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News Release

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Literary voices vie for the UK's longest-running book prizes

An exciting mix of award-winning writers and emerging talent forms the shortlist of Britain's longest-running literary awards announced today (Thursday, March 29).

Biographies of HRH Princess Margaret – the Queen's sister – and legendary boxer and activist Muhammad Ali are contenders for the James Tait Black Prizes.

They feature alongside works on the life and work of the revered novelist Joseph Conrad and a heart-rending memoir of a tragic family holiday.

Biographies by popular critic and satirist Craig Brown and award-winning author Jonathan Eig join the latest books by American academic Maya Jasanoff and acclaimed writer Richard Beard in the shortlist for the £10,000 biography prize.

Contenders for the £10,000 fiction prize include novels based around a fictional second civil war in America, a ghost story set in modern-day America, a toxic love affair and a series of experimental short stories.

The winners of the Prizes – presented annually by the University of Edinburgh – will be announced on Saturday, 18 August, at the Edinburgh International Book Festival.

The four biographies competing for the £10,000 prize are: *The Day That Went Missing* by Richard Beard (Harvill Secker); *Ma'am Darling* by Craig Brown (4th Estate); *Ali, A Life* by Jonathan Eig (Simon & Schuster); *The Dawn Watch, Joseph Conrad in a Global World* by Maya Jasanoff (William Collins).

The four novels competing for the £10,000 fiction prize are: *American War* by Omar El Akkad, (Knopf); *White Tears* by Hari Kunzru, (Hamish Hamilton); *First Love* by Gwendoline Riley (Granta); *Attrib* by Eley Williams (Influx Press).

Ranked among the top universities in the world

Two prizes are awarded annually for books published during the previous year – one for the best work of fiction and the other for the best biography.

More than 400 books were read by academics and postgraduate students for the University's School of Literatures, Languages and Cultures, who nominated books for the shortlist.

Biography judge Dr Jonathan Wild, of the University of Edinburgh, said of the shortlist: "It has been an outstanding year for biography writing as these shortlisted books eloquently testify."

Fiction Judge of the James Tait Black Prize Dr Alex Lawrie, of the University of Edinburgh, said: "The books on this year's shortlist are experimental, thoughtful, and provocative. Together they represent the very best that fiction has to offer."

This year's fiction shortlist features in a free online course launched by The University of Edinburgh and Edinburgh International Book Festival to help book lovers get the best out of their reading.

The free course, *How to Read a Novel*, draws on an array of texts, from the classics to contemporary works.

The Massive Open Online Course – or MOOC – takes readers on an insightful journey giving them the tools to appreciate works of fiction, and examine what makes a good novel.

More than 12,000 people signed up for the four-week course last year via the FutureLearn website.

The Book Festival is hosting two additional events linked to the course's content featuring the fiction contenders for the James Tait Black Prizes.

The James Tait Black Prizes, awarded annually by the University of Edinburgh's School of Literatures, Languages and Cultures, were founded in 1919 by Janet Coats, the widow of publisher James Tait Black, to commemorate her husband's love of good books.

The prizes are for the best work of fiction and biography during the previous 12 months. They are the only major British book awards judged by literature scholars and students.

Each year the University also awards the James Tait Black Prize for Drama annually for the best original play written in English, Scots or Gaelic and first performed by a professional company in the previous year.

Participants can sign-up for the free online course which starts in July at:
<https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/how-to-read-a-novel/3>

For further information on the Prizes go to: <https://www.ed.ac.uk/events/james-tait-black>

Twitter: @EdinUniMedia - #JamesTaitBlack

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