



Friday 14 February

PRETI TANEJA TO CHAIR DESMOND ELLIOTT PRIZE, JOINED BY SONIA SODHA AND SINÉAD GLEESON

- **University of East Anglia (UEA) New Forms Prize to be judged by Inua Ellams, with Professor Henry Sutton and Dr. Claire Hynes of UEA and National Centre for Writing (NCW) Programme Director Peggy Hughes**
- **Laura Kinsella Fellowship to be judged by Roopa Farooki, with Alice Jolly and NCW Chief Executive Chris Gribble**

The National Centre for Writing (NCW) has today (Friday 14th February) announced the judges for its 2020 Early Career Awards.

The £10,000 Desmond Elliott Prize, the country's largest prize for first novels, which as of this year, is the flagship in the Early Career Awards portfolio will be chaired by the 2018 winner, Preti Taneja. Taneja will be joined by journalist Sonia Sodha and writer Sinéad Gleeson, who are together tasked with finding the novel they believe is most worthy of being crowned the best debut novel of the last 12 months.

Taneja said: "I am delighted to be chairing the Desmond Elliott Prize. The National Centre for Writing has expanded this respected prize to offer a year-round platform of support and mentorship, alongside generous financial assistance to a writer whose work speaks to our times. This award says: your time to write and to develop your craft and career is vital and worth nurturing. My fellow judges and I can't wait to immerse ourselves in the best debut fiction of 2019 from across the UK and Ireland. We will be looking to shortlist three exceptional first novels; our chosen winner will be an outstanding talent who will truly benefit from the endorsement of this prestigious Prize.

Preti Taneja was awarded the 2018 Desmond Elliott Prize for her debut *We That Are Young* (Galley Beggar Press), which was also listed for awards including the Folio Prize and the Prix Jan Michalski. It has since been published in the USA and Canada by AA Knopf, in India by Penguin Random House, and translated into several languages. It is in development for television with Gaumont US (*Narcos*).

The Desmond Elliott Prize will be run by the National Centre for Writing for the first time this year, as the flagship in its Early Career Awards portfolio which also includes the newly created UEA New Forms Award and the Laura Kinsella Fellowship.”

NCW Chief Executive Chris Gribble said:

“Our vision for the Early Career Awards is to increase the impact of prize culture and to provide a platform for writers at the critical early stages of their career. With the enthusiasm of this outstanding group of judges, we are confident we will be celebrating three exceptional writers - who we will support as they develop a sustainable career in literature. We thank the Desmond Elliott Charitable Trust, the University of East Anglia and the Laura Kinsella Foundation for their confidence and investment in us. Huge thanks also to Arts Council England for recognising the opportunity to increase the impact of prize culture.”

The UEA New Forms Award, worth £4,000 to the winner, will champion an innovative and daring new voice in fiction. It will be awarded to a writer at the beginning of their career whose work might collaborate with other art-forms or in site-specific/site-responsive ways, experiment with forms of performance or print, challenge traditional form or inhabit a digital space.

The Laura Kinsella Fellowship, also worth £4,000, has been set up to support writers experiencing limiting circumstances or whose voices are underrepresented in mainstream literary fiction. It will be awarded to one exceptionally talented early career writer of literary fiction.

Sarah Crown, Director of Literature, Arts Council England said:

“We are delighted that Arts Council England is able to support the National Centre for Writing to test this innovative approach, in which awards are complemented by professional development, mentoring opportunities, resources and advice, helping new writers to build sustainable careers in an increasingly challenging landscape.”

The winners of all three prizes will benefit from the resources of the National Centre for Writing’s Early Career Awards programme, co-funded by Arts Council England. Each writer will receive a tailored package of further support including residency opportunities, mentoring and industry insight.

The Desmond Elliott Prize longlist will be announced in April and a shortlist in May. The winners of all three prizes will be revealed at an awards ceremony on Thursday 2nd July.

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For further information, please contact Emily Souders at Riot Communications:

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Notes to editors:

About the National Centre for Writing:

The National Centre for Writing (NCW) is a place of discovery, exchange, ideas and learning for writers, literary translators and readers. It champions artistic experimentation, cross-sector collaboration and literary translation to support a vibrant and diverse literary environment in the UK.

Based in the restored and extended 15th century Dragon Hall in the heart of Norwich, England's first UNESCO City of Literature, it explores how writing can inspire and change the world we live in. Its year-round programme of events, festivals and courses reaches over 14,000 people a year with an additional 110,000 engaged online. Through its learning and participation programme it supports 20,000 young people a year and has a commitment to working with those in the most disadvantaged areas. NCW's patrons include Margaret Atwood, JM Coetzee, Kei Miller and Elif Shafak.

www.nationalcentreforwriting.org.uk

About the Desmond Elliott Prize:

The Desmond Elliott Prize is an annual award for a first novel written in English and published in the UK. Worth £10,000 to the winner, the Prize is named after the literary agent and publisher, Desmond Elliott, in memory of his passion for discovering and nurturing emerging authors.

