

Sienna Brown: *Master of My Fate*

What does being longlisted mean to you?

“Being long listed for the ARA Historical Novel Prize means acclamation as a writer and a way to honour the story itself - *Master of My Fate* is a significant story, and one that needs to be told especially in light of the Black Lives Matter movement. Australia’s colonial past is imbued with people like William Buchanan, who was born a slave on a plantation in Jamaica before being transported here as a convict and goes a long way to establishing that Australia’s beginnings were truly more multicultural than many people realise, or would like to admit.”

Why did you enter the inaugural ARA Historical Novel Prize?

“I love historical fiction. I entered the ARA Historical Novel Prize because I felt it was important to be a part of the dialogue, part of the landscape, and discover where my book fits within that. There are prizes for all the other genres, but this is the first prize being given for historical fiction. It’s exciting to see the prize come to fruition— it affirms a really terrific and hardworking genre that requires a great deal of research and the ability to create a story embedded in reality, as much as the imagination.”

Why do you think awards like this are important?

“Awards like the ARA Historical Novel Prize provides recognition for the author and the ability to break through to readers, particularly with such an overburdened marketplace. This award also helps to keep authors focused—it gives us something to work towards and while connecting with readers is amazing, validation by your peers is equally as important. It’s also about acknowledgement of all the hard work done by the publishers, editors, designers, marketing, booksellers etc to name a few, because an award for one, is an award for all. And of course substantial prizes like this gives an author the freedom to just stay focused on writing, which is vital to producing excellent work.”

Nigel Featherstone: *Bodies of Men*

What does being longlisted mean to you?

“Being longlisted for the ARA Historical Novel Prize is a shot in the arm, particularly in what has been a fairly challenging year for the arts and the book industry, as well as more broadly across the world. It is a vote of confidence and a wonderful moment of encouragement that my novel—*Bodies of Men*—has merit, and it’s a great opportunity for the book to reach a wider audience.”

Why did you enter the inaugural ARA Historical Novel Prize?

“The ARA Historical Novel Prize is a terrific new initiative to support and recognise the quality of historical fiction in Australia and New Zealand. The prize represents an opportunity to be part of the broader conversation about historical fiction and to recognise all the writers and readers that love the genre.”

Why do you think awards like this are important?

“Writing is a solitary business and publication is difficult— they say that only one in one thousand manuscripts is published. To be published is wonderful, as is being read, but to then be recognised by an award such as the ARA Historical Novel Prize is amazing. To have my book read by judges who appreciate historical fiction, and then have their stamp of approval, is a great moment.”

Catherine Jinks: *Shepherd*

What does being longlisted mean to you?

“I am stoked! I have to say, I’m trying not to get too excited because the book was shortlisted for another prize and wasn’t successful!”

Why did you enter the inaugural ARA Historical Novel Prize?

“The ARA Historical Fiction Prize is one of the first awards in which I was keen to enter the book, because I am such a history nut. It is so great that there is finally a historical novel prize. After 30 odd years of writing historical novels, finally there is a prize that recognises the genre and, not only that, it is a serious prize.”

“If you don’t understand history, then you’re condemned to repeat it. People are so historically unaware—it’s staggering really—and historical fiction is a soft way of getting people interested in learning more about the past. These days, people think we’re different from what we used to be generations ago. In some ways we are, but in a lot of ways we’re not. Historical appreciation is essential. We have to value what used to be because it informs what is happening now. Historical fiction is an easy way to foster this appreciation.”

Why do you think awards like this are important?

“At this particular point in time, awards like the ARA Historical Novel Prize are staggeringly important—they give recently published books much-needed publicity. I have had books come out, and it’s honestly just like throwing them off a cliff; no one pays attention. Every single book of mine that has ever really been successful has received some sort of shortlisting or prize.”

Mirandi Riwoe: *Stone Sky Gold Mountain*

What does being longlisted mean to you?

“I want to thank the Historical Novel Society Australasia and ARA Group. I am so thrilled to be longlisted in the inaugural ARA Historical Novel Prize—what a huge honour. I love writing historical fiction, so it is especially lovely to be recognised in this prize.”

Why did you enter the inaugural ARA Historical Novel Prize?

“There was quite a bit of excitement for this generous, new prize that was especially for historical fiction. I couldn’t resist throwing my hat in the ring.”

Why do you think awards like this are important?

“Historical fiction explores and reveals aspects of our past that still affect us today. It can expose the wrongs of the past, or illuminate how far we have come. An award like the ARA Historical Novel Prize is essential in supporting and promoting historical fiction as a genre and its authors.”

