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UBC graduate student wins inaugural University of Lethbridge Bridge Prize national short story competition

University of British Columbia (UBC) graduate student Sara de Waal is the inaugural winner of the University of Lethbridge's [Bridge Prize](#) national short story writing competition, earning a \$7,500 first-place award from a pool of 340 story submissions.

Her touching and poignant tale, *Cecilia and Richard*, won the favour of the jury panel and elicited praise for its construction and detail.

"The most carefully constructed story we received, beautiful deployment of metaphor, especially when we're told that the father has no energy for metaphor. This is a language story, filled with effective detail, colours painting words and consequences," adds juror Aritha Van Herk, an Alberta-based author.



The Bridge Prize was established in 2019 by the U of L's School of Liberal Education and Vancouver-based alumnus and donor Terry Whitehead (BA '94). It is Canada's only national short story competition open exclusively to post-secondary graduate and undergraduate students studying at Canadian universities and colleges. It's \$10,500 in prize money make it the richest student writing competition in Canada and among the largest for any short story competition in the country.

In addition to de Waal's work, three finalists received \$1,000 for their entries. Ahmad Danny Ramadan, also of UBC, was recognized for *The Miraculous Return of Khaled from the Dead*; Evan Neilsen, University of Calgary, for *Harriet*; and James Cawkwell, University of Alberta, for his work *Tadpole*.

“Congratulations to Sara and the finalists for their creative and memorable stories,” says Whitehead. “A special thank you to our local jury and main jury for their energy, time and enthusiasm to support the next generation of Canadian literary talent. The support of *The Walrus* and Munro’s Books was so instrumental in generating awareness and excitement of the Bridge Prize. We look forward to a long partnership.”

De Waal is a writer and teacher from Abbotsford, B.C who will graduate from UBC’s Master of Fine Arts Program in Creative Writing in November. Her first picture book, *48 Grasshopper Estates*, is projected for release through Annick Press in April 2021. When she’s not busy writing, de Waal works as a primary music and art teacher where her students constantly inspire her to keep making art.

“When I began my Master of Fine Arts degree at UBC, I resigned from teaching music and returned to my high school job on a dairy farm, hoping all those early hours in the milking parlour would provide more time for daydreaming up stories — and they did,” she says. “The job also allowed me, on occasion, to help with the birthing of calves. Every time a calf took its first steps, I thought, I’ve never seen anything as beautiful or as unsteady. When I entered the Bridge Prize, I had just begun my last term as a creative writing student, and I felt similarly about most of my work: half in love with it, half afraid it would fall flat on its face. The contest was very much a first-steps experience for me, and I was both surprised and delighted to see Cecilia and Richard stand on its own outside the safety of my imagination. Though I’ve now resumed the tricky balance of writing while teaching, the Bridge Prize has given me the motivation and confidence to continue nudging my stories out into the world.”

Dr. Shelly Wismath, dean of the School of Liberal Education, says the Bridge Prize competition exceeded expectations.

“We are so pleased to congratulate Sara de Waal as the inaugural winner of the Bridge Prize. Her story stood out among stiff competition from across the country, as deeply moving and beautifully written,” says Wismath. “We are also grateful for the tremendous support the Bridge Prize has received from our sponsor and from authors and academics across Canada, in support of a new literary competition.”

Submissions for the 2022 Bridge Prize competition will be accepted beginning January 21, 2021. The main jury for the 2022 competition will be announced in November.

About the Bridge Prize

- Established in 2019 and first awarded in 2020, a new competition will run every second year.
- Total prize money for the Bridge Prize is \$10,500, with \$7,500 to the winner and \$1,000 each to three finalists.

- 340 stories from students attending 61 post-secondary institutions in nine provinces across Canada were entered for 2020.
 - An initial group of 18 local jurors, comprised of campus and community-based academics and cultural leaders, read all 340 stories. Each story was read by a minimum of three jurors, after which the field was narrowed to the top 70. Every local juror then read each of the 70 stories before 10 were sent on to the main jury.
 - The five-person main jury was comprised of authors Thomas King (head juror), Charles Demers and Aritha Van Herk; Shelley Ambrose, former executive director of *The Walrus* magazine; and Leslie Hurtig, artistic director of the Vancouver Writers Fest.
- To view online: <https://www.uleth.ca/unews/article/ubc-graduate-student-wins-inaugural-bridge-prize-national-short-story-writing-competition#.X2tqktZ7k6U>

To see a video message from the winner: <https://www.uleth.ca/unews/video/bridge-prize-2020-winning-author#.X2tqvdZ7k6U>

Attached photo of UBC graduate student Sara de Waal

-- 30 --

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