

2017 Annual Debut Novel/Novella Prize

Dear Writers,

Thank you for your patience while waiting for the results of the novel competition. We had an excellent response and it's been an immensely difficult decision, especially once we had the full manuscripts of the short-listed novelists..

Congratulations to all those who made it into the final 15 novels:

1	<i>The Pig Baby</i>	Katy Green
2	<i>Secret Life</i>	Mina Bancheva
3,	<i>Shotline</i>	Paul Barid
4.	<i>Kinglake</i>	Susanne Haywood
5	<i>A Short History of Lines</i>	Emma Musty
6	<i>Colouring In</i>	Suzie Lockhart-Smith
7	<i>Weight of Bones</i>	Joanne Reardon
8	<i>The Red Gene</i>	Barbara Lamplugh
9	<i>Thieves in Antwerp</i>	Lisa Medved
10	<i>Taking Italian in My Sleep</i>	Gerry Stewart
11	<i>Yetunde's House</i>	David Cundall
12	<i>Mussolini's Ear</i>	Jennifer Varney
13	<i>Aravaž on the Taff</i>	Michael Apichella
14	<i>Not As She Is</i>	Susanna Kay
15	<i>Whenever</i>	Sarah Connell

Getting these down to the last five was very difficult, but it came down to the following short-list:

<i>The Pig Baby</i>	Katy Green
<i>Secret Life</i>	Mina Bancheva
<i>Whenever</i>	Sarah Connell
<i>Weight of Bones</i>	Joanne Reardon
<i>Yetunde's House</i>	David Cundall

These novels all had a great deal of style, some extraordinary ideas, compelling narratives and honest humanity.

The Pig Baby is a fascinating, speculative concept with a well-developed first person protagonist, interesting story and some genuinely strange writing that engages the reader and demands thought.

Secret Life explores the story of Yana, an escapee from Communist Bulgaria living a double life that begins to infect and endanger those she loves, both back home and in her new life in Wales. A high-stakes novel about the compromises that people make in extremis and the disregard of politic elites for individuals, which nonetheless retains a sense of hope.

Whenever is set in a depressed northern town where Christine wakes to find her husband has disappeared. In tight prose and precisely observed detail, an unusual story emerges when Christine meets an unemployed young musician, Robin. A quietly powerful narrative with empathic characters and psychological depth.

Weight of Bones is a tangled and beautifully textured tale of murder, fires, deceit, blame and guilt. From Paris to a fair ground in a north-western English seaside town, the novel is densely written, full of visceral detail and distinctive characters, with a central mystery that hooks from the opening line to an ending that refuses to be neat.

Yetunde's House is set in a terraced house in Leeds. Yetunde, an empathic and well-realised protagonist, is a midwife from Nigeria, taking in lodgers that include Zak, a homesick priest from Kenya and Thomas, an IT developer from Uganda. But this is no idyllic tale; suspicion, racial tension and misinformation combine to add stress after stress, even before Thandiwe, a pregnant HIV-positive asylum seeker arrives to add sexual tension into the mix. A compelling story of broken relationships across a broken world, the character of Yetunde shines even beyond disaster.

We read and re-read these entries, going round in circles for a while. The range of themes, the willingness to take risks with the writing and the clear commitment and ambition of the shortlisted writers made this an almost impossible task – but in the end the overall winner emerged as having the novel with the strongest opening, beautifully honed and elegant writing throughout and the most distinctive voice **We're delighted to announce that the winner is Sarah Connell with *Whenever*.**

Huge congratulations to all the short listed writers and especially to Sarah. We look forward to working with her to develop the novel for publication in spring, 2019.

In the meantime, **thank you to everyone who entered and we hope to see more of your work in future.**