



The University of Edinburgh

## *News Release*

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**UNDER STRICT EMBARGO UNTIL 19.30 BST SATURDAY 23 AUGUST 2014**

### **Acclaimed authors join oldest book prize's hall of fame**

A novel based around the disintegration of a remote community in England, and a biography of a Booker prize-winning novelist are the winners of Britain's oldest literary awards announced tonight (Saturday, August 23).

Acclaimed author Jim Crace and renowned biographer Hermione Lee have joined the distinguished list of writers who have won the James Tait Black Prizes.

DH Lawrence, Graham Greene, Angela Carter and Ian McEwan are among the past winners of the prizes – which have been awarded annually by the University of Edinburgh since 1919.

The winners of the £10,000 prizes were announced by broadcaster Sally Magnusson at the Edinburgh International Book Festival.

Former Journalist and broadcaster Jim Crace, the author of 13 books, is winner of the fiction prizes for his book *Harvest*.

The British-born writer has several prestigious awards to his name, including a Donald Windham-Sandy M. Campbell Literature Prize from Yale University.

Respected academic, critic and biographer Professor Dame Hermione Lee, is the winner of the biography prize for her book *Penelope Fitzgerald: A life*.

Professor Lee has written widely on women writers, including Penelope Fitzgerald, Virginia Woolf and Edith Wharton.

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

*Harvest* by Jim Crace topped a shortlist that features three other novels: *Benediction* by Kent Haruf; *The Flamethrowers* by Rachel Kushner; and *All the Birds, Singing* by Evie Wyld.

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*One of the top universities in the world*

*Penelope Fitzgerald: A life.* by Hermione Lee was chosen from a shortlist that featured: *The Boys in the Boat: An Epic True-Life Journey to the Heart of Hitler's Berlin* by Daniel James Brown ; *Empress Dowager Cixi: The Concubine who Launched Modern China* by Jung Chang and *Priscilla: The Hidden Life of an Englishwoman in Wartime France* by Nicholas Shakespeare.

The James Tait Black Prizes are distinctive in the way that they are judged. Each year more than 400 novels are read by academics and postgraduate students who nominate books for the shortlist.

Chairman of the James Tait Black Prize for fiction Dr Lee Spinks of the University of Edinburgh said: "In *Harvest*, Jim Crace presents a spellbinding lyrical reflection upon the nature of cultural inheritance and the obligations and responsibilities of community in a changing and uncertain world. It is a novel fit to be ranked among his very best, which means that it can be considered one of the distinctive achievements of contemporary literature in English."

Biography judge Professor Jonathan Wild, of the University of Edinburgh said: "Hermione Lee's biography of Penelope Fitzgerald provides a masterclass in writing of this type. It's the perfect marriage of an excellent subject and a biographer working at the very top of her game."

The James Tait Black Awards were founded in 1919 by Janet Coats, the widow of publisher James Tait Black, to commemorate her husband's love of good books.

In 2013 the prize was extended to include a new category for drama.

For further information please go to: <http://www.ed.ac.uk/james-tait-black>

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