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Massachusetts author wins 2013 Pitt Press literature prize

PITTSBURGH—Anthony Wallace has been named the 2013 winner of the Drue Heinz Literature Prize, one of the nation’s most prestigious awards for a book of short stories. His manuscript, The Old Priest, was selected from a field of over 350 entries by award-winning author Amy Hempel. The University of Pittsburgh Press, sponsor of the prize, will publish the collection this fall.

Born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Wallace resides in Brookline, Massachusetts. He is a senior lecturer in the Arts & Sciences Writing Program at Boston University, where he has taught seminars in American literature for the past eleven years.

“The stories in The Old Priest have to do with time and memory, and I think there is a pattern in which they open out beyond ordinary daily time into something larger—the present moment, perhaps, but a larger conception of it,” Wallace explained. “The old priest talks about eternity as a place that contains everything that has ever been, every lost dog, as he describes it, every broken watch and burnt dinner, then adds, ‘If eternity really is eternity, then nothing is ever lost. It’s all there, for all time, safe and whole within the sight of God.’ It might be true in these stories that God and eternity are synonymous, or at least coeval, but that’s for readers to decide.”

Hempel praised the title story as “a powerhouse that has the scale and scope of a novel.” She said Wallace’s characters are “people who appreciate simple pleasures while making mistakes they have made before and will likely make again. For all the unsavory behavior, there is a moral core in many of these people’s lives.”

Wallace earned his B.A. in English Literature from Lafayette College and his M.A. in Creative Writing from BU. Recently, he and BU colleague Bill Marx have worked with the Dean’s office in developing “The Theater Now,” an experimental first-year writing seminar designed in cooperation with Boston area theaters.

Wallace has published poetry and short fiction in literary journals such as CutBank, The Atlanta Review, Another Chicago Magazine, The Florida Review, and River Styx. He has twice been a finalist for the Flannery O’Connor Short Fiction Award. Most recently he has published several non-fiction articles in The Arts Fuse. The title story, originally published in The Republic of Letters, has won a Pushcart Prize and will be included in Pushcart Prize XXXVII (2013 edition).

Recalling his reaction to winning the prize, Wallace remarked, “The experience has been fantastic—I think it’s fair to say that nothing better could have happened to me and my writing!”

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