

Julian Barnes wins David Cohen Prize for Literature 2011

Author gives Clarissa Luard Award to The Reading Agency to support literacy work with young offenders

*****under embargo until 7.30pm Thursday 17 March 2011*****

The **David Cohen Prize for Literature 2011** has been awarded to the English novelist, essayist and short story writer Julian Barnes for his lifetime's achievement in literature. The prize, worth £40,000, was presented by the chair of judges Mark Lawson at a gala ceremony hosted at the British Library this evening.

Julian Barnes is one of England's foremost fiction writers. Shortlisted on three occasions for the Man Booker Prize (for *Flaubert's Parrot*, *England, England*, and *Arthur and George*), he is as lauded overseas as in his homeland. The French Ministry of Culture named him Commandeur de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres in 2004 and he has also been awarded the Austrian State Prize for Literature.

On winning the Prize Julian Barnes said:

'The measure of a literary award's value lies in its list of previous winners. Over the last 18 years the David Cohen Prize has established itself as the greatest honour a British or Irish writer can receive within these islands. It is also conducted with proper secrecy and dignity. So it is a matter of sober delight to be added to the list of prize-winners.'

Mark Lawson, chair of judges, said of this year's winner:

'The David Cohen Prize is in effect a UK version of the Nobel Prize for Literature, open to writers of fiction and non-fiction, comedy and tragedy. Within those divisions, there are writers who are most efficient at prose or dialogue, structure or style, narrative or character, plot or ideas, novels or short stories. What is remarkable about Julian Barnes is that he has excelled in all these areas: from the combination of literary criticism and fiction in *Flaubert's Parrot*, through the structural daring of the multiple narratives in *A History of the World in 10½ Chapters* to the historical fiction of *Arthur and George* and the essayistic reflection on faith and mortality in *Nothing To Be Frightened Of*. The already extraordinary list of David Cohen Prize-winning authors has been fittingly extended.'

Born in Leicester in 1946, Julian Barnes was educated at the City of London School and the University of Oxford, where he studied modern languages.

After graduation, he worked as a lexicographer for the *Oxford English Dictionary* Supplement for three years. In 1977, Barnes began working as a reviewer and literary editor for *New Statesman* and the *New Review*. From 1979 to 1986 he worked as a television critic, first for *New Statesman* and then for *The Observer*.

As well as three Man Booker nominations, Barnes has received several honours for his writing including the Somerset Maugham Award, Geoffrey Faber Memorial Prize, Prix Médicis, E M Forster Award, Gutenberg Prize, Grinzane Cavour Award and the Prix Femina.

The winner of the David Cohen Prize for Literature also chooses the recipient of the **Clarissa Luard Award**, which is worth £12,500. The award, funded by Arts Council England, is given to a literature organisation that supports young writers and readers or an individual writer under the age of 35. Julian Barnes presented the 2011 award to The Reading Agency to support their reading initiatives for young offenders.

Julian Barnes on the Clarissa Luard Award:

'It seems to me that the practice of reading is currently more under threat than the practice of writing. There will always be young writers; will there always be young readers? Our literacy levels are falling, and – disgracefully – public libraries are threatened with closure. So the Clarissa Luard Award is to go to The Reading Agency, which since 2002 has had remarkable success in promoting reading skills and confidence among the young. They work through libraries and other institutions. I have asked them to apply the Award to their work in young offenders' institutions, where an estimated 25% of inmates have the reading age of a seven-year-old. They are going to run a special programme for the two years of the prize, targeting ten Young Offenders Institutions across the country.'

Miranda McKearney, Chief Executive of The Reading Agency said:

'In the current climate, everything to do with money is a huge pressure. So you can imagine our amazed delight at being honoured with the Clarissa Luard Award by Julian, to help us work with more young offenders. This means we'll be able to take our Six Book Challenge into ten new Young Offenders Institutions. It means we can help 900 young offenders to build their literacy skills and confidence, and start to really enjoy reading, with all that will mean for their future lives. And we'll get the chance to do in-depth work, training 100 prison officers, library staff and tutors. We are profoundly grateful!'

