

Gleebooks Prize (\$10,000)

James Boyce, *Van Diemen's Land* Black Inc.

In this important contribution to the colonial history of Tasmania – and Australia – James Boyce argues that, unlike the mainland colonies, Tasmania was not just a convict settlement, but a convict society. The high percentage of convicts and former convicts in the island's population laid the foundation for a unique social environment, in which the former prison became the land of hope. The book, writes Boyce, is best described as environmental history, 'not because it explores how convict settlers changed the environment, but because its primary interest is how the environment changed *them*'. Woven into the story of Aboriginal-settler relations, this account of convict history goes beyond the history wars which have dominated public debates in the last decade to offer a compelling alternative narrative of colonial settlement and adaptation.

Tim Flannery, *Quarterly Essay 31: Now or Never, a sustainable future for Australia?* Black Inc.

Tim Flannery's *Quarterly Essay* presents an urgent plea for a sustainable future by means of fundamental questions: 'What is our purpose as a species? And how does Earth work?' If the standard definition of sustainability involves extending the Eighth commandment (Thou shalt not steal) to include not stealing from future generations, Flannery argues that any discussion of this issue must be underpinned by a broader moral and philosophical vision. Never losing sight of the big questions, his essay also concerns itself with practical solutions: what can we do before it is too late to reverse the despoliation of Earth's life-support system? Calling for a 'new industrial revolution' he goes on to detail possible measures to address the pressing issue of climate change: radical and ambitious, but do-able if political rhetoric is backed by political will.

Passionate as well as informed, Flannery has a unique capacity to present scientific complexity as if it were a voyage of discovery. His account challenges the reader and yet offers hope that humanity will become the means by which the Earth's self-regulatory system can be harnessed for the survival of the planet, and of human civilisation.

Gideon Haigh, *The Racket: how abortion became legal in Australia*, Melbourne University Press, an imprint of Melbourne University Publishing Ltd

Early in his compelling account of the long struggle for abortion to become legal in Victoria and NSW Gideon Haigh says: 'For much of Australia's history it has been easier to obtain an abortion than to use the word in print'. Haigh's story looks back to the nineteenth century in the United Kingdom, Europe and Australia before concentrating mainly on Victoria and NSW in the 1940s to the 1960s. His detailed description of 'the abortion scene' in Victoria is supplemented by a briefer account of the situation in Sydney – 'far rougher and more corrupt than in Melbourne'. Haigh's book moves deftly among various social milieux, including a range of medical professionals, police, journalists, magistrates, judges, prostitutes, and criminals as it lays out a tale of corruption at all levels. Haigh's social history shows the intersection of ordinary personal lives with other more powerful persons and institutions by turns intractable and beneficent. We hear many stories of personal and familial devastation in a tale that is also an inspiring story of the courage of feminists, social reformers and well-meaning people of all kinds.

**Chloe Hooper, *The Tall Man: death and life on Palm Island*
Penguin Group (Australia)**

Chloe Hooper's analysis of the events that led to and followed from the death of Cameron Doomadgee while in police custody on Palm Island does for her Australian context what some of the writing from Janet Malcolm and Joan Didion has done for American contexts. Hooper's elegant study of a terrible event aligns ancient Aboriginal cultural myths, magic, stories and explanations with the fateful logics of the contemporary white Australian police and judicial systems. The mixture of the personal and the aggregated, the individual and the institutional takes us from lazy evenings and beautiful sunsets in a tropical paradise that exhibits dispossession everywhere, to long, hot days in trial courts as the reader negotiates a story of policing, the justice system of trials and coroner's inquest, suicides and violence.

Hooper's tale shows how a specific, violent Aboriginal death brings with it traces of the earlier violent settlement of north Queensland, and her contrapuntal presentation of Aboriginal and white traditions (contained in the ambiguity of her book's title) allows each perspective to have its full cultural force. There is a fascinating mixture of 'the ancient and the modern' in her depiction of the everyday violence and dispossession of life on Palm Island which leaves the reader in a productive state of information, anger and sadness. Both writer and reader struggle to balance the choice between an explanation that says a specific set of actions caused the fatal injuries or an alternative explanation made in terms of an 'accident' or 'a complicated fall'. We come to see what Hooper means by mentioning 'a kind of war' and her story tells of many broken hearts as it works away with intelligence and empathy at its reader's emotions.

**David Love, *Unfinished Business: Paul Keating's interrupted revolution*
Scribe Publications Pty Ltd**

In *Unfinished Business*, veteran economic and financial observer David Love examines the significance of the major economic reforms undertaken by Paul Keating in his role as Treasurer and Prime Minister from 1983 to 1996, and their part in the revolutionary vision that transformed the economy, modernised the country's financial system and put in place measures designed to guarantee national prosperity through national savings and thereby improve the lives of all Australians.

Love argues that the failure to appreciate the importance of Keating's goal and to finish the job Keating started has left our new-found prosperity vulnerable, particularly in the current economic downturn.

The reach and depth of the current global financial crisis has driven home the need for us all to better understand how the economy works. This engaging, informative and accessible narrative is a book that needed to be written: it makes an important contribution to public debate about – and understanding of – economic policy.

**Jonathan Richards, *The Secret War: a true history of Queensland's Native Police*
University of Queensland Press**

This is a well researched account by historian Jonathan Richards of the role played by Queensland's Native Police in white settlement history and in the violent dispossession of Aboriginal people. Richards reminds us that Aboriginal resistance to European invasion was not considered a valid or appropriate action, but killing as part of an armed defence of settlers' assets was seen as lawful and justified homicide. The book makes reference to documents that reveal massacres of Aboriginal men, women and

children by Native Police led by white officers charged with guaranteeing security for advancing white settlers.

Richards argues that the indigenous recruits were part of a divide and rule colonising tactic used successfully elsewhere in the British Empire – native recruits were better at tracking down persons of interest than were white police, were cheaper, were not prone to succumbing to the ravages of climate and environment, and were used in areas at some distance from their own people. Many Native Police in Queensland were forced into service.

The book is a comprehensive study of a little known aspect of our history and makes a valuable contribution to our understanding of the tools and scale of dispossession.