



DAVID COHEN
PRIZE FOR LITERATURE

NEW WRITING NORTH

16 November 2022

Judges announced for David Cohen Prize for Literature 2023

The judges have been announced for the David Cohen Prize for Literature 2023.

The prize was founded in 1993 and for three decades has been one of literature's most prestigious prizes, recognising the UK and Ireland's greatest living writers. Uniquely amongst these countries' prizes, the David Cohen Prize for Literature recognises a lifetime's achievement and is awarded based on a writer's whole career.

Previous winners of the David Cohen Prize for Literature include Hilary Mantel, Edna O'Brien and Harold Pinter. Colm Tóibín won the Prize in 2021 and reflected on the first prize giving – to VS Naipaul – saying, "When I attended the inaugural reception for the David Cohen Prize in London in 1993, I did not imagine for a moment that my own writing would ever be honoured in this way. Those who have won the Prize in the past are artists whose work I revere. I am proud to be among them."

The 2023 judges are the eminent writers, journalists and critics: **Hermione Lee** (Chair of the Judges), **Aida Edemariam**, **Helen Mort**, **Malachy Tallack** and **Boyd Tonkin**.

Hermione Lee said: "I'm delighted to be chairing the David Cohen Prize for the second time. It's one of the most prestigious and respected literary awards in this country, and since 1993 has been given (every other year) to some of the outstanding novelists, poets, playwrights, and non-fiction writers of our time, several of whom have *then* won the Nobel prize for literature. It's a fascinating prize because instead of rewarding an author's single book (like most literary prizes) it celebrates a lifetime's literary achievement. That gives the judges the chance to read right across their selected authors' works. It's a lot of work, but very absorbing and revealing. In my first year as Chair we gave the prize to Colm Tóibín. This year, working with a wonderful group of fellow judges who cover many different kinds of writing between them, I hope we'll come up with an equally exciting and distinguished choice. I can't wait to start reading."

Aida Edemariam said: "I'm thrilled to be working on this prize, and with such very accomplished judges. I can't wait to get stuck into some of the best writing these islands have to offer."



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Helen Mort said: “It is an unparalleled honour to have the chance to consider the lifetime achievements of authors and to revisit their work. It’s a reminder of the books that have shaped and inspired me and an encounter with new discoveries.”

Malachy Tallack said: “I’m delighted to be part of the judging panel for the David Cohen Prize. It seems a daunting task to judge and compare authors not just on the strength of a single book but on the achievements of a whole career. And yet, what could be more delightful than to read and discuss great work like this? I’m very much looking forward to it.”

Boyd Tonkin said: “I’m excited and honoured to judge this unique award, which recognises the whole range of a distinguished author’s career and not just its solitary peaks. Since 1993, the David Cohen Prize’s roster of winners has grown into an extraordinary pantheon of the greatest figures in modern British and Irish literature. It will be a huge privilege to assist in adding a new name to this list.”

The David Cohen Prize for Literature was founded by the prominent arts benefactors, the late Dr David Cohen, chair of the John S Cohen Foundation, and his former wife Veronica Cohen. The John S Cohen Foundation is now chaired by their daughter, Imogen. The £40,000 biennial prize will be awarded in winter 2023 by prize administrators New Writing North.

Chair of the John S Cohen Foundation, Imogen Cohen said: “I would like to thank all the judges for their time, and immense dedication to this prize.”

Ends

For all media enquiries, please contact Laura Fraine at New Writing North
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Judges’ biographies

Aida Edemariam's first book, *The Wife’s Tale*, was a finalist for a Governor General’s Literary Award in Canada and won both a Royal Society of Literature Jerwood Award and the 2019 Royal Society of Literature Ondaatje Prize. She has judged various prizes, including the International Booker Prize, and is a senior feature writer and editor at the Guardian.

Hermione Lee is a literary biographer and Emeritus Professor of Literature at the University of Oxford, where she was President of Wolfson College from 2008 to 2017



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and founded the Oxford Centre for Life-Writing. Her work includes biographies of Virginia Woolf, Edith Wharton, Penelope Fitzgerald and Tom Stoppard, critical books on Elizabeth Bowen, Willa Cather and Philip Roth, and books about life-writing: *Body Parts* in 2005, a “Very Short Introduction” to *Biography* in 2009, and, in 2020, a co-edited collection, *Lives of Houses*. She is a Fellow of the British Academy and the Royal Society of Literature, and a Foreign Honorary Member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. In 2013 she was made a Dame for services to literary scholarship.

She has judged a number of literary prizes in the past, including the Booker (twice), the Hawthornden Prize (for twelve years), the W.H. Smith Award, the Guardian First Book Prize and the Geoffrey Faber Memorial Prize. She was a judge for the David Cohen Prize in 1999 when it was awarded to William Trevor.

Helen Mort is a poet who has also written novels and non-fiction. Her collections *Division Street*, *No Map Could Show Them* and *The Illustrated Woman* are all published by Chatto & Windus. Her memoir *A Line Above the Sky* (Ebury, 2022) is shortlisted for the Boardman Tasker Award. She’s a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature and teaches at Manchester Metropolitan University.

Malachy Tallack is the award-winning author of four books, most recently *Illuminated by Water* (Doubleday, 2022). His novel, *The Valley at the Centre of the World* (Canongate, 2018) was a BBC Radio 4 Book at Bedtime; it was shortlisted for the Highland Book Prize and longlisted for the Royal Society of Literature Ondaatje Prize. Malachy is from Shetland, and currently lives in Fife.

Boyd Tonkin is a journalist, editor and critic who in 2020 was awarded the Royal Society of Literature’s Benson Medal for service to literature over the course of a career. His writing on literature and arts appears in international media including *The Economist*, *The Financial Times*, *Wall Street Journal* and *Times Literary Supplement*. As Literary Editor and then Senior Writer of *The Independent* (1996-2016), he re-founded the Independent Foreign Fiction Prize in collaboration with Arts Council England, and judged it 2001-2015. He chaired the Man Booker International Prize 2016 and then served as the prize’s Special Adviser. His reader’s guide to global fiction, *The 100 Best Novels in Translation*, is published by Galileo. He is a Trustee of the Orwell Foundation, a member of the Booker Prize Foundation’s advisory committee, and an editorial adviser to the journal *Critical Muslim*.

Previous winners of the David Cohen Prize for Literature:

- 2021 Colm Tóibín



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- 2019 Edna O'Brien
- 2017 Tom Stoppard
- 2015 Tony Harrison
- 2013 Hilary Mantel
- 2011 Julian Barnes
- 2009 Seamus Heaney
- 2007 Derek Mahon
- 2005 Michael Holroyd
- 2003 Beryl Bainbridge and Thom Gunn (joint winners)
- 2001 Doris Lessing
- 1999 William Trevor
- 1997 Muriel Spark
- 1995 Harold Pinter
- 1993 V S Naipaul

About New Writing North:

New Writing North is the literature development agency for the North of England, and is an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation www.newwritingnorth.com. It works in partnership with regional and national partners to produce a range of literary activities including flagship projects such as the David Cohen Prize for Literature, the Northern Writers' Awards, Young Writers, the Gordon Burn Prize and Durham Book Festival.

Social media and online:

www.newwritingnorth.com; @NewWritingNorth; #DavidCohen;
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