

ALS Gold Medal 2014

Judges' Report

Judges:

Dr Philip Butterss (Chair) (U Adelaide)

Dr Mandy Treagus (U Adelaide)

Kelli Rowe (U Adelaide)

Shortlist:

Luke Carman, *An Elegant Young Man* (Giramondo)

Hannah Kent, *Burial Rites* (Picador)

Eleanor Limprecht, *What Was Left* (Sleepers)

Alex Miller, *Coal Creek* (A & U)

Christos Tsiolkas, *Barracuda* (A & U)

Alexis Wright, *The Swan Book* (Giramondo)

Winner:

Alexis Wright's *The Swan Book* is a novel of serious political intent concerning the migration of stories, peoples, imaginations and cultures. Wright's remarkable third novel is rightfully angry, necessarily challenging, deeply personal, and universally damning. The central plot line of *The Swan Book* follows the story of Oblivion Ethyl(ene), or Oblivia, a mute teenage girl who is the victim of a gang rape in her displaced and army-controlled Indigenous community. The narrative style is an extension of Wright's *Carpentaria*, blending many dimensions and registers simultaneously; *The Swan Book* is satirical, humorous, folkloric, mythical, magical and scathing, and combines the literal and the metaphoric with virtuosic skill. The logic with which Wright connects some of the most pressing political issues of our time—Indigenous rights, intervention, climate change, refugee policy—is compelling, and her projection of these issues into a dystopian future reveals both their messiness and their urgency.

The ALS Gold Medal is awarded annually for an outstanding literary work in the preceding calendar year. The Medal was inaugurated by the Australian Literature Society, which was founded in Melbourne in 1899 and incorporated into the Association for the Study of Australian Literature in 1982. The winner receives a gold medal. No nominations are required, though ASAL members are invited to propose potential winners to the judging panel.