

****Embargoed until 18:30 BST on Thursday 2nd July****

DEREK OWUSU WINS 2020 DESMOND ELLIOTT PRIZE WITH “GROUNDBREAKING” DEBUT *THAT REMINDS ME*

**Taylor Beidler wins the inaugural UEA New Forms Award and Michelle Perkins receives the first
Laura Kinsella Fellowship**

The National Centre for Writing (NCW) has today (2nd July) announced Derek Owusu’s *That Reminds Me* as the winner of the Desmond Elliott Prize 2020. The novel-in-verse, praised by judges as a ‘transcendent work of literature’, is chosen as the best debut novel across the UK and Ireland this year from a strong shortlist including *The Girl with the Louding Voice* by Abi Daré and *The Private Joys of Nnenna Maloney* by Okechukwu Nzelu.

In addition to the £10,000 prize money, Owusu will receive a tailored year-round platform of support and mentorship from the NCW, which is running the Desmond Elliott Prize for the first time this year as part of its new Early Career Awards portfolio.

That Reminds Me is a vivid and semi-autobiographical tale of a British-Ghanaian boy called K, whose turbulent childhood spent passing through foster homes leaves him battling with a budding neurosis. At 11-years-old, K is moved from his white foster family in a village in Suffolk and is taken back to the very different context of inner-city London after his foster mother develops cancer. Each section, told in fragments of memory, explores K’s flickering experiences of abuse, sexual awakening, depression, alcoholism, self-harm and addiction.

It was chosen as the best debut of the year by a judging panel chaired by author and previous Desmond Elliott Prize winner, Preti Taneja, who was joined by Chief Lead Writer at *The Observer*, Sonia Sodha, and writer and editor Sinéad Gleeson. **Preti Taneja said:** “*That Reminds Me* is written with a rare style that wrings pure beauty from every painful, absurd moment K must face. Despite the terrors around him, this young black man has an instinctive love for the world that burns at the core of the book. The judges and I were as shattered by the truths of the story as we were moved by the talent of its writer. Derek Owusu has given us a unique, profound and transcendent work of literature: we want as many readers as possible to discover it - once they do they will return to again and again.”

Owusu is a writer, poet and podcaster from north London who, before turning his hand to fiction, collated, edited and contributed to *Safe: On Black British Men Reclaiming Space* (2019), an anthology of writing by 20 Black British men. He was a co-host of the literature podcast *Mostly Lit* up until 2017.

That Reminds Me is published by Stormzy’s #Merky imprint. It is the first title in a two-book deal for Owusu, and the first book published by the imprint to have won any major literary prize. The TV and

film rights to Owusu's second book with #Merky, *Teaching My Brother to Read*, have already been sold to Idris Elba's production company, Green Door Pictures.

The new Early Career Awards portfolio also includes the University of East Anglia (UEA) New Forms Award for an innovative and daring new voice in fiction and the Laura Kinsella Fellowship which recognises an exceptional writer who has experienced limiting circumstances or is currently underrepresented in literary fiction.

The UEA New Forms Awards was judged by writer and poet Inua Ellams, with Professor Henry Sutton and Dr. Claire Hynes of UEA and NCW Programme Director Peggy Hughes. It is awarded to Taylor Beidler, whose project explores non-traditional storytelling and aims to synthesise her work as a playwright, performance artist and creative non-fiction writer.

Of Beidler's entry, **Peggy Hughes said:** "This is an impressive project with exciting potential, using a personal story to powerful, measured effect."

The Laura Kinsella Fellowship was judged by doctor and author Roopa Farooki and novelist and playwright Alice Jolly with Chief Executive of the NCW, Chris Gribble. It is awarded to Michelle Perkins. Perkins originally trained as a nurse and was the first person in her family to go to university when she studied at Goldsmiths in the 90s. After experiencing some major life challenges, she rediscovered writing as a means to make sense of her difficult family history.

Of Perkins' work, **Roopa Farooki said:** "There is a poetic pragmatism that is the writer's own, and I feel there is great potential for this writer to be a bold and brilliant voice."

Beidler and Perkins will both receive £4,000 to support them at the beginnings of their careers as well as a bespoke programme of support provided by the NCW, supported by Arts Council England. All three winners have also been invited to choose a selection of ten books which NCW will gift to a library or school of their choice.

