



2019 Winner

The Long Take Robin Robertson

Picador

About the author

Robin Robertson is from the north-east coast of Scotland. A Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature, he has published six books of poetry and received a number of accolades, including the Petrarca-Preis, the E.M. Forster Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and all three Forward Prizes. His selected poems, *Sailing the Forest*, came out in 2014. *The Long Take* won the Walter Scott Prize for Historical Fiction, the Roehampton Poetry Prize, the Goldsmiths Prize for Fiction and was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize.

About the book

A *noir* narrative written with the intensity and power of poetry, *The Long Take* is one of the most remarkable – and unclassifiable – books of recent years. Walker is a D-Day veteran with post-traumatic stress disorder; he can't

return home to rural Nova Scotia, and looks instead to the city for freedom, anonymity and repair. As he moves from New York to Los Angeles and San Francisco we witness a crucial period of fracture in American history, one that also allowed *film noir* to flourish. The Dream had gone sour but – as those dark, classic movies made clear – the country needed outsiders to study and dramatise its new anxieties.

While Walker tries to piece his life together, America is beginning to come apart: deeply paranoid, doubting its own certainties, riven by social and racial division, spiralling corruption and the collapse of the inner cities. *The Long Take* is about a good man, brutalised by war, haunted by violence and apparently doomed to return to it – yet resolved to find kindness again, in the world and in himself.

Reviews

"A beautiful, vigorous and aching melancholy hymn to the common man that is as unexpected as it is daring . . . *The Long Take* is a masterly work of art, exciting, colourful, fast-paced - the old-time movie reviewer's vocabulary is apt to the case - and almost unbearably moving." *The Guardian*

"*The Long Take* shows it is perfectly possible to write poetry which is both accessible and subtle, which has a genuine moral and social conscience . . . This is a major achievement and will linger long in the reader's mind." *Scotsman on Sunday*

"As a work of art, this dreamlike exploration is a triumph; as a timely allegory, it is disturbingly profound... One of the first major achievements of 21st-century English-language literature." *Financial Times*

Discussion Questions

How is the past used to help us understand the present?

What impact does the use of different writing styles have? How do you think it would be different if it were all written in prose?

How do films play into the narrative?

The young newspaper-man Pike becomes a focus for Walker's anger: how does the author use Pike as a contrast to Walker himself?

What role does Billy play in helping Walker come to terms with the war and his part in it?

Consider the final choices Walker makes in the story - both in regard to Pike and

about himself. Why does Walker take this course of action?

The story highlights many of the forces that shaped 20th-century and 21st-century America, including racism, seen through the eyes of the outsider Walker. Discuss how the author explores the concept of an American identity, both on an individual and a national basis.

The story discusses and shows illustrations of how much of historic Los Angeles was intentionally razed by developers. Discuss this erasure as a metaphor for America's relationship with its own history.

(Questions supplied by The Reading Agency and Walter Scott Prize team)