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## **New Angle Prize for Literature 2009**

### **Award Short List**

"Suffolk Boy" by Alasdair Eoin Aston. *Orphean Press 2009*

"Scapegallows", by Carol Birch. *Virago Press 2007*

"Crow Country" by Mark Cocker. *Jonathan Cape 2007*

"Notes from Walnut Tree Farm" by Roger Deakin (edited Alison Hastie & Terence Blacker). *Penguin Books 2008*

"Story of the Southwold-Walberswick Ferry " by Ann Gander with Dani Church. *Holm Oak publishing 2009*

"Constable in Love" by Martin Gayford. *Fig Tree 2009*

"What I Was" by Meg Rosoff. *Penguin Books 2008*

"Coke of Norfolk (1754-1842)" by Susanna Wade Martins. *Boydell & Brewer Ltd 2009*

#### *Judges for 2009:*

*Ronald Blythe*

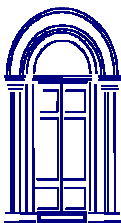
*Anne Parry*

*D J Taylor*

#### **Publishers' synopses follow:**



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### **“Suffolk Boy” by Alasdair Eoin Aston *Orphean Press 2009***

Twenty poems reflecting the author’s childhood in a naturalist’s paradise of north Suffolk

### **“Scapegallows”, by Carol Birch *Virago Press 2007***

New South Wales, 1817. Margaret Catchpole is stranded at a settler’s homestead as the floodwater draws in, and she finds herself facing death - as she has several times before. She looks back over her life - the complex and stormy partnership with Will Laud, a ‘hell-born-babe’, that led her into the world of smuggling and in to a double life. After Will is forced to flee the country, Margaret is taken on as a nursemaid by the wealthy Cobbold family, but a crime against them means she is tried and sentenced to hang. She avoids death but when an elaborate gaol escape fails, Will is shot dead and Margaret captured. Sentenced once more to hang, she looks death full in the face. But she doesn’t die. Her sentence is transmuted to transportation for life to Australia.

The novel explores a deeply divided society. Ironically, by reaching the lowest depths and being cast out by the society which spawned her, Margaret finds her true role as an independent pioneer in a young colony.

### **“Story of the Southwold-Walberswick Ferry “ by Dani Church with Ann Gander *Holm Oak publishing 2009***

Dani Church took over the Southwold-Walberswick ferry service from her father David in 2001, becoming the fifth-generation family member to take passengers across the River Blyth in Suffolk. Her book charts the often-troubled story of the ferry from the first recorded licence in the 13th century, through its mechanised heyday to the present rowing-boat service, much loved by tourists and locals alike.

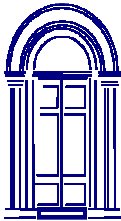
With anecdotes and tales from the ferrymen and women of the past she shows how, through fair weather and foul, the ferry has played a crucial role in bringing together the people of Southwold, Walberswick and far beyond

### **“Crow Country” by Mark Cocker *Jonathan Cape 2007***

One night Mark Cocker followed the roiling, deafening flock of rooks and jackdaws which regularly passed over his Norfolk home on their way to roost in the Yare valley. From the moment he watched the multitudes blossom as a mysterious dark flower above the night woods, these gloriously commonplace birds were unsheathed entirely from their ordinariness. They became for Cocker a fixation and a way of life.

Cocker goes in search of them, journeying from the cavernous, deadened heartland of South England to the hills of Dumfriesshire, experiencing spectacular failures alongside magical successes and epiphanies. Step by step he uncovers the complexities of the birds’ inner lives, the unforeseen richness hidden in the raucous crow song he calls ‘our landscape made audible’.

*Crow Country* is a prose poem in a long tradition of English pastoral writing. It is also a reminder that 'Crow Country' is not 'ours': it is a landscape which we cohabit with thousands of other species, and these richly complex fellowships cannot be valued too highly.



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### **“Notes from Walnut Tree Farm” by Roger Deakin (edited Alison Hastie & Terence Blacker) *Penguin Books 2008***

For the last six years of his life, Roger Deakin kept notebooks in which he wrote his daily thoughts, impressions, feelings and observations. Discursive, personal and often impassioned, they reveal the way he saw the world, whether it be observing the teeming ecosystem that was Walnut Tree Farm, thinking about the wider environment, walking in his fields, on Mellis Common or on his travels at home, or contemplating his past and his present life.

