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THE UK - STILL IN LOVE WITH ROMANCE! PASSIONATE AT 50...

***Romantic Novelists' Association celebrates
50th anniversary at glittering awards ceremony***

LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT HONOURS FOR MAEVE BINCHY AND JOANNA TROLLOPE

London, 16 March 2010: The Romantic Novelists' Association (RNA) today marked their 50th Anniversary by honouring two of the world's best-selling and much-loved authors, Maeve Binchy and Joanna Trollope, with Lifetime Achievement Awards for their contributions to this ever popular, block-busting genre. The winners were announced today at the RNA's Pure Passion Awards lunch at the Royal Garden Hotel, London, hosted by critic and TV personality Barry Norman.

The Lifetime Achievement Award is the second award Joanna Trollope has received from the RNA having, thirty years ago, won the Romantic Novel of the Year Award for her novel *Parson Harding's Daughter* (1980).

Joanna Trollope said: "I am amazed and thrilled to be given this, and so touched, too. Of course it means a lot in itself, but it means even more to me because I have such admiration and respect for the RNA, which must be one of the most professional and supportive of literary associations around, as all its aspiring writer members know, and of course, I was one of them, once...So my pleasure and gratitude are very heartfelt."

Maeve Binchy was presented with a Lifetime Achievement Award in recognition of the joy she has given to millions of readers around the world. Her first novel, *Light A Penny Candle* was published in 1982, and her books have sold an estimated 45 million copies in 39 countries worldwide.

Maeve Binchy said, on being presented with her award in Ireland: "Thank you very much for giving me this opportunity to say how delighted I am with my Lifetime Achievement Award, and to have it on the 50th anniversary is even better. I've always admired the Association because it's managed to make us believe that stories are important and that we can get lost in the lives of other people."



The RNA's long-standing and hotly-contested **Romantic Novel of the Year** and **Love Story of the Year awards**, highly respected within the publishing industry, were also presented. In honour of the 50th Anniversary, several new awards were introduced this year: the **Romantic Film of the Year**, **The Romantic Comedy Award** and **The People's Choice Award**. In keeping with the RNA's desire to help emerging authors, **The Harry Bowling Prize for New Writing** was included in the RNA ceremony for the first time.

Winner of **The Romantic Novel of the Year 2010**, which recognises the best of the year's novels exploring the "deep mysteries of the human heart", is Lucy Dillon's ***Lost Dogs and Lonely Hearts***, published by Hodder & Stoughton. The perfect story for our nation of dog lovers, the story focuses on the romantic sequence of events that occurs when abandoned strays are matched with new owners, whose lives become interwoven.

Winner of **The Love Story of the Year** for a shorter romance with a strong emphasis on the developing central relationship is Nell Dixon's ***Animal Instincts***, published by Little Black Dress. This is the second time Nell Dixon has received an award from the RNA, having won this award, then called the Romance Prize, in 2007 for her novel *Marrying Max*.

Katie Fforde, Chair, RNA said: "The new awards introduced to celebrate the RNA's 50th year not only showcase this fantastic, best-selling and popular genre but also provide a wonderful excuse for readers to get to know new writers across the diversity of themes and plots that comprise the romantic fiction genre. These Pure Passion Awards have enjoyed a higher standard of entries than ever before but the judges were unanimously won over by Lucy Dillon and Nell Dixon, whose character development and storylines kept us hooked to the very last page. Clearly the public, who were invited to vote for their favourites for the first time in the new People's Choice and Romantic Film Awards, were equally as excited by the books as they pointed us to the clear winners."

On the Lifetime Achievement prizes, Fforde added: "This genre gives so much pleasure to so many people and two of our finest authors are superb examples of doing just that. Maeve Binchy and Joanna Trollope are household names, national treasures and some of the best storytellers of the last 50 years. It was our pleasure and privilege to honour them with Lifetime Achievement Awards."



The RNA Romantic Film of the Year, celebrating the finest adaptation from a romantic novel to a film released in the UK during 2009, was selected by the public via www.lovereadings.co.uk. The winner is ***An Education***, by Lynn Barber, published by Penguin. The film was scripted by Nick Hornby.

The Romantic Comedy Award, which recognises the book "where love and laughter go hand in hand", was won by Jane Costello's ***The Nearly-Weds***, published by Simon & Schuster. The judges said the book was "a witty, at times laugh-out-loud romance, full of great characters."

The People's Choice Award, a new award recognising key new or developing authors in the romantic genre, was also selected by the public via www.lovereadings.co.uk. The winner is ***Missing You*** by Louise Douglas, published by Pan.

The Harry Bowling Prize for New Writing, sponsored by Headline, recognises writing promise and is given every two years to the best first chapter and synopsis submitted by an author who has not yet had an adult novel published. Runner up for the 2010 award is ***Sunrise*** by John Barfield, and the winner is ***Fear No Evil*** by Debbie Johnson, who the judges felt showed great comic potential.

The RNA's 50th Anniversary is supported by an extensive, nationwide in-store promotion under the '2010 Pure Passion Awards' banner, with all shortlisted titles stickered with the official logo. Posters and official consumer magazines featuring all the shortlisted titles and authors in each category are available from bookshops and libraries throughout the UK.

