

EMBARGOED UNTIL 11 AM, WEDNESDAY, 7 OCTOBER 2020

ARA Historical Novel Prize announces longlist and doubles prize monies

In conjunction with its generous sponsor ARA Group, the Historical Novel Society Australasia (HNSA) has today announced the eight talented authors, and their outstanding novels, selected in the 2020 longlist for the inaugural *ARA Historical Novel Prize*.

Longlisted entries include:

- *Master of My Fate* by Sienna Brown (Penguin Books Australia)
- *Bodies of Men* by Nigel Featherstone (Hachette Australia)
- *Shepherd* by Catherine Jinks (Text Publishing)
- *Stone Sky Gold Mountain* by Mirandi Riwoe (University of Queensland Press)
- *The Electric Hotel* by Dominic Smith (Allen & Unwin Australia)
- *Damascus* by Christos Tsiolkas (Allen & Unwin Australia)
- *The Dictionary of Lost Words* by Pip Williams (Affirm Press)
- *The Yield* by Tara June Winch (Penguin Books Australia)

The ARA Historical Novel Prize is designed to give historical novelists the opportunity to be recognised in a class of their own — for the first time ever as part of an Australian and New Zealand literary award.

According to Linda Funnell, the Chair of the judging panel, the quality of the 185 entries received was truly remarkable.

“It has been a privilege to see the breadth and quality of historical fiction being written and published in Australia and New Zealand,” she said.

“The judging process has been a challenging one, assessing 185 entries for excellence in writing, depth of historical research, reader appeal, and design.”

“There are many fine books that did not make it onto the longlist, an indicator of the depth and richness of the field,” she said.

The announcement of the longlist coincides with ARA Group doubling its funding for the inaugural award, increasing the total prize monies to \$60,000. The overall prize winner will now receive \$50,000, with an additional \$5,000 to be awarded to each of the remaining two shortlisted authors.

The increase in funding places the ARA Historical Novel Prize among the top five richest literary prizes in Australia and New Zealand, and makes it the most significant genre-based literary prize in Australia.

ARA Group Founder, Executive Chair and Managing Director, Edward Federman, said he recognises the current challenges facing the arts sector, particularly the literary community, and is passionate about amplifying the award’s impact on the winning authors.

“The COVID-19 pandemic has adversely affected the livelihoods of those working across all facets of the literary community, with many Australian and New Zealand authors unable to promote their work or earn a living through appearances or conducting writing courses due to lockdown restrictions and social distancing requirements,” he said.

“In light of this, we’re hopeful the additional funding for the ARA Historical Novel Prize will not only make a considerable difference to the lives of the winning authors, but also shine a light on the historical fiction genre and the work of all entrants across the Trans-Tasman community.”

HNSA Chair and Author Elisabeth Storrs said she is confident the ARA Historical Novel Prize will ensure authors are proud to call their novel ‘historical fiction’ due to its literary merit, depth of research and reader appeal.

“The 2020 ARA Historical Novel Prize longlist demonstrates the true diversity of historical fiction, and its innate ability to explore bygone eras, to illuminate new interpretations, and to transport readers to a different time and place,” she said.

“From an account of the very first Oxford English Dictionary, through to life on the Australian goldfields, our longlisted authors tell thrilling tales that are steeped in history, and full of meanings that resonate with audiences all over the world.”

“Historical fiction has the power to enlighten and entertain. The ARA Historical Novel Prize is a true celebration of the genre, and a real opportunity to foster it on a grander scale.”

Applications for the ARA Historical Novel Prize were open to all authors — whether traditionally or self-published — who are residents or citizens of Australia or New Zealand, with books published between 1 January 2019 and 30 June 2020.

The definition of the genre set for the prize ensures a breadth of talented writers was eligible to enter. Under the entry criteria, historical fiction was defined as a novel written at least 50 years after the events described, or by an author not alive at the time of the events described, who therefore must approach those events only through research.

The judging panel for the prize included Linda Funnell (Chair), co-editor of The Newtown Review of Books, freelance editor and publishing consultant; Paula Morris, historical novelist, academic and founder of the Academy of New Zealand Literature; Kirsty Murray, historical novelist, Creative Fellow of the State Library of Victoria and Asialink Literature Resident in India; and Colin Falconer, author of over two dozen novels of historical fiction translated across 23 languages

The ARA Historical Novel Prize shortlist will be announced on Wednesday, 28 October, with the prize winner to be announced by both video broadcast and live stream in Sydney on the evening of Tuesday, 10 November 2020.

More information about the prize can be found at www.hnsa.org.au/ara-historical-novel-prize

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