



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

13 June 2006

## ALAN BENNETT IN LINE FOR MEMOIR PRIZE PEN/Ackerley Prize shortlist announced

Now in its twenty-fifth year, the PEN/Ackerley Prize for literary autobiography will be presented on Thursday July 13. Since its inauguration in 1982, the PEN/Ackerley Prize has been awarded to some of Britain's most distinguished authors, with previous winners including Diana Athill, Blake Morrison, Lorna Sage, Jenny Diski, Tim Lott and Germaine Greer. The PEN/Ackerley Prize is Britain's only dedicated award for life writing.

Chairman of the Judges, Francis King, remarked of this year's prize: 'it produced a number of good books and a dozen or so excellent ones.'

### **The shortlist includes:**

Nina Bawden, *Dear Austen* (Virago)  
Alan Bennett, *Untold Stories* (Faber/Profile)  
Xandra Bingley, *Bertie, May and Mrs Fish* (Harper Perennial)  
Neil Cross, *Heartland* (Scribner)  
Richard Mabey, *Nature Cure* (Chatto & Windus)  
Anna Swan, *Statues without Shadows* (Sceptre)

### **Blake Morrison, winner of the PEN/Ackerley Prize 1994 said:**

'The PEN/Ackerley Prize, named after one of the most candid non-fiction writers of the twentieth century, is unique in the world of literary awards, and a great honour to win. It may not make you rich but it can do wonders for your confidence.'

### **Tim Lott, winner of the PEN/Ackerley Prize 1997 said:**

'Winning the PEN/Ackerley prize for *The Scent of Dried Roses* meant an enormous amount to me. Being presented with the prize by Alan Bennett was one of the proudest moments of my life, and I consider it to have done a tremendous amount for my career and self esteem. I think the PEN Ackerley Prize deserves far more attention than it

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IAN MCEWAN

6-8 AMWELL STREET  
LONDON EC1R 1UQ  
T 020 7713 0023  
F 020 7837 7838  
E [enquiries@englishpen.org](mailto:enquiries@englishpen.org)  
W [www.englishpen.org](http://www.englishpen.org)

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Dr Alastair Niven OBE

**Deputy President**  
Lisa Appignanesi

**Director**  
Jonathan Heawood  
[jonathan@englishpen.org](mailto:jonathan@englishpen.org)

**Programme Director  
Readers & Writers**  
Simon Burt  
[simon@englishpen.org](mailto:simon@englishpen.org)

**Office and Events Manager**  
Alice O'Hanlon  
[alice@englishpen.org](mailto:alice@englishpen.org)

**Programme Director  
Writers in Translation**  
Andrea Pisac  
[andrea@englishpen.org](mailto:andrea@englishpen.org)

**Programme Director  
Writers in Prison**  
Lucy Popescu  
[lucy@englishpen.org](mailto:lucy@englishpen.org)

**Assistant  
Writers in Prison**  
Cecilie Torjussen  
[cecilie@englishpen.org](mailto:cecilie@englishpen.org)

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gets - it is worthy, unique and aims for the highest quality in writing.'

**Francis King, Chair of the Judges, said:**

'In recent years books about unhappy childhoods have preponderated. Two such made the short-list this year – Neil Cross's *Heartland* and Anna Swan's *Statues Without Shadows*. What is remarkable about each is that, despite all the childhood suffering endured by the author, the tone is never the usual one of blaming or self-pity. Richard Mabey's *Nature Cure*, an account of how his observations of the natural world helped to keep him afloat during a nervous breakdown, struck the judges as the best written of the books; Alan Bennett's generously bulging portmanteau *Untold Story* as the most entertaining. In *Dear Austen* Nina Bawden writes of the death of her husband in a horrific railway accident with passion and grace. Xandra Bingley's *Bertie, May and Mrs Fish* is a delightful evocation of a wartime childhood.'

**Notes to Editors:**

1. English PEN is the founding centre of an international network of writers' centres, nurturing literature and defending freedom of expression worldwide.
2. The PEN/Ackerley Prize was founded in memory of the writer JR Ackerley by his sister Nancy in 1982. It is awarded every year by a panel of judges chaired by JR Ackerley's executor, Francis King CBE. The winner receives £1,000.
3. The PEN/Ackerley Prize will be awarded in London on Thursday July 13 2006. Call Alice O'Hanlon in the English PEN office on 020 7713 0023 to enquire about tickets to the event, which is by invitation only.

**Contact:**

Jonathan Heawood, Director, English PEN  
[jonathan@englishpen.org](mailto:jonathan@englishpen.org)  
020 7713 0023

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