

## Faculty of English. Ross Raisin wins 2024 BBC National Short Story Award

Novelist and short story writer, Ross Raisin has won the nineteenth BBC National Short Story Award with Cambridge University (NSSA) for ‘Ghost Kitchen’, a tense, cinematic  
5 story narrated by a bicycle courier and inspired by the gig economy and the ‘dark  
kitchens’ of the restaurant industry.

Raisin was presented with the prize of £15,000 this evening (Tuesday 1 October) by the 2024 Chair of  
Judges Paddy O’Connell at a ceremony held at BBC Broadcasting House and broadcast live on BBC  
10 Radio 4’s Front Row. ‘Ghost Kitchen’ is available to listen to on BBC Sounds, read by Ashley Margolis.

Praised for its ‘pitch-perfect handling of memory and backstory’ and its ‘clear-eyed  
attentiveness to the detail of lives not seen before in fiction’, ‘Ghost Kitchen’ is the  
story of Sean, a young man who has sought invisibility and refuge in the industrial  
15 wilderness of an unnamed city by working as a bicycle courier for an out-of-town take-  
away business after a tragic family incident. **A precisely realised world where workers  
have little agency, Sean’s story of vulnerability and redemption** plays out against the  
relentless grind of the gig economy and the harsh realities of a world where humanity  
has no value and where both the brutality, and unexpected tenderness, of men is  
20 revealed.

Jenn Ashworth, BBC National Short Story 2024 Judge says:

“‘Ghost Kitchen’ was a stand-out story from the beginning. We loved **the delicacy of the  
prose, the pitch perfect handling of memory and backstory** - always a difficult task to  
25 pull off well in a short story, **the clear-eyed attentiveness to the detail of lives none of  
us had seen depicted<sup>x</sup> in fiction before**. A short story is one of the most difficult  
literary forms, demanding not only precise focus, but also **a gesture towards a fuller,  
larger world**. In ‘Ghost Kitchen’, Ross manages to give the reader the gift of a sleek,  
sharp, perfectly delineated moment - **one incident in the life of one man** - but also  
30 shows us - in a way that felt necessary and urgent to all of us - **the complexity of an  
entire world.**”

Talking about his story, Raisin says: “During the research and writing of my last novel, I  
became interested in the growth of dark kitchens (also known as ghost kitchens), so-  
35 called in part because they have no windows, no way for anybody on the outside to see  
in; places too that are often on the outskirts of urban areas; concealed islands that  
sometimes create the conditions for darkness to flourish. Thinking about all of this, and  
concurrently thinking about food-delivery models (by way of some fascinating  
conversations with bicycle couriers) led naturally to a deeper level of critical and  
40 creative thinking about the gig economy. One of the things that has felt different about  
this short story for me, compared to most I have written in the past, is that it has the  
feeling of a small and specific slicing into a universal story that unites an enormous - yet  
largely ignored - sector of society.”

45 This year’s judging panel was chaired by Paddy O’Connell, host of Radio 4’s Broadcasting  
House and co-host of the weekend edition of the BBC’s popular Newscast podcast. He  
was joined by novelist and critic, Michael Donkor; memoirist, novelist and film-maker

Xiaolu Guo; former NSSA shortlisted writer and Professor of Writing at Lancaster University, Jenn Ashworth; and returning judge, Di Speirs MBE, Books Editor at BBC Audio.

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Di Speirs, Editor of Books at BBC Audio and Judge of the Award since its launch says: “I am absolutely delighted that Ross Raisin, a writer whose novels have stopped me in my tracks and made me see afresh, has turned his undoubted talent to the short story, and with similarly powerful effect. A brilliantly rendered glimpse into life in the edge-lands, ‘Ghost Kitchen’ combines the tension of a dark plot with an unexpected and moving exploration of male friendship. Read it!”

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Chair of Judges, Radio 4’s Paddy O’Connell says:

“The short story has saved me once again. In these angry times, the attention goes to the people who burn books rather than read them<sup>2</sup>). I loved reading the entries - they stayed with me long afterwards and some of them even had me at ‘hello’. Thanks to all the writers. We judges are proud to have been your readers.”

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Raisin, who was named one of Granta’s Best of Young British Novelists in 2013, and Sunday Times Young Writer of the Year 2005, beat a strong shortlist including three time nominee and 2021 BBC National Short Story Award winner, Lucy Caldwell for ‘Hamlet, a love story’; memoirist and novelist Will Boast for ‘The Barber of Erice’ and new talents, finance lawyer Manish Chauhan for ‘Pieces’ and Vee Walker, a former museums and heritage expert for ‘Nice Dog’.

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Dr Bonnie Lander Johnson, Fellow, Lecturer and Director of Studies at Cambridge University says: “Ross Raisin’s ‘Ghost Kitchen’ is an entirely modern coming-of-age story. It deftly examines the vulnerability of an isolated young man, the weight of moral guilt and its capacity to urge us toward maturity, and how the small arc of local life and local relationships can be opened up when we participate in the wider circles of community orbiting around us. I treasured every word of this story - the quiet, narrative unravelling of its crimes and the gentle turn toward redemption.”

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The BBC National Short Story Award is one of the most prestigious for a single short story, with the winning author receiving £15,000, and the shortlisted authors £600 each. Each of the five stories are available to listen to on BBC Sounds and are also published in an anthology BBC National Short Story Award 2024 and published by Comma Press. The 2023 winner of the BBC National Short Story Award was Naomi Wood who won for ‘Comorbidities’.

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Alongside BBC NSSA, the winner of the 10th anniversary BBC Young Writer’s Award with Cambridge University, an award created to inspire and encourage the next generation of short story writers, was also announced. A cross-network collaboration between Radio 4 and Radio 1 and open to all 14-18-year-olds, the award was won by Lulu Frisson, a 17-year-old sixth former from Birmingham, for ‘Special’. It is also available to listen to on BBC Sounds read by Kymberley Cochrane. Lulu will appear on Radio 1’s Life Hacks on Sunday 6th October.

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<https://www.english.cam.ac.uk/bbcshortstory/2024/10/02/ross-raisin-wins-2024-bbc-national-short-story-award/>

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x) *I want to talk about this word/term.*      2) *cf ‘Reading in levels’*