



Jan 28, 2015 00:00 GMT

Whitley Bay literature lover honoured by new writers' award

A NEW short story award exclusively for North East writers has been added to the roster of Northern Writers' Awards, which are now open for submission until Monday 2 February.

The Clare Swift Short Story Award is worth £1000 and will be awarded to the best unpublished short story written by a North East author.

With the objective of celebrating and promoting writing talent in the region, the award is supported by the North East Chamber of Commerce (NECC) in

association with Northumbria University, Newcastle.

Clare Swift (nee Bartley), of Whitley Bay, was just 47 when she died of cancer in 2013 after a brief illness. An avid reader and a fan of the short story, members of Clare's Whitley Bay book group have come together to create the award in her memory.

Born in Gateshead, Clare held a degree from Sheffield University and a Post Graduate Diploma from Northumbria University and spent many years working for newspapers in London, before returning to the North East in 2002 after the birth of her second child. Latterly, she worked at the Freeman Hospital in Newcastle.

Peter Wilby, the journalist and former editor of *The Independent on Sunday* and *The New Statesman*, for whom Clare Swift worked as a PA, will judge the award, alongside members of Clare's book group.

Peter Wilby said: "Clare was passionate about writing and about literature, and this competition is a worthy memorial to her sadly short life."

Sue Reay, Clare's friend and fellow book group member, said: "Clare was one of the founding members of our book group about 10 years ago. She was passionate, opinionated and challenging and loved literature, books and reading. She was a kind, generous, creative individual who always went the extra mile for people. We miss her dearly and her life was cut short so tragically and quickly that we still struggle to take it all in sometimes.

"The short story competition was an idea that we felt would be a fitting tribute to Clare and keep her memory alive. We are so grateful that it has been achieved in such a way as to be part of the Northern Writers' Awards. We can't thank New Writing North, NECC and Northumbria University enough for working with us to make it happen."

The Northern Writers' Awards are produced by New Writing North and have run since 2000. The organisation has a significant history of supporting the short story as a form: in 2002, New Writing North initiated the Save Our Short Story Campaign, which in 2005 became a national prize, the BBC National Short Story Award.

Claire Malcolm, chief executive of New Writing North, said: “We have a long history of promoting, commissioning and developing readers for short stories, but we have never had a prize exclusively for short stories before. Many writers of all genres love this form and we’re looking forward to reading some excellent and surprising submissions.”

Charlie Nettle, head of marketing at NECC, said: “As part of our bicentenary celebrations we are looking to work more closely with education to support and develop the region’s home-grown talent. This opportunity with Northumbria University takes us into quite a different space, but it very much supports our focus on talent and the strength of our region.

“Clare was a real ambassador for the North East and her story of returning back to the region for the quality of life is becoming a recurring message that illustrates that even people from the region often do not realise what we have here and how special the North East is. It has been a real honour to work with Sue Reay and Clare’s book group, Northumbria University and New Writing North to create this award in Clare’s memory.”

Lucy Winskell, Pro Vice-Chancellor, Business and Engagement at Northumbria University, said: “We are very excited about this unique partnership between the University and NECC, which, building on our existing relationship with New Writing North, will only go further towards enhancing the region’s literary offering.

“The award is set to provide a great platform into the industry for some of the region’s talented writers, putting them in the spotlight and enabling them to further their career in memory of someone who was very much loved and respected.”

The deadline for entries is Monday 2 February. The winner will be revealed at the Northern Writers’ Awards ceremony in late June at Northumbria University.

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