Dominic Smith: *The Electric Hotel*

What does being longlisted mean to you?

“It’s a real honour to be recognised as part of the longlist, especially at a time when history feels more important than ever. I’m delighted to know my work has been appreciated within a genre full of so many promising and accomplished voices.”

Why did you enter the inaugural ARA Historical Novel Prize?

“I’ve been publishing historical fiction for more than a decade, so I was very excited to hear about a new prize that recognises the contributions that this genre makes to broader literature and storytelling. I certainly wanted to throw my hat into the ring!”

Why do you think awards like this are important?

“There aren’t many awards that are specific to historical fiction, despite the genre’s enduring popularity. A prize like this brings attention to the ways in which the historical novel can shed light on both the past and the present. I think it’s especially important that the award is a celebration of Australian and New Zealand writers and writing.”

Christos Tsiolkas: *Damascus*

What does being longlisted mean to you?

“Being longlisted for this prize is a great honour. I mean that with the utmost sincerity. As someone who does cherish and respect the work of historians it is a gift that people whose vocation and discipline is history have acknowledged my work. I think this is a great compliment for any writer.”

Why did you enter the inaugural ARA Historical Novel Prize?

“When my publishers contacted me about entering the ARA Historical Novel Prize I immediately said yes. I was nervous – anxiety and self-doubt are a writer’s constant companions – but I was curious of the judgement of people whose speciality is history. Again, the nomination is a gift for me.”

Why do you think awards like this are important?

“Awards are important because they are a means of making public the work and efforts of writers. I am proud to be part of this list of nominations. For many of us our first introduction to history comes from reading historical fiction. I know this was definitely true in my case as a young reader. There’s always an element of distance a writer has to keep from the allure of the “glittering prizes”. I do honestly believe that writing is not a competition. Yet in a world of so much dizzying information a prize such as this can, for a moment, shine a light on the good work many writers are doing, often work that doesn’t get the attention or scrutiny that it deserves.”

Pip Williams: *The Dictionary of Lost Words*

What does being longlisted mean to you?

“It might not surprise you to know that one of the first things I did was look up the meaning of Longlisted in the dictionary – essentially, it means to be selected for consideration. It could be for a job or a scholarship or prize. In my case, it means that this novel, which I have loved and nurtured and written into being, has been appreciated by others as having some inherent value. It means it is good enough to be considered alongside other novels that have been loved and nurtured and written into being by their authors.”

“So, what you are really asking is what it means to be considered. In some ways that is a question at the heart of my book – and I can honestly say that being long listed for this Prize makes me feel like I’ve been heard; that the themes I explore in my book are as important today as they were in the early 20th century; that somehow, I have managed to express them in a way that resonates with readers. In short, it is satisfying and humbling and thrilling.”

Why did you enter the inaugural ARA Historical novel Prize?

“I entered this Prize because a reader suggested it. They had enjoyed the way my book wove the fictional story of a woman through the history of the Oxford English Dictionary. I think they appreciated the way fiction can present a different perspective on history and how that new perspective can challenge what we think about the present. They sent me the link to the prize, and I clicked on it.”

Why do you think awards like this are important?

“This is my first novel, so I am new to the opportunities literary prizes can offer books and their authors. But I have always been a reader, and I have been introduced to so many wonderful books I might not otherwise read, because they have been considered for literary prizes.”

“I am acutely aware that an award, of any kind, is going to reflect all kinds of subjective decisions. That the longlist from one group of judges might be different to the longlist from another group of judges. But awards are important because they introduce books, and the ideas within them, to readers. They kick start conversations that can extend beyond book groups and have an influence on social, cultural and political discussions. They acknowledge the value of the arts, and in some cases, they are the greatest form of financial remuneration for the prize winner. In the absence of economic security, that can’t be underestimated.”

Tara June Winch: *The Yield*

What does being longlisted mean to you?

“Being longlisted for the Historical Novel Prize is such a great honour, particularly because the truth that I’ve written about was denied from the declarations of Australian history for so long. I’ve realised in the writing of this novel, and the response from readers, that truth telling is always necessary in any age, that’s it is always relevant to know where we have come from, that our past is entwined with our present - and only by knowing our history will we be conscious to try not to repeat it.”

Why do you think awards like this are important?

“Awards like the ARA Historical Novel Prize are important because they flag a genre that can be buried by the commercial world of contemporary fiction. The award pays homage to the past, and has the ability to highlight parts of our history that may not be in the public discourse. It’s an exciting prize to be part of for that reason, to see what great stories of the past have been reimagined and unearthed.”