First awarded in 2008, the Prize has a track record of spotting outstandingly talented novelists at the beginning of their careers, with former winners including Eimear McBride for *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing* and Claire Fuller for *Our Endless Numbered Days*, as well as Preti Taneja for *We That Are Young*.

Visit www.desmondelliottprize.org.uk for more on the history of the Desmond Elliott Prize and www.nationalcentreforwriting.org.uk/early-career-awards/ for information on the 2020 Prize.

Judges' bios, alphabetically by surname:

Inua Ellams was born in Nigeria in 1984. He is an internationally touring poet, playwright, performer, graphic artist & designer. He is an ambassador for the Ministry of Stories and has published four books of poetry: *Candy Coated Unicorns and Converse All Stars*, *Thirteen Fairy Negro Tales*, *The Wire-Headed Heathen* and *#Afterhours*. His first play, *The 14th Tale*, was awarded a Fringe First at the Edinburgh International Theatre Festival and his fourth, *Barber Shop Chronicles*, sold out its run at England's National Theatre. In graphic art & design, online and in print, he tries to mix the old with the new, juxtaposing texture and pigment with flat shades of colour and vector images. He lives and works from London, where he founded the Midnight Run, a nocturnal urban excursion. He is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature.

Roopa Farooki the award-winning author of six literary novels for adults that have been published in over twenty countries, and has been listed for the Women's Prize for Fiction three times. She received an Arts Council Award and Author's Foundation Prize for work that increases understanding between

cultures. She lectures in creative writing at the University of Oxford, is a Royal Literary Fund Fellow and is the Ambassador for the Family for the relationship charity, Relate. Roopa is also a junior doctor working for the NHS in London and Kent. She has four children (twin girls and two boys). Roopa's new middle grade series for Oxford University Press, *The Double Detectives Medical Mysteries*, featuring Ali and Tulip, #SuperSmartBraveBrownGirls as heroes, came out in January 2020 with *The Cure For A Crime*. She says that doctors, detectives and writers have something in common, they all like to solve mysteries, and work out what makes people tick.

Sinéad Gleeson's debut collection *Constellations: Reflections from Life* (Picador 2019) won Non-Fiction Book of the Year at 2019 Irish Book Awards. Her essays have been published by *Granta*, *Winter Papers* and *Gorse*, and broadcast by BBC and RTÉ. Her short stories have been featured in several anthologies including *Being Various: New Irish Short Stories* (Faber, 2019) and *Repeal the 8th* (Unbound, 2018). She has edited the award-winning anthologies *The Long Gaze Back: An Anthology of Irish Women Writers* and *The Glass Shore: Short Stories by Women Writers from the North of Ireland*, with *The Art of Glimpse: 100 Irish Short Stories*, forthcoming from Head of Zeus in October 2020. She is currently working on a novel.

Claire Hynes is a lecturer in Literature and Creative Writing at the University of East Anglia. She writes fiction, autofiction, and theatre monologues. Her writing includes, 'How It Feels to Be Black Woman, Me,' published in Lighthouse literary journal (2018) and 'Assorted Biscuits,' published in Tangled Roots Anthology (2015). Her theatre monologues, 'How It Feels...' (2018) and 'Welcome to the Freak Show' (2016) have been performed at The Contact Theatre, Manchester. Her short fiction, 'In Her Hair' was listed for the Bath Short Story Award and published in the Bath Short Story Award Anthology (2014) and Claire was commended in the Words and Women, 'about,' competition (2014). Claire is a former news editor of The Voice newspaper and she contributes to national and international media including The Guardian.

Alice Jolly was the Winner of the Royal Society of Literature V.S.Pritchett Award 2014 and the PEN Ackerley Award 2016. She was the runner up for Rathbones Folio Prize 2019 and long listed for Royal Society of Literature Ondaatje Prize 2019.

Sonia Sodha is chief leader writer at The Observer and deputy opinion editor at The Guardian and an author. She makes and presents Analysis documentaries for Radio 4 and is a regular contributor to news and current affairs programmes such as *Question Time*, *Newsnight*, *BBC Breakfast*, the Sky paper review and the *Today* programme. She's a trustee of the philanthropic foundation the Trust for London and a former school governor. Prior to working in journalism, Sonia held a variety of senior policy roles at think tanks and charities, and also worked in frontline politics as a senior policy adviser to Ed Miliband while he was leader of the opposition.

Preti Taneja was awarded the 2018 Desmond Elliott Prize for her debut *We That Are Young* by that year's judges, author Sarah Perry, award-winning broadcaster Samira Ahmed and former Waterstones' head of fiction Chris White. A reimaging of Shakespeare's *King Lear* set in modern-day India, the novel explores the play's themes of generational damage, misogyny and social inequality against the backdrop of rising fascism in India and Kashmir. It was listed for awards including the Folio Prize (UK), the Shakti Bhatt First Book Award (India) and the Prix Jan Michalski (Europe's premier award for a work of world literature). It has been published in several translations and is in development for television with Gaumont US (*Narcos*).