

NEW WRITING NORTH

Press release

Friday 30 June 2017

27 writers share £43,000 prize fund at

Northern Writers' Awards 2017

27 writers have been recognised at the 18th annual Northern Writers' Awards, which were held in Newcastle on Thursday night.

The Northern Writers' Awards is an innovative and progressive talent development programme, which supports writers to achieve their creative ambitions at all stages of their careers. This year the awards attracted over 1,200 entries. The awards recognise unpublished work-in-progress by new and established writers in the North of England.

Northern Writers' Awards have now been awarded to 254 writers since they were founded in 2000. This year's cohort follow in the footsteps of successful previous winners including Chloe Daykin, whose debut children's novel *Fish Boy* was published by Faber to great acclaim earlier this year; Mark Illis, whose young adult novel *The Impossible* will be published by Quercus this July; and poet Mark Pajak, who recently won a prestigious Eric Gregory Award.

The Northern Writers' Awards are produced by New Writing North with funding from Arts Council England and support from Northumbria University, Channel 4 and North East Chamber of Commerce.

This year's awards are worth £43,000 in support, bursaries and cash prizes, and were judged by the literary agent Elise Dillsworth, authors Juno Dawson and Richard T Kelly and poet Clare Pollard. The editor and journalist Peter Wilby judged the Clare Swift Short Story Award and writers Debbie Taylor and Margaret Wilkinson judged the Andrea Badenoch Fiction Award.

Awards include development opportunities with partners including Channel 4, Lime Pictures, Bonafide Films, Oneworld Publications, The Poetry School, Arvon, The Literary Consultancy, and the Society of Authors, as well as cash prizes, which buy writers time to complete their work.

Nine writers received the flagship Northern Writers' Awards and 12-months membership of the Society of Authors, including **Vidyan Ravinthiran, from Durham**, who was awarded £3000 to support him to complete his second poetry collection, a book of sonnets. **Vidyan said:** "I'm delighted to have won a Northern Writers' Award: it feels like a vindication of a difficult and personal project, and both the financial assistance and the tremendous emotional encouragement of it means a lot to me."

Yvonne Battle-Felton, from Lancaster, received an award for her novel-in-progress, *Remembered*. **Yvonne said:** "Being awarded a Northern Writers' Award feels like I've been granted a magical stopwatch that lets me slow down the outside world as I concentrate on completing my novel. At the same time, I know that with the award comes a community and network of support. I am looking forward to dedicated time to immerse myself into writing and the writing community."

Maria Isakova-Bennett was one of five writers selected to take part in the New North Poets programme, run in collaboration with The Poetry School. Working with the acclaimed poet Clare Pollard, participants will receive 12-months of mentoring, professional development and peer support. **Maria Isakova-Bennett, from Liverpool**, said: “Over the past year in particular, I’ve been musing over how to explore wider possibilities for my poetry, and I feel hopeful that, through the award, in addition to the wonderful opportunity of mentoring, I’m going to learn more about opportunities for sharing my work and developing poetry with other disciplines.”

Two new writers have won Northumbria University/Channel 4 Writing for Television Awards, which give them 9-month attachments to the independent production companies Lime Pictures and Bonafide Films.

Andrew Turner, from Bolton, will have the opportunity to work with staff on *Hollyoaks*, while **Alex Clarke, from Sale**, will be attached to Bonafide Films. Both writers will receive mentoring from experienced producers and a bursary worth £3000. At the end of the development period, writers may have the opportunity to undertake a paid commission for their respective production companies.

Alex Clarke said: “What I learn through this partnership will be invaluable and I’m just so eager to get started. Hopefully this will open further doors that have previously been closed. The bursary helps too. I’m not shy enough to pretend that being a working-class writer is easy. Writing often feels like a luxury. Focusing solely on my writing career is difficult and often fragments into holding down two or three jobs at the same time (and writing in your sleep.) You can easily feel trapped on a train that never reaches its destination, stuck in the land of potential but never quite arriving. Yet this bursary enables me to focus on writing without financial pressure for a while.”

The Northumbria University Student and Alumni Award was received by **Gateshead writer, Heather Askwith.**
Heather said: “I can’t put into words how much this award means to me! In trying to forge a writing career, rejection is rife and can be disheartening. There have been points this year where I’ve wanted to give up, but my love of writing has always pulled me through. Winning this Northern Writers’ Award has shown me that being determined, working hard and striving to achieve your dreams in the face of rejection is worth it. I’m so glad that I kept going.”

For emerging writers, winning a Northern Writers’ Award can offer a foot up the ladder, including introductions to publishers and agents at the annual Summer Talent Salon in London, support from New Writing North and the possibility of mentoring and other professional development. For writers who have already had work published, winning an award can buy time to write or to follow a new artistic direction.

