

Shortlist for Walter Scott Prize announced today



The shortlist for the fourth £25,000 Walter Scott Prize for historical fiction is announced today by the judging panel. The six novels, with settings ranging from Tudor and Restoration England to the slums of Victorian London, and from the bloody battlefields of the Western Front in World War One to the highlands of Malaysia during the 'Malayan Emergency', encompass a giddy diversity of setting in both time and place, echoing the oeuvre of the writer after whom the prize is named, Sir Walter Scott.

The shortlist is:

TOBY'S ROOM by Pat Barker

THE DAUGHTERS OF MARS by Thomas Keneally

BRING UP THE BODIES by Hilary Mantel

THE STREETS by Anthony Quinn

THE GARDEN OF EVENING MISTS by Tan Twan Eng

MERIVEL by Rose Tremain

The judges commented:

"This year's shortlist is rich and complex, contains breathtaking writing, and gloriously unexpected stories which

refresh understandings of history in a way in which Sir Walter Scott would have approved. The shortlist exemplifies the extraordinary quality of newly-published writing that is set in the past: from ancient to recent history.”

The shortlisted books are by authors from Australia and Malaysia, as well as from England, strengthening the international dimension brought to the prize by last year’s opening up of the rules to include writers from the Commonwealth. Books must have been written in English, with the majority of their setting being at least 60 years ago, in keeping with the prize’s definition of ‘historical’ borrowed from Walter Scott himself in the subtitle of his Waverley novels: ‘Tis Sixty Years Since.’

The Walter Scott Prize, founded in 2009 by the Duke and Duchess of Buccleuch and awarded at the Brewin Dolphin Borders Book Festival in June, is the largest annual UK prize to be judged outside London, and honours the legacy and achievements of Sir Walter Scott, founder of the historical novel. Scott’s influence has been further revived this year, with several new books and documentaries on his life, a new radio adaptation of his work read by David Tennant, and the re-opening of his Borders home Abbotsford after substantial restoration.

The judging panel for the Walter Scott Prize for historical fiction comprises Kirsty Wark, Louise Richardson, Jonathan Tweedie, Elizabeth Laird, Elizabeth Buccleuch, and chair Alistair Moffat. The judges’ criteria include originality and innovation, quality of writing, a strong narrative, and the ability of a book to shed light on the present as well as the past. Books can be by writers living in the UK, Ireland or the Commonwealth as long as they are writing in English and

the book is first published in these countries.

Shortlisted authors are invited to attend the award ceremony and announcement on Friday 14th June, which is a public event as part of the Brewin Dolphin Borders Book Festival in Melrose, near Scott's home Abbotsford. As well as enjoying the hospitality of the Duke and Duchess of Buccleuch at their home Bowhill, shortlisted authors this year will also exclusively be offered a private preview tour of Abbotsford following its restoration.

The Judges said of the shortlisted books:

TOBY'S ROOM Pat Barker

"The story, which is approached obliquely through the lens of solving a mystery, is beautifully simple whilst capturing complex characters, and contains the most exquisite writing. Pat Barker is where she wants to be in this period; she is a master."

THE DAUGHTERS OF MARS Thomas Keneally

"Sheds new light on a well-documented period in history and from a different and hugely effective viewpoint. The atmosphere is evoked brilliantly, and it draws you in to the lives of everyday people affected by momentous events with masterful ease."

BRING UP THE BODIES Hilary Mantel

“Hilary Mantel lends a superb and cleverly contemporary spin to the well-known story of Anne Boleyn, and *Bring up the Bodies* is a highly readable, intelligent novel that effortlessly fulfils the criterion of the Walter Scott Prize that work should shed light on the present as well as the past.”

THE STREETS Anthony Quinn

“This novel is refreshingly different and contains a cornucopia of wonderful material and evocative descriptions, from opulent ballroom to appalling slum tenement. Anthony Quinn is an excellent writer, and universal themes of loss of identity and community are well-covered here.”

THE GARDEN OF EVENING MISTS Tan Twan Eng

“This is a richly enigmatic, layered novel, which portrays the complexity of Malaya at that time, as well as the jaggedness of relationships, sensitively providing multiple glimpses of cultural identities.”

MERIVEL Rose Tremain

“A marvellously rollicking good read, and it is such a pleasure to meet Robert Merivel again. Rose Tremain brings the character to life in a way that makes you want to find out even more about the period. Enormously skilled and deft.”