Running in parallel to the Early Career Awards is an online digital programme providing free resources for anyone, anywhere wanting to progress with their writing. Every two months NCW releases a bespoke support package with advice from established and new voices. Supported by the Arts Council England, this element of the Early Career Awards aims to widen the impact of literary prize culture.

@WritersCentre #DEP20 #EarlyCareerAwards

**For further information please contact Beatrice Edwards at Riot Communications on
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Notes to Editors

1. 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



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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. Its key funders are Arts Council England, Norwich City Council and University of East Anglia.

www.nationalcentreforwriting.org.uk

2. 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.

3. The previous winners of The Desmond Elliott Prize have successfully continued their writing careers and have published further work to great acclaim.

- **2019: *Golden Child* by Claire Adam (Faber & Faber)** has since been listed as the one of the 100 most influential novels by BBC News, has won the Barnes & Noble Discover Great New Writers awards for fiction and has been longlisted for the 2020 Jhalak Prize.
- **2018: *We That Are Young* by Preti Taneja (Galley Beggar Press)** has since been published in the U.S. and Canada by A.A Knopf, in India by Penguin Random House, in Germany by CH Beck and in France by Les Éditions de l'Observatoire. It is currently being adapted for television by producer Dina Dattani for Gaumont US.
- **2017: *Golden Hill* by Francis Spufford (Faber & Faber)** was the author's first work of fiction following a number of successful non-fiction titles. It received critical acclaim and also won the 2016 Costa First Novel Award and the 2017 Ondaatje Prize.
- **2016: *The Glorious Heresies* by Lisa McInerney (John Murray)** was also awarded the Baileys Women's Prize for Fiction Book of the Year and has been optioned for television by boutique drama production company Fifty Fathoms. McInerney's second novel, *The Blood Miracles*, was published in 2017 and won the Encore Award.



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- **2015: *Our Endless Numbered Days* by Claire Fuller (Fig Tree)** has been published to great acclaim in nine countries. Fuller's second novel, *Swimming Lessons*, published in 2017, was shortlisted for the Encore Award.

Of her third novel, *Bitter Orange*, the *Guardian* said, 'Fuller is an accomplished and serious writer who has the ability to implant interesting psychological dimensions into plotty, pacy narratives'.

- **2014: *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing* by Eimear McBride (Galley Beggar Press/Faber)** was also awarded the inaugural Goldsmiths Prize in 2013, the 2014 Baileys Women's Prize for Fiction and the 2014 Geoffrey Faber prize. Her second novel, *The Lesser Bohemians*, was published in 2016 and won the James Tait Black Memorial Prize.
- **2013: *The Marlowe Papers* by Ros Barber (Sceptre)** was also awarded the 2013 Author's Club First Novel Award and longlisted for the Women's Prize for Fiction. Her second novel, *Devotion*, was published in 2015 and was shortlisted for the Encore Award.
- **2012: *The Land of Decoration* by Grace McCleen (Chatto & Windus)** was shortlisted for the National Book Awards and selected by Richard and Judy for their book club. McCleen has since published *The Professor of Poetry* in 2014 and *The Offering* in January 2015, both with Sceptre. *The Professor of Poetry* was lauded by Hilary Mantel, who called it 'an astonishing and luminous novel... every line is newly felt and freshly experienced'.
- **2011: *Saraswati Park* by Anjali Joseph (Fourth Estate)** also won the Betty Trask Prize and the Vodafone Crossword Book Award for Fiction in India. Her most recent novel, *The Living*, was published in 2016.
- **2010: *The Girl with Glass Feet* by Ali Shaw (Atlantic Books)** was shortlisted for the Costa First Book Award 2009 and longlisted for the *Guardian* First Book Award 2009 and the Dylan Thomas Prize 2010. Shaw's most recent novel, *The Trees*, was published in 2016.
- **2009: *Blackmoor* by Edward Hogan (Simon & Schuster)** was followed by *The Hunger Trace* in 2011, *Daylight Saving* in 2012 and *The Messengers* in 2013. *The Hunger Trace* was shortlisted for the 2012 Encore Award and *Daylight Saving* was shortlisted for the 2013 Branford Boase.
- **2008: *Gifted* by Nikita Lalwani (Viking)** was longlisted for the Man Booker Prize 2007, shortlisted for the Costa First Novel Award and nominated for the *Sunday Times* Young Writer of the Year. Lalwani's second novel, *The Village*, was published by Viking in 2012 and was selected as part of the 2013 Fiction Uncovered promotion.