

## SA author gets the Booker nod

Author and poet Marlene van Niekerk's "uncompromising look" at poor Afrikaans communities has netted her a place in the finals of the Man Booker International Prize.



The 10 finalists for the prestigious literary award were announced at the University of Cape Town last week.

The award is a complement to the Man Booker Prize, recognising an author's body of work rather than a single book of fiction. It is the first time the finalists have been announced in Africa.

The international award takes place every second year and the winner - who takes home £60,000 (about R1m) - will be announced on 19 May in London.

"Marlene van Niekerk is the author of two immense masterpieces, *Triomf* and *Agaat*, which chart in evocative, sometimes disturbing detail the aches and aggravations of political transition in South Africa for those who saw themselves as on the losing side, in particular impoverished Afrikaners," the judges said.

"Van Niekerk's vision is ambitious, uncompromising and irrefutable. The bold experimentalism of her Afrikaans takes the reader deep inside the contortions of the apartheid psyche and asks whether some historical hurts and hatreds can ever be entirely erased."

The press-shy author, a professor of Afrikaans and Dutch literature and Creative Writing at Stellenbosch University, was not available for comment yesterday.

But novelist, critic and Oxford University English professor Elleke Boehmer, who is one of the judges in the awards, said Van Niekerk displayed a "richness and pungency of language, and an extraordinary demotic range".

The other finalists from Africa are Mia Couto (Mozambique), Alain Mabanckou (Congo) and Ibrahim al-Koni (Libya).

"It was completely not by design that these four writers formed a southern cross across the continent. They are a wonderful mix. It's a real testimony to the strength and richness of African writing," Boehmer said.

César Aira (Argentina), Hoda Barakat (Lebanon), Maryse Condé (Guadeloupe), Amitav Ghosh (India), Fanny Howe (US) and László Krasznahorkai (Hungary) round off the list of finalists.

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