Notes from Walnut Tree Farm collects the very best of these writings, capturing Roger’s extraordinary, restless curiosity about the natural and human worlds, his love of literature and music, his knack for making unusual and apposite connections, and of course his distinct and subversive charm and humour. Together they cohere to present a passionate, engaged and – in spite of the worst pressures of contemporary life – optimistic view of our changing world

### **“Constable in Love” by Martin Gayford *Fig Tree 2009***

When John Constable fell in love with Maria Bicknell, granddaughter of a Suffolk country neighbour, he little knew how long it would take to make her his wife. The impediment to their marriage was simple: 'that necessary article cash'.

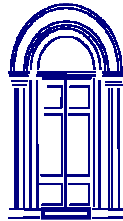
He was a painter without sufficient funds to support the daughter of a wealthy London lawyer, and both he and her grandfather, the formidable (and sometimes comical) Rector of East Bergholt, disapproved of the match. It would be seven long, difficult years before they could marry, but in that time he would become one of the greatest painters of the nineteenth century.

Martin Gayford writes superbly about Constable's early years as a painter and Maria and John's correspondence provides the lively backdrop to the story; one of lovers' tiffs, London versus country life, encounters with Turner, Byron and Wordsworth, royal scandals and rivalries at the Royal Academy. All the time, John Constable battles to become a painter who can earn his living and win Maria's hand.

### **“What I Was” by Meg Rosoff, *Penguin Books 2008***

'I was at boarding school in East Anglia, my third. I didn't want to be there. But if there had been no school, there would be no Finn. He lived in a hut on the coast. He was like the hut, in fact – it took a while for both of them to warm up. But that is all I longed for. Finn, warming to me. A nod. Half a smile. Asking me to help on the boat. Not asking me to leave. I didn't want it to end. Now I am waiting for the end, and looking back to the beginning.'

Haunting, intense and with a surprising twist in the tale – this is unlike anything you will have read before... (cont'd)



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Rising star Meg Rosoff delivers a piercing and magical story about friendship and humanity. In the not too distant future, a one-hundred-year-old man called H sails the eastern coast of England with his godson. H recalls when he himself was sixteen, his godson's age as they search for the site of H's life-altering friendship with a boy named Finn. Finn lives alone on an isolated slip of land and follows no rules: he spends his days swimming, fishing, and collecting driftwood for his tiny beach hut. H, on the other hand, is an upper-class boarding school boy stifled by monotony and endless rules. They meet by chance on the beach, and H is immediately awed by (and jealous of) Finn's way of life. They strike up an unlikely friendship but the gap between their lives becomes difficult to bridge, and before long the idyll that nurtured their relationship is shattered by heart-wrenching scandal. Meg Rosoff was formerly a YA author, but her work transcends categorization and we are delighted to bring it to adult readers for the first time. *What I Was* is a timeless, enthralling story destined to become a classic.

### **“Coke of Norfolk (1754-1842)” by Susanna Wade Martins *Boydell & Brewer Ltd 2009***

Thomas William Coke ['Coke of Norfolk'] [1754-1842] is best known as one of the main promoters of the improved farming of the 'Agricultural Revolution'. He was also a county MP for over forty years between 1776 and 1832; and the owner of one of the finest palladian mansions in Britain, and by far, the largest estate in Norfolk at Holkham Hall. A friend of Charles James Fox, he moved in the highest Whig social circles and lavishly entertained distinguished friends from both political and academic fields who came to Holkham for its splendid library, works of art and antiquities as well as the game coverts. A charismatic figure, he was an outspoken critic of Britain's war against the Americans in their fight for independence which made him friends who visited and corresponded across the Atlantic. Despite his importance, both locally and nationally, there has been no full scale biography of him for a hundred years - a gap which this book sets out to address. It sets his agricultural achievements in a wider context, and places Coke himself in his milieu, as one of a small circle of landed grandees who were of major influence during a period of political turbulence and agricultural change. The author also examines Coke's reputation as a 'patriot'.

Dr SUSANNA WADE MARTINS is Honorary Research Fellow, School of History, University of East Anglia