

Edugyan on shortlist for Gov. Gen. Awards

MARK MEDLEY
POSTMEDIA NEWS

Former Calgarian Esi Edugyan continued her literary winning streak on Tuesday, landing on the shortlist for the Governor General's Literary Awards and becoming one of precious few authors who have ever been nominated for all three of Canada's major literary prizes.

She joins former Governor General winner Andrew Nikiforuk in the Calgary contingent of nominees. He picked up a nod in the non-fiction category for *Empire of the Beetle: How Human Folly and a Tiny Bug Are Killing North*

America's *Great Forests*. Nikiforuk, an author and investigative journalist, previously won a GG award in 2002 for *Saboteurs: Wiebo Ludwig's War Against Big Oil*.

"If it brings more attention to the state of our forests and improbable creatures like the bark beetle, then that's great," Nikiforuk said. "This book is just old-fashioned storytelling about a pretty remarkable creature that we all ignored because we thought it was too small to pay attention to."

Nikiforuk is among a number of GG-Awards nominees attending WordFest events this week in

Calgary and Banff.

The nominees for the Governor General's Literary Awards were announced on Tuesday. For only the second time in history, two authors have been shortlisted for all three of Canada's major fiction prizes.

In what is becoming a regular occurrence, Edugyan, who now lives in Victoria, and Patrick deWitt find themselves on the shortlist in the category of best English-language fiction.

Edugyan's novel *Half-Blood Blues*, about a black jazz musician who vanishes after being arrested by the Nazis, and deWitt's *The Sisters Brothers*, a bleak comic tale about a pair of hit men

cowboys, were previously shortlisted for the Rogers Writers' Trust Fiction and Prize and the Scotiabank Giller Prize.

Joining them on the shortlist are former *Coach* writer Marina Endicott for *The Little Shadows*, a historical novel about a vaudeville sister act; Touch, Alexi Zentner's debut novel about a priest returning to his childhood home in the wilds of northern B.C.; and *The Free World* by David Bezmozgis, about a family of Latvian Jews living in Rome in the mid-1970s, which is also up for the Scotiabank Giller Prize.

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Author Andrew Nikiforuk is nominated for a Governor General's Literary Award.

actually Jane Goodall. For me, she's the ultimate female scientist," van Heijningen said.

Van Heijningen cites the famed British anthropologist as an inspiration, but his character Kate Lloyd seems more akin to the Alien's Ripley, the woman portrayed by Sigourney Weaver who battles the otherworldly creature in that 1979 film.

"She's very smart, but she's very young and inexperienced, and she gets invited to join this expedition because they (the male scientists) think they can easily control her. That's how she starts out," Winstead said of her character.

"But when the very bad things start to happen, she's the one who starts kicking butt and really figuring out what they have to do in order to survive."

The best horror films are both timeless, yet very much of their time. *The Thing From Another World* (1951) is seen as reflecting America's paranoia about communism, and Carpenter's *The Thing* (1982) has been viewed as a thinly veiled parable about the horrors of AIDS.

This new *Thing* could be viewed as a commentary on the present-day threat from the global war on terror, its makers said, but Van Heijningen was quick to add that he didn't set out to comment on modern times.

"It's first and foremost a horror film about an alien. But you can definitely make the parallel in the sense that we have terrorists among us, pretending to be good neighbours, while they have a very different, hidden agenda."

Winstead agrees there is a timely subtext to *The Thing* dealing with trusting, or not, acquaintances and others.

But she added that the horror genre allows people to share their fright, perhaps even laugh at it, then shrug it off.

"It's a way of living vicariously through terrifying events, and the audience comes through it unscathed. That's what this film does. You live through all the rising tension and paranoia, and then you get to walk away."

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They were selected by a jury of writers: Douglas Arthur Brown, Peter Oliva and Kerri Sakamoto.

Endicott and Bemozgis are slated for WordFest appearances this week. Originally scheduled for WordFest, deWitt had to cancel due to a conflict with going to the award ceremony for the Man Booker Prize in England. He is scheduled to come to Calgary on Dec. 6 for a reading at the Calgary Public Library's John Dutton Theatre.

The only year ever that two authors have been shortlisted for all three prizes was 1998. That year, Barbara Gowdy's *The White Bone* and Wayne Johnston's *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams* accomplished the feat.

With the announcement Tuesday, the shortlists for the three major Canadian fiction prizes are set. While Edugyan and deWitt have received the lion's share of the attention for their multiple nominations — not to mention a spot on the Man Booker Prize shortlist — almost as notable are the authors who failed to earn a nomination, including Wayne Johnston for *A World Elsewhere*, Guy Vanderhaeghe for *A Good Man*, and Miriam Toews for *Irma Voth*. All three authors are appearing at WordFest.

Michael Ondaatje's novel *The Cat's Table*, which is nominated for the Scotiabank Giller Prize, was not submitted for consideration.

Competing against Nikiforuk in the English-language non-fiction category are Charles Foran's *Mordecai: The Life and Times*; Richard Gwyn's *Nation Maker*; Sir John A. Macdonald: *His Life, Our Times, Volume Two: 1867-1891*; Nathan M. Greenfield for *The Damned: The Canadians at the Battle of Hong Kong and the POW Experience, 1941-45*; and J.J. Lee, also appearing at WordFest, for *The Measure of a Man: The Story of a Father, a Son, and a Suit*.

WITH FILES FROM ERIC VOLMERS,
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