

PRESS RELEASE

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Local Author Achieves National Success

Christina Courtenay wins Historical Romantic Novel Category

Romantic Novelists' Association Awards 2014

Christina Courtenay, who divides her time between London and Hereford, was declared the winner of the Historical Category of the Romantic Novel of the Year Award this evening.

The announcement, made by Darcey Bussell CBE, was for her novel *The Gilded Fan*, and to mark her success Christina was presented with a star-shaped crystal trophy by Ms Bussell during a glittering ceremony held in the Reading and Writing Room of the Gladstone Library, One Whitehall Place in London.

Christina's novel then went forward, along with those of the four other category winners - Contemporary, Epic, Romantic Comedy and Young Adult - to contest the Romantic Novelists' Association's (RNA) most coveted award, the Romantic Novel of the Year. This is the most prestigious award in the RNA's calendar and the winner was announced later in the evening.

The Historical Novel Category is for books set in a period before 1960, and time slip novels can be included. Christina won in the face of fierce competition from Charlotte Betts, who was successful last year, Liz Harris, Joanna Hickson, Carol McGrath and Annie Murray.

Published by Choc Lit, *The Gilded Fan* is set in 1641 and follows the story of Midori Kumashiro, orphaned daughter of a warlord, who has to leave Japan or die; so

flees to England. Although trained in the arts of war, will that be enough to help Midori survive a journey with a lecherous crew and an attractive captain that she doesn't trust?

Having come to Nagasaki to trade, the last thing Captain Nico Noordholt wants is a female passenger, especially a beautiful one. How can he protect her from his crew when he can't keep his own eyes off her? During the journey Nico and Midori form a tentative bond, but they both have secrets that can change everything. When they arrive in England a civil war is brewing, and only by standing together can they hope to survive.

The category winners' novels -

**A Night on the Orient Express* - Veronica Henry
Contemporary Category

**The Fever Tree* - Jennifer McVeigh
Epic category

**The Gilded Fan* - Christina Courtenay
Historical Category

**It's Raining Men* - Milly Johnson
Romantic Comedy

**Linked* - Imogen Howson
Young Adult

- were read and judged by a respected, highly experienced panel of five independent industry professionals who determined the overall winner of the Romantic Novel of the Year.

This year the five judges included Sarah Broadhurst, *The Bookseller*; Alison Flood, *Guardian.co.uk*; Jane Mays, *The Daily Mail*; Karin Stoecker, ex-Editorial Director, Harlequin Books and Chris White of Waterstones.

The judges said of Christina's novel, "Historically well done and accurate. The Japanese element was riveting, it was a compelling read."

For the past 50 years the RNA has set a benchmark in romantic fiction. Its President, Katie Fforde, commented, "The RNA was set up in 1961 to encourage the good writing of romantic fiction in all its many genres. We congratulate all of our category winners. To get this far and compete against some of the best authors in the land is no mean feat."

Cover images for all the above novels, together with author photographs, can be found at:

http://www.romanticnovelistsassociation.org/activities/photo_galleries

High resolution pictures of the Romantic Novel of the Year Awards can be found in the media section of our website

http://www.romanticnovelistsassociation.org/news/media_centre

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The Historical Romantic Novel category finalists

Charlotte Betts, *The Painter's Apprentice*, Piatkus

1688. Beth Ambrose has led a sheltered life within Merryfields, her family home on the outskirts of London; a place where her parents provide a sanctuary for melancholic souls. A passionate and gifted artist, Beth shares a close bond with Johannes the painter, who nurtures her talents and takes her on as his apprentice. But as political tensions begin to rise in the capital, Noah Leyton arrives at her family home in the middle of the night with a proposition that turns Beth's world upside down. And when Merryfields becomes refuge to a mysterious new guest, whose connections provide an opportunity for Beth to fulfil her artistic ambitions, she soon realises that it comes at a price.

Liz Harris, *A Bargain Struck*, Choc Lit

1887 Wyoming. Ellen O'Sullivan wants a home, husband and family. Widower Connor Maguire wants a woman to raise Bridget, his daughter, work the homestead and bear him a son. He advertises and Ellen answers. On paper she is everything Connor needs in a wife; however, when they meet it becomes clear that Ellen has not been entirely truthful. Will Connor be able to overlook Ellen's dishonesty and keep his side of the bargain? Or will Bridget's resentment, the attentions of the beautiful Miss Quinn and the arrival of an unwelcome visitor combine to prevent the couple starting anew?

Joanna Hickson, *The Agincourt Bride*, Harper Collins

When her own child is stillborn, young Mette is pressed into service as a wet-nurse at the court of Charles VI of France. As her charge, Catherine, approaches womanhood, Mette's position seals Catherine's fate as a pawn between two powerful dynasties - her brother, the Dauphin, and the Duke of Burgundy. Both use Catherine to further the cause of France and she is powerless to stop them. But with France in chaos following defeat at the Battle of Agincourt the tables turn and suddenly her currency has never been higher. Can Mette protect Catherine from those who seek to harm her or will her loyalty place Catherine in greater danger?

Carol McGrath, *The Handfasted Wife*, Accent Press

1066 and England faces a time of great uncertainty. Beautiful, beloved Elditha, handfasted wife of King Harold, the father of her children, is cast aside for a political marriage. Witnessing Harold's defeat at Hastings, she flees from the Norman invasion. Can she preserve her broken love and protect her family?

Annie Murray, *The Women Of Lilac Street*, Pan

Birmingham, almost a decade after the end of the Great War, and the women of Lilac Street have had more than their fair share of troubles ... Rose Southgate is trapped in a loveless marriage. Shy and isolated, she makes the best of life, until she meets a man who changes everything. Jen Green is struggling to make ends meet, with a sick husband and five children to support. Aggie, her eldest daughter, is twelve years old and longs for excitement. But prying into the adult world shows her more than she had bargained for. And Phyllis Taylor is a widow who has managed to put a dark and traumatic past behind her. But the return of her daughter Dolly threatens all that These women find strength in friendship, as they discover that the best way to solve their problems is to face them together.

Note to Editors

About the Romantic Novelists' Association

The RNA was formed in 1960 to promote romantic fiction and encourage good writing and now represents more than 700 writers, agents, editors and other publishing professionals. The Romantic Novel of the Year Award was launched in the same year, and recognises excellence in romantic novels thereby enhancing the standing of the genre.

The RNA has always involved readers in judging the awards. Keen readers are asked to rate nominated books on a number of criteria including romantic content, readability, characters, plot, dialogue, style and ending. These readers' favourites are then presented to the expert independent judges, who decide the overall winners.

The 2013 Romantic Novel of the Year Award winner was Jenny Colgan, for *Welcome to Rosie Hopkins' Sweetshop of Dreams*, published by Sphere. Other recent winners include Jane Lovering, Julia Gregson, Freya North, Rosie Thomas, Jojo Moyes and Philippa Gregory.

A list of past winners of RNA awards can be found at www.romanticnovelistsassociation.org