 2018 at A Touch of Salt. Tickets to the event are available to purchase – [www.jcu.edu.au/fals](http://www.jcu.edu.au/fals).

**Further information:**

Dr Victoria Kuttainen, Executive Director of the Board

Mobile: 0408 070 510

[victoria.kuttainen@jcu.edu.au](mailto:victoria.kuttainen@jcu.edu.au)

**NOTE:** Attached are the judges' comments and bio's.

## Colin Roderick Award 2018 Shortlist

### Judges' Comments

*Claire Aman, Bird Country*

These stories are striking for their range and variety. Starting with a tale about a father, son and daughter-in-law heading to sea to scatter the ashes of the grandfather, it then puts together unlikely connections in *Ash Miss*, which shows the connection between a budgerigar, a mistreated boy and a crippled woman. Together the stories cover the range of human conditions with sensitivity and humour.

*Tony Birch, Common People*

A suite of realist stories with varying characters and situations, the range impressive. The delineations are firm but fine; one interesting characteristic is the way they could be set at any time, details suggest the present (being made redundant, the NGV) or the sixties and seventies (a Torana); grief is a common thread. 'Raven and Sons' is funny, 'Colours' has a nice non-realist twist ending, and 'Frank Slim' is brilliant.

Tony Birch has focussed on ordinary people and the dispossessed in these stories and treats his characters, no matter how distressing their circumstances with dignity and compassion. They may be common people, mostly ignored in Australian society, but Birch alerts us to what really matters.

*Lois Murphy, Soon*

A stunning work of sustained tension, especially the ending of this book. Although in many ways a standard realist novel, the book blends Sci-Fi and thriller, as well as being very, very well written. There are astute observations on character, and a plausible, weary, narrator. The book's entwinement of two stories that do not come together until the final pages that link abandonment, and revenge. If the greatest evil we commit is indifference to the suffering of others, whether loved ones or those in the news, this book will make you think for days about the price we should pay for lack of care.

*Kim Scott, Taboo*

This is very recognisably Kim Scott's work, and reflects his interest in recovering Noongar language. It feels more stripped back, cleaner, clearer than the earlier novels, and consequently both lighter (in style) and weightier (in ideas). There is a strong and compelling mix of vernacular – ordinary language, slang, everyday life – and recuperative: recovering, restoring, revivifying language, culture and people. *Taboo* shows a desire to speak of and to Indigenous audiences first and foremost. Part of this address is being prepared to show negatives, complexities, ambiguities and conflicts, particularly conflicts about ways of being Indigenous.

Jock Serong, *On the Java Ridge*

The writing leaves you breathless and there are passages that are brilliant, for example - 'Now he understood the gravity. Now he could trace the river backwards to him at the source:' in speaking of responsibility; 'The pile of bodies on the island, that didn't even enter the political calculus. ... they'd died as they lived: on the wrong side of an invisible line.' Serong brings together thriller, political critique, and adventure story in a way that might be reminiscent of James Bond, were it not that governments turn out to be the most evil of all.

Alexis Wright, *Tracker*

This is a new genre: a tapestry of voice in prose, a book of revelation about the mining industry, Aboriginal politics, and Territory/federal politics, economics and social thought. Above all, *Tracker* shows the power of story, in the constantly shifting ground of social relations: the power of analogy, anecdote, metaphor, in personal relations and therefore in political debate and policy implementation. Completely eschewing exposition – unheard of in non-fiction – it *demonstrates* Tracker's 'tactile' (p. 380) knowledge of people and their position-taking, shows our loss with his death, and shows how much is to be done in making the world liveable and sustainable for Aboriginal people in remote areas. The other notable aspect of the book is how unflinching it is about Tilmouth, the problems he was trying to solve, and his opponents and blockers.



## The Judges

### Leigh Dale

Professor Leigh Dale taught Australian and other literatures for several decades, and was editor of the journal *Australian Literary Studies* from 2002 to 2015. She was a judge of the inaugural Barbara Jefferis Award, and for the Association for the Study of Australian Literature (ASAL).

### Alan Lawson

Emeritus Professor Alan Lawson was formerly Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research & International) at The University of Queensland, Dean of the Graduate School, and inventor of the Three Minute Thesis Competition (3MT®), 2008. Prior to that he was a teacher and researcher in the fields of 'settler' cultures, literary and cultural institutions, Australian and Canadian fiction. He was (with Ken Goodwin) co-editor of *The Macmillan Anthology of Australian Literature*, and an editorial board member of 12 – mostly literary – journals. He has formerly judged several other Literary Awards, and is a Fellow of the Queensland Academy of Arts & Sciences.

### Stephen Torre

Stephen Torre is an Adjunct Professor in the College of Arts, Society and Education at James Cook University, and a Research Fellow in the Cairns Institute. His research interests are in the short story, writing and culture in the tropics, and twentieth-century avant-gardes. He is the founding editor of *etropic: electronic journal of studies in the tropics*; the project leader of the Cairns Institute's Cultural Atlas of Tropical Australia; the convenor of the Tropics of the Imagination Conference; and the patron and life-long member of Cairns Tropical Writers Inc.

### Mary Vernon

Born in Perth Western Australia Mary has worked as a journalist in most states of Australia and several other countries.

As well as her considerable experience in writing, reporting, layout, editing and uploading web content she started reviewing books for *The Australian* in the early 1980s. She took over as Books Editor at the *Townsville Bulletin* when Colin Roderick retired from that position while also being, in turn, deputy editor, features editor, production editor, and daily columnist at the *Townsville Bulletin* in North Queensland. She has edited several books and anthologies and, like most journalists, is working on the Great Australian Novel, as well as having almost completed a history of food on Magnetic Island.

Besides working in print with a variety of regional papers, she has also worked in radio and is still heard most Friday afternoons on ABC Radio Townsville as part of their drive time show.

She worked as tutor and mentor for News Ltd's online training college for young journalists for 10 years and spent six months in Myanmar in 2005, mentoring and training journalists on the *Myanmar Times* in Yangon, an experience she found very satisfying, although difficult.

In 2009 she graduated as a Master of Arts (Writing) from James Cook University in Townsville and hopes to complete a PhD in Social History over the next few years.