
**Saturday 25 August 2012
FOR IMMEDIATE USE**

**Winners announced for Britain's oldest literary prizes
at the Edinburgh International Book Festival**

Acclaimed novelist Padgett Powell and leading biographer Fiona MacCarthy have joined the roll call of celebrated writers to win the James Tait Black Prizes, Britain's oldest literary awards.

The winners of the £10,000 prizes – awarded annually by the English Literature department at the University of Edinburgh – were announced this evening (Saturday, 21 August) by broadcaster Sally Magnusson at the Edinburgh International Book Festival.

American writer Padgett Powell, whose work has been nominated for an American Book Award and excerpted in *The New Yorker*, is winner of the fiction prize for his book *You and I*.

One of Britain's foremost literary biographers, Fiona MacCarthy is the recipient of the biography prize for her book on the British artist and designer Edward Burne-Jones, *The Last Pre-Raphaelite: Edward Burne-Jones and the Victorian Imagination*.

The prizes are for the best work of fiction and the best biography published during the previous 12 months.

This year the James Tait Black Prizes have been extended to include a new category for drama. The prize for the best original new play written in English, Scots or Gaelic has been organised by the University in partnership with the National Theatre of Scotland. The first winner of this award will be announced in August 2013.

The James Tait Black's roster of former winners includes some of the best writers in the literary canon with past winners including DH Lawrence, Ian McEwan and Cormac McCarthy.

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Fiction winner Padgett Powell, who is a Professor of writing at the University of Florida, saw off competition from authors including ManBooker Prize nominee A.D. Miller and Scots writer Ali Smith, who also made the fiction shortlist in 2006 and 2011.

Fiction winner Padgett Powell said: "The woman who forty years ago inspired me and supported me in the presumption to write - she appears in my first book as a "literary mother" - has recently written me that she considers the James Tait Black Prize second to the Nobel. I do not gainsay her."

Veteran biographer Fiona McCarthy topped a biography list that included Pulitzer Prize winner Manning Marable for his book, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention*, and Australian author Ian Donaldson for his biography of Renaissance dramatist Ben Johnson.

Biography judge Professor Jonathan Wild of the University of Edinburgh, said: "The James Tait Black Prizes have a very long history of celebrating the work of great novelists and biographers. The quality of works we considered this year was top notch, which made the shortlisting process even more difficult than usual."

The four novels competing for the fiction prize were: *Snowdrops* by A.D. Miller; *Solace* by Belinda McKeon; *You and I* by Padgett Powell; *There But For The* by Ali Smith.

The shortlisted works for the biography section were: *Ben Jonson: A Life* by Ian Donaldson; *The Last Pre-Raphaelite Edward Burne-Jones and the Victorian Imagination* by Fiona MacCarthy; *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention* by Manning Marable; *Nikolaus Pevsner: The Life* by Susie Harries, which also won the 2011 Wolfson History Prize.

The James Tait Black Memorial Prizes were founded in 1919 by Janet Coats, the widow of publisher James Tait Black, to commemorate her deceased husband's love of reading. They are the only major British book awards judged by scholars and postgraduate literature students.

The announcement of the new drama prize was made as part of the celebrations to mark 250 years of English Literature study at the University of Edinburgh.

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Later in the year the University will be making a special award for the 'Best of the James Tait Black' in fiction.

The award-winner will be drawn from fiction winners since the award began in 1919.

A shortlist of authors will be announced in the Autumn.

For further information on the James Tait Black Memorial Prizes please go to:

<http://www.ed.ac.uk/james-tait-black>

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