

Nominations for Walter Scott Prize announced



The shortlist for the £25,000 Walter Scott Prize for historical fiction has been announced recently by the Duke of Buccleuch, at the launch of the Borders Book Festival programme in Melrose. Our photo shows last year's winner, Andrea Levy.

With settings ranging from pre-revolutionary France to the Wild West of the 1850s, via two World Wars, the shortlist of six books was chosen by a new panel of judges from novels published during 2011.

The shortlist is:

On Canaan's Side by Sebastian Barry

The Sisters Brothers by Patrick de Witt

Half Blood Blues by Esi Edugyan

The Stranger's Child by Alan Hollinghurst

Pure by Andrew Miller

The Quality of Mercy by Barry Unsworth

The books are by authors from Ireland, Canada and England, and cover such diverse subjects as the jazz age in Nazi-occupied Europe, slavery in the English coalmines, and the closure of a cemetery in 18th-century Paris. The Walter Scott Prize,

founded in 2009, is the largest annual UK prize to be judged outside London, and honours the legacy and achievements of Sir Walter Scott, founder of the historical novel.

The judging panel for the Walter Scott Prize this year included new judges Kirsty Wark, Professor Louise Richardson, and Jonathan Tweedie, who joined existing judges Elizabeth Laird and Elizabeth Buccleuch, and chair Alistair Moffat. The judges' criteria include originality and innovation, quality of writing, and the ability of a book to shed light on the present as well as the past. The judging panel described making a very difficult choice from 'the strongest longlist for the Prize so far'.

Also announced today, a new sponsorship deal with Jura Single Malt Whisky means that each of the shortlisted authors, as part of their prize, will have the opportunity to stay for a week in the exclusive Writer's Retreat on the Hebridean Isle of Jura, sample the award-winning whisky and write a short story inspired by their stay. This will be the first time writers of historical fiction have made use of the retreat.

Rob Bruce Head of PR for Jura Single Malt Whisky said:

'Jura has a long literary history, and the shortlisted writers will follow in the footsteps of George Orwell who wrote his famous novel 1984 whilst saying on the island. We have welcomed a number of other talented writers to Jura over the last few years including Alexander McCall Smith, Will Self and Stuart MacBride, however we have not yet had a writer who specialises in historical fiction, so we are very much looking forward to reading their short story that is inspired by their time on the island.'

Shortlisted authors are invited to attend the award announcement and ceremony on 16th June, which is a public event as part of the Borders Book Festival in Melrose, and which will include exclusive readings from the works by the actor John Sessions, and a presentation by former prizewinner Hilary Mantel.

The Judges said of the shortlisted books:

***On Canaan's Side* by Sebastian Barry**

'This is a real historical novel, writing that reeks of the period. The simplicity of the writing belies a deep empathy and understanding of his subject and characters'

***The Sisters Brothers* by Patrick de Witt**

'A tremendously enjoyable story, with really valuable historical detail as well as dark humour'

***Half Blood Blues* by Esi Edugyuan**

'Illuminates a corner of history as yet unilluminated, with emotions that almost become characters in their own right'

***The Stranger's Child* by Alan Hollinghurst**

'You cannot help relishing the elegance of his writing and the quality of the prose'

Pure by Andrew Miller

'A wholly unexpected story, richly imagined and beautifully structured'

The Quality of Mercy by Barry Unsworth

'A terrific story which successfully knits political, historical and personal strands'