



Embargoed to 10pm, Friday November 2, 2007

Media Release:

## CRIME BOOKS PASS CONNEX TEST: ANNOUNCING THE WINNERS OF 7<sup>th</sup> DAVITT AWARDS

*Undertow* (PanMacmillan), Sydney Bauer's debut legal thriller set in Boston, has won tonight's Davitt Award for the best (adult) crime novel by an Australian woman in 2006. *Silent Death: The Killing of Julie Ramage* (Hodder) by Age journalist, Karen Kissane, took out the Davitt (true crime) and jointly shared the Davitt (readers' choice) with *Devil's Food* (Allen & Unwin) by Kerry Greenwood. Jacyn Moriarty won the Davitt (young adult) for *The Betrayal of Bindy Mackenzie* (PanMacmillan).

The Davitt Awards were set up by Sisters in Crime in 2001 to celebrate the achievements of Australian women crime writers and, this year, have been sponsored by the Victoria Police Museum.

Sisters in Crime spokesperson, Dr Sue Turnbull, said that this year the judges used a unique and innovative form of assessment – the Connex Test – to assess the 38 Australian women's crime books in contention.

"The Connex Test establishes whether or not the book was engaging enough to distract the reader from the tedium of travel on Melbourne's public transport system. The quality of the writing – the plot or narrative, character and originality – determined how well the books passed the test," she said.

Walkley Award winning Perth journalist, Estelle Blackburn, was guest speaker at the Davitts award ceremony at the Celtic Club in Melbourne tonight. Blackburn's investigations resulted in pardons for John Button and Darryl Beamish, both wrongfully imprisoned for murder in Western Australia. Her latest book, *The End of Innocence* (May 2007), outlines her journey while searching for justice for the two men.

Blackburn presented the awards for best crime novels (adult and young adult) and readers' choice, as judged by the 500 members of Sisters in Crime. Assistant Police Commissioner (and long-term Sisters in Crime member), Sandy Nicholson, presented the true crime award.

"We're delighted to be partners in crime with the Victorian Police Museum," Dr Turnbull said. "Their generous support has enabled us to lure Estelle Blackburn across the Nullabor to be our guest speaker and present some of the awards."

The Davitt (adult fiction winner), Sydney Bauer, is a Sydney writer whose pseudonym pays homage to two TV characters – *Alias's* Sydney Bristow and *24's* Jack Bauer. She has worked extensively as a journalist for News Ltd and ACP, later becoming the National Director of Publicity at Channel 10 and then the Director of Programming in Sydney for Channel 7.

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***Fighting for justice for women crime writers; promoting women's crime fiction***

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Working in television gave Bauer access to the brilliant writing talents of people like Steven Bochco, Dick Wolf, David E Kelly and Aaron Sorkin among others and the inspiration to write her first novel, *Undertow*, which explores racism, gender, class and politics in contemporary Boston. PanMacmillan has just negotiated a new publishing deal with Madison and Berkley Presses will see *Undertow* hit the US market from next week. Bauer's second novel, *Gospel*, is also set in Boston and features the same lawyer, David Cavanaugh.



Bauer told the award ceremony, "I have to start by saying how much I appreciate – not just the acknowledgement – but the opportunity to be involved with, to be part of, and to be recognized by a group like Sisters in Crime. The group is such an unwavering, dedicated, enthusiastic supporter of us female crime writers that a simple thank you does not seem enough."

According to Dr Turnbull, the judges found *Undertow* a novel of the times. "It's a page-turning legal thriller which uses a filmic/televisual style to propel the reader forward in a breathless rush to the dramatic denouement."

The Davitt (young adult winner) Jacyln Moriarty was unable to attend the awards night as she was in New York on a tour with her American publishers (Scholastic) to promote her novel, titled *The Murder of Bindy Mackenzie* in the US, and a more recent book.

Moriarty lives in Sydney and is the author of the international best-seller, *Feeling Sorry for Celia* (winner of the New South Wales Premier's Award for Young Adult Fiction) and its companion books, *Finding Cassie Crazy* and *The Betrayal of Bindy Mackenzie*. Her books have been translated into several languages including Dutch, Italian, Danish, German, Hebrew and Thai, and have been named Best Books for Young Adults by the American Librarians Association. Her most recent novel is *The Spell Book of Listen Taylor*.

