

PRESS RELEASE: 23 August 2005

UNDER STRICT EMBARGO UNTIL 00.00 GMT TUESDAY 23 AUGUST 2005

The National Short Story Prize launches to reclaim waylaid literary form

A major literary prize launches today at the Edinburgh International Book Festival. The *National Short Story Prize* is an annual award aimed at re-establishing the importance of the British story after many years of neglect. The new award is funded by NESTA (the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts) and supported by BBC Radio 4 and *Prospect* Magazine. First winners will be announced in May 2006.

The *National Short Story Prize* will be the largest award in the world for a single story. The winning author will receive **£15,000**, and a runner up **£3,000**. Three further authors will receive **£500** each. The shortlist of five stories will be broadcast on BBC Radio 4 in advance of the winner being announced in May 2006, and the winning stories will be published and distributed free by *Prospect* magazine.

The award aims to honour the country's finest writers of short stories, and as such it is open to authors with a previous record of publication who are either UK nationals or residents. Entries may be stories published during 2005 – or previously unpublished.

Radio 4 is the world's major broadcaster of short stories, broadcasting a story every day of the week. However, this healthy state of affairs isn't mirrored in the medium of print. The record of publication has been declining in Britain for two decades. *Prospect* is one of very few UK magazines bringing short stories to readers in every issue. A comparison with the greater prestige enjoyed by the short story in America prompted *Prospect* to devise an award that might galvanise British magazines and publishers, lend fire to writers, and give short story readers a platform equal to that enjoyed by Radio 4 listeners. While the British literary scene is dominated by the novel, this is an opportunity to restore the balance to an equally important fictional form. Alex Linklater, deputy editor of *Prospect* Magazine said:

"The novel is a capacious old whore: everyone has a go at her, but she rarely emits so much as a groan for their efforts. The short story, on the other hand, is a nimble goddess: she selects her suitors fastidiously and sings like a dove when they succeed. The British literary bordello is heaving with flabby novels; it's time to give back some love to the story."

The new award stands at the heart of a UK-wide campaign — **story** — that is also launched today. The campaign is a joint venture managed by Booktrust and the Scottish Book Trust. Over the next two years, it will develop events, festivals and a central website—as well as collaborations with bookshops, libraries and other public institutions. The ambition of the **story** campaign is to expand opportunities for British

writers, readers, magazines and publishers of the short story. Faith Liddell is Project Manager for the campaign and said:

"Booktrust and the Scottish Book Trust, in their first major collaboration, are delighted to have the National Short Story Prize as the jewel in the crown of this campaign to build the prestige of the short story in our culture."

By sponsoring the award at such a high level, NESTA has set out to provide a central focus to these nationwide initiatives, aiming to identify emerging talent and reverse a period of commercial decline and bring fresh ideas and energy into a once vital literary form.

Chris Powell, NESTA Chairman, said:

"NESTA is all about supporting innovation, and while the UK short story may not be new – with a strong history from Joseph Conrad to Will Self – it has been dormant for too long. The National Short Story Prize will address this by filling a gap in the awards market and breathing life into this once great British literary form, helping it to identify and reward a new generation of talented UK writers."

Mark Damazer, Radio 4 Controller, said:

"Radio 4 is very happy to support this initiative to revitalise the short story in its printed form. This award should stimulate the interest of writers and publishers alike and I am looking forward to broadcasting the winning stories to the Radio 4 listeners who hold the short story in very high regard."

www.theshortstory.org.uk

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NOTES TO EDITORS:

- The *National Short Story Prize* is made possible due to the generous sponsorship of the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts (NESTA) and will be supported and managed by BBC Radio 4, *Prospect*, the Booktrust and Scottish Book Trust.
- For information on **story**, the national campaign to celebrate the short story, go to www.theshortstory.org.uk. This new site includes a complete bibliography of the short story in the UK, events and projects listings and features, tips for writers and readers and a selection of classic and contemporary short stories.
- The panel of judges includes novelist and author of short stories **William Boyd**, broadcaster and writer **Francine Stock**, deputy editor of *Prospect* magazine **Alex Linklater**, Radio 4 producer **Di Spiers**, writer **Lavinia Greenlaw**.
- The panel will select a long list in by March 2006, followed by a shortlist, to be announced in May 2006. The shortlisted stories will be broadcast on BBC Radio 4 to precede the final announcement of the award winner and runners up.
- This award is open to UK nationals or residents, aged 18 years or over only. The story must not be more than 8000 words. Entrants must submit original work that does not infringe the copyright or any other rights of any third party. Entrants must have a prior record of publication. Entries are limited to stories written in English and only two will be accepted per author. The story entered must either be unpublished or if published then first and only publication must have between 1 January 2005 and 31 December 2005. For full details, entry criteria and an entry form see bbc.co.uk/radio4 or send a stamped addressed envelope to The National Short Story Prize, Room 316 BBC Henry Wood House, 3 & 6 Langham Place, London W1A 1AA.
- **Prospect** magazine was founded 10 years ago in September 1995 to fill the gap in Britain for a monthly magazine of essays and comment in politics and culture. *Prospect* picked up where cold war debates left off, and is now well established—selling around 25,000 copies every month. It was modelled on American magazines such as the *Atlantic Monthly* and *New Republic* which combine in-depth coverage of domestic and international politics with rigorous standards of editing and a high level of literary and cultural debate. *Prospect* began its programme of regular short fiction in 2003. For *Prospect's* current issue and archives go to www.prospect-magazine.co.uk
- **NESTA** (the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts) is a non-departmental public body (NDPB) investing in innovators and working to improve the climate for creativity in the UK. Established in 1998 and set up with an endowment from the National Lottery (£200 million, raised in 2003 to £250

million), NESTA invests the interest to support UK innovation. Since May 2000, when the programmes first opened, NESTA has spent over £58m on programmes supporting 683 awards. Visit www.nesta.org.uk to find out more.

- **BBC RADIO 4** is the world's biggest single commissioner of short stories. There is a story broadcast every day, with over a million listeners tuning in each week. 40 per cent of Radio 4's short stories are special commissions, mainly from leading authors and at least 35 per cent are from already published material – contemporary and classic – and include stories broadcast to coincide with publication. Unsolicited stories and those not published by mainstream publishers make up at least a further 25 per cent of output. Go to www.bbc.co.uk/radio4
- **Booktrust** and the **Scottish Book Trust** exist to bring books and people together. The story campaign is their first major collaboration. **Booktrust** is an independent educational charity, working to encourage readers of all ages and cultures to discover and enjoy books. Booktrust's family of websites provides information about books for adults and children, as well as news about the book world. Booktrust also administers a number of prizes and projects, and runs the Bookstart "books for babies" scheme. The **Scottish Book Trust** is Scotland's national agency for readers and writers. It aims to create a confident, cultured and articulate nation through engagement with literature in all its forms by providing key services to readers, writers and the education sector. Its projects include Live Literature Scotland, Words@Work, Reading Rich and BRAW, Network for the Scottish Childrens' Book. See www.booktrust.org.uk and www.scottishbooktrust.com for more information.