

2011 Book of the Year Shortlist includes Edinburgh-based Stewart Conn

Four talented authors, including one who is Edinburgh-based, have been shortlisted for Scotland's largest literary prize, the Scottish Mortgage Investment Trust Book of the Year Award, in partnership with Creative Scotland.

✘ Stewart Conn who lives in Edinburgh won the Poetry category with his title, *The Breakfast Room (Bloodaxe)*, and is now in the running to win the book of the year. From 2002-2005 Conn was the capital's inaugural Makar. He has received awards from the Scottish Arts Council, the Society of Authors and the Poetry Book Society, while *Stolen Light: Selected Poems* was shortlisted for Saltire Scottish Book of the Year. Most recently he has edited *100 Favourite Scottish Poems* and *100 Favourite Scottish Love Poems*. He is a fellow of the RSAMD, an honorary fellow of the Association for Scottish Literary Studies and somewhat to his bemusement, a Knight of Mark Twain.

Selected from a long list of 17 category finalists, the winners of each of the Fiction, Non-Fiction, Poetry and First Book awards will receive £5,000. All four authors now go on to compete for the Scottish Book of the Year accolade and the chance to win a further £25,000, a total prize of £30,000 – Scotland's largest literary prize, and one of the largest in the UK.

The four category winners are: –

Fiction: [Leila Aboulela, *Lyrics Alley*](#) (Weidenfeld & Nicolson)

Non-Fiction: [Jackie Kay, *Red Dust Road*](#) (Picador)

Poetry: [Stewart Conn, *The Breakfast Room*](#) (Bloodaxe)

First Book: [Sue Peebles, *The Death of Lomond Friel*](#) (Vintage)

For the first time in the history of the awards, readers and book lovers from across the country will have a role in choosing the Scottish Book of the Year in a public vote that begins on the 16 May and ends on 31 July 2011. The Scottish Book of the Year will be announced at a special event at the Edinburgh International Book Festival in August.

To cast your vote, simply go on line to www.scottishbookawards.com Voting cards will also be appearing in every Scottish library and branches of Waterstone's booksellers across Scotland, although votes are welcome from anywhere in the world. The winner will be decided using a combination of the judges' scores and the public vote.

The four category winners are an eclectic mix of subject-matter and style.

Red Dust Road is a touching autobiographical account of the author's journey from Glasgow to meet her estranged Nigerian birth father;

Lyrics Alley is the thought-provoking tale of a powerful Sudanese family who are torn between modernising influences and past traditions, addressing many issues faced by Islamic women today;

The Death of Lomond Friel is a debut novel set on the east coast of Scotland. It is a touching exploration of the relationship between a successful radio presenter and her father: a stroke sufferer who quietly plots his own death;

The poems in **The Breakfast Room** explore, warmly and with often wry humour, the fragility and vulnerability of our lives. A number draw their inspiration from music and paintings, while a concluding series of love-poems is imbued with tenderness.

Gavin Wallace, Creative Scotland Portfolio Manager for Literature, Publishing and Language, Creative Scotland, said:-

'Moving from Sudan to Cairo, Glasgow to Lagos, Scotland's central belt to the east coast, from joyful affirmation to the

ungovernable pain of loss, this is a shortlist of myriad journeys, physical and spiritual, of an astonishing range and eclecticism of styles that truly reflect a mature literary culture. As well as rewarding sheer literary excellence, it is equally our aim that these Awards, and the new public vote, encourage people to enjoy the joys of reading, and sharing reading.'

Leila Aboulela, author of *Lyrics Alley*, said:-

'I started writing when I moved to Scotland in my late twenties. I was homesick for Khartoum and I wanted to put into words the anxieties and newness of being a Muslim in Britain. In the literary culture of 1990s Scotland I found a home for my stories, a place which nurtured my skills and encouraged me to grow as a writer.

'Fiction is a compelling, convincing exaggeration. In *Lyrics Alley*, an awful, life-changing event triggers the birth of a poet. And Sudan too emerges wobbly after decades of Anglo-Egyptian rule. The novel is set in the 1950s and I dedicated it to my father because I wanted to capture his optimistic youth, before the disappointments and military dictatorships that came with post-independence.'

Jackie Kay, author of *Red Dust Road*, said:-

'*Red Dust Road* is about my twenty year old journey to find my birth parents, but also about my adoptive parents and the road I've been on with them. I'm fascinated by what makes us who we are, nature or nurture.'

Stewart Conn, author of *The Breakfast Room*, said:-

'I am delighted for Bloodaxe and myself, and on behalf of the poems. What makes the prize even more gratifying and meaningful to me is its having been awarded to this particular volume, the source of so much of which lies in the affections.'

Sue Peebles, author of *The Death of Lomond Friel*, said;

'I'm thrilled to win the First Book prize and be part of such a fine shortlist. Everything to do with 'The Death of Lomond Friel' – the writing of it, the publication, the responses from readers and judges – has been highly improbable, which adds to the delight.

'The affection shown towards Lomond Friel is heart-warming. Of course, I care passionately about every character in the book (they could not exist otherwise), and I have tried to convey them, their faults and their frailties, as best I can – but it is the readers who have brought them to life.'