"With *The Betrayal of Bindy Mackenzie*, I wanted to do something different. So I set myself two challenges: first, I would write a murder mystery; and second, I would write a book about the least popular girl in the school. The two ideas seemed to work together and that's how the book got its start," Moriarty said.

Dr Turnbull said, "*The Betrayal of Bindy Mackenzie* is an engaging youth novel that works on many levels. It's a mystery, with a crime unravelled in a masterful way, but it's also about coping mechanisms, the ways in which we conceal our real fears by pretending they don't exist. Moriarty evokes the world of the teenage girl, her thoughts, angst and language in a way which Chris Lilley might well use."

*The Betrayal of Bindy Mackenzie* also won this year's Ned Kelly Award for young adult fiction. The judges also highly commended ***Monkey Under Cover*** by Gabrielle Lord.

Karen Kissane was very surprised to win two Davitt awards for her true crime book, *Silent Death*.

"I think these awards, and the work of Sisters in Crime, more generally, are very important to women writers. Writing a book is a hard, lonely old slog; it is hard to sell books in any numbers in this country; and crime novels and true crime are only now starting to be written by women in large numbers. Being welcomed and encouraged like this is hugely important to women, and I am very grateful to have been the beneficiary of it," she said.

Dr Turnbull said *Silent Death* also offered not only a portrait of a marriage, but also an understanding of a specific social milieu.

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"*Silent Death* also offered an analysis of the defence of provocation and the ways in which the law frequently fails to deliver justice. Another great strength is that it presents multiple perspectives. As a result, the book is remarkably even-handed, although it takes a very clear moral position."



Coincidentally, Kissane presented last year's Davitt awards.

Kerry Greenwood, the joint winner of The Davitt (readers' choice), is a serial offender having jointly won a Davitt (readers' choice) last year for *Heavenly Pleasures*, the second in her Corinna Chapman baker sleuth series and The Davitt (young adult) in 2002 for *The Three-Pronged Dagger*.

Greenwood has written over 40 novels, including the famous Phryne Fisher mystery series set in 1928 St Kilda. She has also edited two true crime books, *On Murder* and *On Murder 2* and in 1996 published a book of essays on female murderers called *Things She Loves: Why Women Kill*. Kerry has worked as a folk singer, factory hand, director, producer, translator, costumer-maker, cook and also most often as a legal aid barrister.

Greenwood told the crowd, "The lady in question would wish me to say that of all presents, your attention is the most precious, and though fashions may come and go, and though black trakkie daks may vanish from this earth, your affection will remain as one of our most cherished possessions."

Dr Turnbull said that the Sisters in Crime established the Davitts in 2001 to give recognition to the growing body of Australian women's crime writing.

"In 2001 seven crime novels written by Australian women competed for the award. By contrast, this year 16 adult crime novels, 11 young adult crime novels and, now for the second year for true crime, 11 crime books, have fought it out. It's a new chapter in women's crime fiction and true crime," she said.

"Publishers submitted some excellent books by Australian women but a significant number could have benefited from workshoping, more thoughtful editing and perhaps even feedback from sympathetic and experienced crime readers. Publishers in general do not seem to offer such feedback.

"Another issue with which the judges wrestled was the number of books submitted for the Davitt Awards which do not easily fit within the genre of crime fiction.

"The judges recommended *Shifting Fog* by Kate Morton in the adult category. However, although it does contain a crime, the book sits more comfortably within the romance/family melodrama/historical novel category than it does within the various sub-genres of crime fiction."

The judging panel comprised Jane Sullivan (Sunday Age literary columnist), Dr Shelley Robertson (Sisters in Crime member, forensic pathologist), Rosi Tovey (former owner of Chronicles Bookshop in St Kilda, Sue Turnbull (Head of Media Studies, La Trobe University, Sisters in Crime national co-convenor and *Sydney Morning Herald* crime columnist), Katrina Beard (Sisters in Crime national co-convenor, and reviewer) and Vivienne Colmer (Sisters in Crime national co-convenor, and reviewer).

The Victoria Police Museum, which reopened on October 4, is planning book signings, special tours and lectures in the museum with Sisters in Crime. One of the 11 books in contention for this year's Davitt (true crime award) was Rachael Weaving book, *The Criminal*

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of the Century, about serial wife murderer Frederick Deeming, *The Criminal of the Century*. The Victoria Police Museum holds Deeming's death mask.



The awards are named after Ellen Davitt (1812-1879) who wrote Australia's first mystery novel, *Force and Fraud*, in 1865.

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