



Jun 26, 2015 00:00 BST

Northern Writers' Awards 2015 winners announced

Writers from across the North came together at Northumbria University last night as the winners of the Northern Writers' Awards 2015 were revealed.

This year's awards were the biggest yet with 27 writers sharing the £46,000 prize fund. On the night, Northumbria confirmed it would continue its support of the awards for another three years through its partnership with New Writing North.

The winners, chosen by judges Louise Welsh, Caroline Sheldon, Daljit Nagra,

Peter Wilby and Rachel Cooke, were selected from the 866 writers and included North East poet Degna Stone, who previously won a Northern Promise Award in 2010. The awards, which support work in progress, are the largest talent development programme for writers in the North of England and were founded by New Writing North in 2000. In recent years, they have been supported by Northumbria through the University's partnership with New Writing North, and this support will now continue through to 2018.

Pro Vice-Chancellor (Business and Engagement) Lucy Winskell OBE said: "We are delighted to continue to support The Northern Writers' Awards for another three years. These fantastic awards for writers are at the heart of our partnership with New Writing North and further demonstrate the University's ongoing commitment to celebrate and nurture creative talent in the region. As our partnership goes from strength to strength, we will continue to develop exciting collaborations, not just for our students and staff, but also for the wider writing community and cultural sector, enabling us to share expertise, develop innovative research and provide unique creative opportunities."

Other winners in this year's awards include novelist and television writer Mark Illis, from West Yorkshire, whose award supports his work on a young adult novel, and Manchester-based writer Okey Nzelu.

Daljit Nagra judged the poetry submissions to the awards. He said: "I thoroughly enjoyed the judging experience because the field was strong and it was heartening to discover so many accomplished poets who were in many cases completely unknown to me. The best poets had a clear vision for their work, which was matched by their formal dexterity. I found myself being constantly thrilled, moved to tears and made to laugh aloud at the range of the exciting poetic stories. I didn't know judging could be so much fun, quite so rewarding."

Literary agent Caroline Sheldon was one of the judges of prose submissions. She said: "I was privileged to judge the Northern Writers' Awards this year and was impressed by the quality and vigour of the writing. Finding a commercial publisher is such a hard task today, that awards such as these are critical in building up a writer's CV so that writer's work will stand out when it is sent to the major publishers or literary agents. It is also a great fillip to a writer to get encouragement in their work. It was a pleasure to be involved."

The Northern Writers' Awards reward writers whose work shows exceptional promise, and encourage the development of their writing careers through a range of support and advice, including development opportunities and making introductions with literary agents and editors. Awards alumni include many writers whose work has gone on to be published including Benjamin Myers, Zaffar Kunial, Carys Davies, Chloe Daykin, Mari Hannah, Jacob Polley, Dan Smith and Niel Bushnell.

For the first time in 2015, there have been new awards for short stories and writing for television, alongside the more established awards for poetry and prose.

North East writer CS Mee won the new Clare Swift Short Story Award. Peter Wilby, judging, said: "Her story lingered in my mind for days after I had read it. It is a wonderful meditation on childhood memory and nostalgia, on family tensions, on the creative process and the writer's relationship to his characters. The author creates an atmosphere of mystery and faint menace and makes skilful use of metaphor. She hints at a complex reality beneath the surface. This is a bold and ambitious story and it is to the writer's great credit that she pulls it off."

The Channel 4/ Northumbria University Writing for Television Awards provided bursaries for two winners, Sharma Walfall and Nuzhat Ali, to undertake 10 months of mentoring and development opportunities with Red Production Company and Lime Pictures.

Another new award is the Conor Robinson Award, which was created in memory of Conor, a young man from County Durham who died in 2013, while studying at Oxford University. The Conor Robinson Award recognises a promising young writer and was won by Wyatt Sugden from Bishop Auckland, who was nominated for the award.

Claire Malcolm, Chief Executive of New Writing North, said: "Following the past successes of previous winners, it is with great delight and excitement that we announce this year's Northern Writers' Awards winners. We will be working with the writers over the coming year to provide support and opportunities, and we look forward to playing a role in their future successes."

"The Northern Writers' Awards would not be possible without the support of

our funders and partners, in particular we are grateful to Northumbria University, whose support for our awards is central to our very rewarding partnership.”

Northumbria offers a range of courses in Creative Writing. To find out more, sign up for one of its open days on 26 and 27 June by visiting www.northumbria.ac.uk/openday

Northumbria is a research-rich, business-focussed, professional university with a global reputation for academic excellence. To find out more about our courses go to www.northumbria.ac.uk

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