The David Cohen Prize was established in 1992 by David and Veronica Cohen, and Arts Council England, and is recognised as one of Britain's most distinguished literary honours. The Prize has in the past been awarded to novelists, dramatists, biographers, poets and essayists. The most recent recipient of the David Cohen Prize for Literature was Seamus Heaney in 2009. He joined a distinguished list of winners, including V S Naipaul, Harold Pinter, Muriel Spark, William Trevor, Doris Lessing, Beryl Bainbridge and Thom Gunn (jointly), Michael Holroyd, and Derek Mahon.

The winner of the David Cohen Prize was selected by a panel of judges comprising authors, literary critics and academics. This year's judging panel, chaired by **Mark Lawson**, was made up of:

- **Ellah Allfrey**, Deputy Editor, *Granta* Magazine
- **Simon Armitage**, Poet and Professor of Poetry at the University of Sheffield,
- **Michael Billington**, Drama critic of the *Guardian*, author, and Fellow of Kings College London
- **Sarah Churchwell**, Senior Lecturer in American Literature and Culture at the University of East Anglia, writer and critic
- **Tobias Hill**, Poet, novelist and short story writer
- **Kathryn Hughes**, Professor of Life Writing at the University of East Anglia, historian and critic
- **Karl Miller**, Literary editor, critic and writer, founding Editor of *The London Review of Books* and former Editor of *New Statesman*
- **Michael Prodger**, Literary Editor at *The Sunday Telegraph*

The John S Cohen Foundation, which was established in 1965 by David Cohen and his family funds the winner's prize. Arts Council England provides a further £12,500 (The Clarissa Luard Award) to enable the winner to encourage new work, with the dual aim of promoting young writers and readers. The John S Cohen Foundation has supported education and the arts, helping composers, choreographers, dancers, biographers, poets, playwrights and actors, among others.

Antonia Byatt, Director, Literature, Arts Council England said:

'Arts Council England is proud to support a Prize that recognises a lifetime's achievement and the major place literature occupies in our cultural life. I'm also delighted that Julian has recommended The Reading Agency for the Clarissa Luard Award, giving more young offenders the chance to enjoy the work of brilliant writers.'

Viv Bird, Chief Executive of Booktrust said:

'We are delighted to be involved in a Prize that has decorated so many extraordinary writers. The David Cohen Prize not only celebrates those authors who have made a distinctive and enduring mark on the literary landscape, but also looks to the future by giving the winner the opportunity to present the £12,500 Clarissa Luard Award to an individual or organisation in order to encourage writers under the age of 35. This dual purpose of celebrating excellence and inspiring the readers and writers of the future is at the heart of Booktrust's mission.'

For **press enquiries** and interview opportunities please contact Will White on: will.white@booktrust.org.uk or 0208 875 4583

Notes to Editors

The **David Cohen Prize for Literature** is awarded biennially to a living writer from the UK and Ireland whose work, in the opinion of a distinguished panel of judges, merits recognition for a lifetime's achievement in literature. Prize money is made up of £40,000 for the

winning author, provided by the John S Cohen Foundation, and £12,500 contributed by Arts Council England for the Clarissa Luard Award. This is awarded to an individual or organisation, chosen by the winner, to encourage writers and readers under the age of 35.

The John S Cohen Foundation is a private trust set up by David Cohen and his family in 1965 to support education, the arts, conservation and the environment.

Booktrust, which manages the Prize, is an independent national charity that encourages people of all ages and cultures to engage with books. The written word underpins all our activity and enables us to fulfil our vision of inspiring a lifelong love of books for all. Booktrust is responsible for a number of successful national reading promotions, sponsored book prizes and creative reading projects aimed at encouraging readers to discover and enjoy books. These include the Orange Prize for Fiction, the Children's Laureate and the BBC National Short Story Award. See www.booktrust.org.uk and **#DCP11**

Arts Council England works to get great art to everyone by championing, developing and investing in artistic experiences that enrich people's lives.

Clarissa Luard, who worked in the Literature Department of Arts Council England, died in November 1999. She had previously worked at the literary agency A P Watt & Co, and was a firm supporter of young writers.