The full list of winners for the Northern Writers’ Awards 2017 is:

**Northern Writers’ Awards for Fiction and Narrative
Non-Fiction**

Alison Armstrong (Lancaster)

Yvonne Battle-Felton (Lancaster)

Emily Devane (Ilkley)

Richard Smyth (ShIPLEY)

**Northern Writers’ Awards for Children’s and Young
Adult Fiction**

Clare Bell (Northwich, Cheshire)

Françoise Harvey (Darlington)

Northern Writers' Awards for Poetry

Niall Campbell (Leeds)

Vidyan Ravinthiran (Durham)

Waterhouse Award

Rachael Allen (Leeds)

Arvon Award

Sophie Parkes (Mossley, Gtr Manchester)

Andrea Badenoch Fiction Award

Karon Alderman (Newcastle upon Tyne)

**Clare Swift Short Story Award (sponsored by North
East Chamber of Commerce)**

Anton Rose (Durham)

Northumbria University Student and Alumni Award

Heather Askwith (Gateshead)

**Northumbria University/ Channel 4 Writing for
Television Awards – serial drama**

Andrew Turner (Bolton)

**Northumbria University/ Channel 4 Writing for
Television Awards –**

television drama

Alex Clarke (Sale, Gtr Manchester)

Poetry School New North Poets Mentoring Scheme

Jasmine Chatfield (Manchester)

Michael Brown (Middlesbrough)

Rosa Walling-Wefelmeyer (Durham)

Elizabeth Gibson (Wigan)

Maria Isakova-Bennett (Liverpool)

TLC New Fiction Reads

Laura Bui (Liverpool)

Tawseef Khan (Manchester)

Karen Powell (York)

Young People's Awards

Cuckoo Young Writers Awards

Winner: Eloise Unerman (Rotherham)

Highly commended: Grace Middleton (Newcastle)

Highly commended: Holly Cartwright (York)

Matthew Hale Award

Julia Coyle (Leeds)

Clare Pollard judged the poetry entries and said: “It was thrilling to judge these unique awards, and get a privileged insight into so many dazzling, diverse, ambitious poetic projects as they begin to take shape. I can't wait to see what will be achieved by these talented winners with support from New Writing North.”

Literary agent Elise Dillsworth, judging fiction, said: “The joy of judging lies in the excitement of discovering new writers who embrace diversity in the stories they choose to tell. These winners have shown that they have the potential to enrich our literary landscape. Fresh and insightful, these writers have allowed us to escape into other worlds, which is what the best fiction does.”

Anna Disley, Executive Director (Programme & Impact) of New Writing North said: “The Northern Writers' Awards are always a highlight in our calendar and it is tremendously exciting to meet the writers whose work we've been reading over the last few months, and to finally be able to talk to others about just how good their work is. There is a vast amount of writing talent in the region and each year the Northern Writers' Awards remind us of this. We're now looking forward to working with this year's winners to help support their ambitions.”

Dr Heather Robson, Associate Pro Vice-Chancellor (Arts, Design and Social Sciences) at Northumbria University said: “The Northern Writers' Awards are a real highlight in the cultural calendar each year and I'm always very excited to find out which emerging and established writers have been successful.

“I would like to congratulate this year's winners on their achievement, including the recipient of the Northumbria

University Student and Alumni Award. The North East is a hotbed of writing talent and Northumbria's successful partnership with New Writing North and Channel 4 supports and invests in that talent, helping to develop writers and launch long-term careers.

"These fantastic awards are just one element of our innovative partnership with New Writing North, which continues to grow each year. Looking ahead, we will be developing exciting new collaborations for our students and staff, the wider writing community and the cultural sector, enabling us to share knowledge, create new research and provide more unique opportunities for both academics and writers."

Ends

For all media enquiries and interview opportunities, please contact Laura Fraine
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High res images and winner biographies are available at this link: <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/oaunh5ju5x3hbzd/AAC-G7BvY7VV52eb7-wmuUWza?dl=0>

Notes to Editor

New Writing North is the reading and writing development agency for the north of England, and is an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation. It works in partnership with regional and national partners to produce a range of literary and performance activities including flagship projects such as the Northern Writers'

Awards, Read Regional, Cuckoo Young Writers, the Gordon Burn Prize, the David Cohen Prize for Literature and Durham Book Festival. www.newwritingnorth.com

About Northumbria University

Northumbria University, Newcastle is a research-rich, business-focused, professional university with a global reputation for academic excellence.

Complementing its work with New Writing North and Channel 4, the University works with a range of high profile cultural partners, including BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art, Live Theatre, Great North Run Culture and Tyne & Wear Archives and Museums providing students with industry exposure and live project opportunities. We were awarded the Times Higher Education Award for Excellence and Innovation in the Arts in 2012, as well as the Journal's Culture Award for Best Arts and Business Partnership in 2013. Northumbria University's Art and Design courses were ranked Top 10 in the UK for Research Power following the Research Excellence Framework 2014 and the University was ranked Top 50 in the UK – its highest ever league table position – in the Guardian University League Table 2017.

www.northumbria.ac.uk



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