

THE BAREFOOT NUNS OF BARCELONA

The Orange Northern Woman Short Story Competition is marked by its commitment to finding and nurturing literary talent in Northern Ireland. This resulted, last year, with the aid of a generous grant from the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, in the publication of the anthology 'The Barefoot Nuns of Barcelona'. Stories from the winning and short-listed authors of the last five years were gathered together and published.

For the authors it was both a thrill and a great opportunity to see their story in print - a publishing credit is a great help to any aspiring author. It means being able to show an agent or publisher that someone else thinks you have talent. They might pick your work from the slush-pile for a longer look. In a publishing industry that is as competitive as it is right now, with publishers looking for the next Harry Potter or Artemis Fowl, and self-published books flooding the market, that is valuable. Michelle Gallen told me what the Orange NW prize and anthology meant to her.

'Winning the prize was great timing for me, as I'd just resigned from my job - the £1000 kept me in corn flakes for a while! But as a writer it meant a lot to me. I'd been seriously ill a few years ago - my illness shattered my dreams of becoming a writer. I spent years trying to get my health back instead of writing. Winning the prize gave me a real confidence boost. Then when they announced the publication of the anthology I was really excited. I knew I'd have three decent stories in a good anthology. Finding out that the anthology was named after my short story made it that little bit more special. Now I'd love to get a book out that's full of just my own short stories - something that I've created from start to finish. Winning the Orange Northern Woman award, and then getting published in the anthology has made that seem possible!'

Lily McWilliams was also delighted with her success.

'Some years ago I entered two of my short stories into the Northern Woman competition. I was a prize winner on two occasions. This was the highlight of my long years of creative writing. It made me feel my work was truly worthwhile at last. Northern Woman has given us the greatest chance to let our voices be heard, our talent to be discovered. To them I send a big thank you. You have established a wonderful sisterhood of women writers through the yearly competition. Long may we write about love and life and laughter with your encouragement.'

Barefoot Nuns in Barcelona is a lively, well-written book full of quirky, sad, thought-stories. The stories are all well-crafted, imaginative and intelligently written. They range from the sad to the funny, the fantastical to the everyday and they are a tribute to the literary talent that exists in Northern Ireland.

'Northern Woman Editor Lyn Palmer said: 'There is a wealth of untapped potential out there - each year it has become harder and harder to whittle down the torrent of entries to a brief short-list of finalists. Not only will this

book record their talent and their success for posterity; but maybe it will also inspire someone else to pick up a pen, take a risk, and create something special of their own.'

The Barefoot Nuns of Barcelona & Other Short Stories is available to buy through branches of Eason, Tesco and other independent retailers province-wide, priced £7.99. For further information please contact Mary Carson or Lyn Palmer on Tel: 028 9078 3200.

