

## Miles Franklin Literary Award 2004 Shortlist

### Judges' Formal Comments

#### **Peter Carey, *My Life as a Fake* (Knopf)**

*My Life as a Fake* draws on that great Australian literary hoax, the Ern Malley Affair, to force us to question our notions of reality and identity. On a trip to Kuala Lumpur, Sarah Wode-Douglas, editor of an English literary magazine, encounters the dishevelled Australian poet, Christopher Chubb. She hears the remarkable story of his creation of the modernist poet Bob McCorkle who, like Frankenstein's monster, comes to life and steals Chubb's talents and his child. His only legacy to Chubb is his poems.

*My Life as a Fake* is a marvellous tale, complex, tricky and exotic with a myriad of finely crafted voices. It leaves us in no doubt that Peter Carey is one of our great writers.

#### **JM Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello* (Knopf)**

*Elizabeth Costello*, a novel in 'eight lessons' about a distinguished Australian writer whose life is grounded in her work and her intellectual activities, is a book of considerable power and subtlety. Treating his sometimes difficult and obscure material with great clarity and feeling, Coetzee has written a complex novel of ideas that canvasses some of the issues central to the history of Western thought: the good/evil and mind/body problems; the nature of belief; the question of the sacred; and the riddles of sex and death.

*Elizabeth Costello* is a demanding and rewarding work, by one of the best novelists currently writing in English.

#### **Peter Goldsworthy, *Three Dog Night* (Viking)**

*Three Dog Night* is a dramatic story of three doctors whose lives become more and more closely intertwined as one of them tries to come to terms with his approaching death. Goldsworthy sets his operatic themes of jealousy, loyalty, love and death in an instantly familiar contemporary Australia. The small-city complacencies, civilities and summer beauties of Adelaide are played off against the vastness and mystery of the desert, where the values and beliefs of Western medicine come up against those of traditional Aboriginal life.

All Goldsworthy's skills as a poet and librettist are deployed in his most recent fiction. *Three Dog Night* is a novel of here and now, at once lyrical and confronting.

### **Shirley Hazzard, *The Great Fire* (Virago Press)**

Moving from postwar Japan, to Hong Kong, England and eventually New Zealand, Shirley Hazzard's long-awaited new novel approaches the epic in its range of scenes and characters, though running to only 300 pages. At its heart is the growing love between an English war hero and a young Australian girl, providing one glimmer of hope in a world full of burnt survivors and uncaring victors. Hazzard surrounds her central figures with dozens of others, all perfectly evoked in a few words, as are the sights, sounds and smells of their lives.

Complex and utterly engrossing, *The Great Fire* is a reminder of why, in a digital age, the novel still matters.

### **Annamarie Jagose, *Slow Water* (Vintage)**

There have been many accounts of the long voyage from England to Australia in the early nineteenth century but Annamarie Jagose manages to make hers both convincing and surprising. Based on a voyage made by missionary William Yate in 1836, *Slow Water* graphically depicts the customary weeks of sickness and tedium, interspersed with moments of high drama during storms. But we are also shown the accumulating sexual tension, released in liaisons between men and women and men and men, which were never openly discussed even when generally known.

*Slow Water* is one of those rare novels which remains true to its historical period while at the same time bringing its scenes and characters vividly to life.

### **Elliot Perlman , *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (Picador)**

Elliot Perlman's second novel explores in great detail the terrain he has made his own: contemporary middle-class Melbourne. Like all Perlman's fiction, it has an ideological edge, examining the ways in which political trends and public policy can affect and sometimes destroy private lives in contemporary Australia. In *Seven Types of Ambiguity* a sad and bizarre act of kidnapping is the focus for the intersection of seven lives. Each person tells his or her very different version of the story, while even the well-educated and the well-heeled struggle not to fall from grace.

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*Seven Types of Ambiguity* is a sensitive, clear-eyed account of modern life's two cornerstones – love and work - and of what happens when they begin to crumble.