For further information, or to arrange an interview with the Award winners or RNA Chair Katie Fforde please contact:

RNA Press Officer, Janet Gover: 07930 940149; pressofficer@rna-uk.org
Katrina Power, Midas Public Relations: 020 7361 7880; katrina.power@midaspr.co.uk
Tracey Jennings, Midas Public Relations: 020 7361 7863; tracey.jennings@midaspr.co.uk

www.romanticnovelistsassociation.org



Notes to Editors

The Romantic Novelists' Association (RNA) was set up in 1960 to promote respect for the genre and to encourage excellence. It has more than 700 members, including writers, agents, publishers and others associated with the publishing industry.

The Romantic Novel of the Year Award was inaugurated in the same year to recognise excellence in romantic novels. Any novel which is first published in the UK (or simultaneously with other countries) in 2009 is eligible for the 2010 Award.

The RNA has always involved readers in judging the awards. Keen readers are asked to rate nominated books on a number of criteria including romantic content, readability, characters, plot, dialogue, style and ending. These readers' favourites are then presented to the expert judges, who decide the overall winners.

The 2009 Romantic Novel of the Year award winner was Julia Gregson with 'East of the Sun'. Recent winners include Freya North, Rosie Thomas, Erica James, Katharine Davies, Jojo Moyes, Sarah Mason, Cathy Kelly, Philippa Gregory and Maureen Lee. A list of past winners can be found at www.romanticnovellistsassociation.org.

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The RNA's 50th Anniversary Celebrations also include the publication of an anthology, **Loves Me, Loves Me Not** (MIRA), edited by Katie Fforde and Sue Moorcroft. The book features short stories by more than forty RNA members, including bestsellers such as Joanna Trollope, Adele Parks, Carole Matthews, Jill Mansell and Judy Astley, as well as fresh new voices.

Later in the year, the RNA will release a second publication, **Fabulous at Fifty**, a series of reminiscences by members and extracts from the RNA archives, charting the humour and heartbreak, the hard work and the honours of the past 50 years.

Other events during the year include a three day conference in London featuring leading industry figures and award winning writers as guest speakers, and a poll being conducted in association with libraries to decide the nation's most popular romantic novel of the past 50 years.



BACKGROUND TO THE RNA AWARDS 2010

▪ Romantic Novel of the Year 2010

The Romantic Novel of the Year Award was inaugurated in 1960 to recognise excellence in romantic novels and enhance the standing of the genre.

WINNER: *Lost Dogs and Lonely Hearts* by Lucy Dillon (Hodder & Stoughton)

When the abandoned strays from a local dogs' home are matched with brand new owners, it turns out it might not just be the dogs who need rescuing. Rachel's aunt has left her a house, a Border Collie and, despite her knowing nothing about dogs, a crowded kennels. But since her life has collapsed, she is not sure she can deal with any more lost souls...

Lucy Dillon lives in Hereford, Herefordshire.

▪ Love Story of the Year 2010

This prize honours the most memorable stories set around a single theme that concentrate on a developing love affair. The RNA's team of readers gave the highest scores to stories containing strong passion combined with engaging and page-turning plots, that revealed unexpected insights into the characters.

WINNER: *Animal Instincts* by Nell Dixon (Little Black Dress)

Is it true love or just animal attraction? When Clodagh Martin's wild celebrity sister turns up drunk at Rainbow's End, Clodagh's animal sanctuary, announcing she is in trouble and staying, Clodagh's not exactly delighted. She has enough problems right now. Big property magnate, bad-lad Jack Thatcher has been showing a rather strong interest in Clodagh lately. But is it her or her assets he is after?

Nell Dixon was born and continues to live in the Midlands.

▪ Romantic Film of the Year 2010

Romance is a theme that moves easily from the printed page to film. In its anniversary year, the RNA has chosen to celebrate this shared love of romance by selecting the best romantic films released in the UK during 2009 adapted from published novels. This award was decided by a public vote.

WINNER: *An Education* by Lynn Barber (Penguin)

BBC Films. Starring Carey Mulligan & Peter Sarsgaard. The film scripted by Nick Hornby.

When journalist Lynn Barber was 16, she was picked up at a bus-stop by an attractive older man who drew up in his sports car – and her life was almost wrecked. A bright, confident girl, on course to go to Oxford, she began a relationship which, incredibly, was encouraged by her conventional, suburban parents and which took her into the louche, semi-criminal underworld of west London, just as the 60s began. Ruin beckoned, until one day she made an important discovery.

Lynn Barber lives in London.



- **Romantic Comedy Award 2010**

This award recognises the book where love and laughter go hand in hand. Nominations for the award were made by the RNA's team of readers, who were asked to score books on their comedy element, from the mildly amusing to side-splittingly funny.

WINNER: *The Nearly-Weds* by published by Jane Costello (Simon & Schuster)

Bride Zoe Moore is left blushing when she is jilted at the altar. Fleeing to America, Zoe becomes a nanny to sexy, moody, single dad Ryan's two adorable children. Slowly, Ryan and Zoe begin to fall in love. But when Zoe's ex-fiancé comes to find her, she is forced to make a difficult choice.

Jane Costello is a former journalist for newspapers including the Daily Mail and Liverpool Echo. She lives in Lancashire.

- **People's Choice of the Year 2010**

This award recognises key new or developing authors in the romantic genre. Expert romantic writing buyers were asked to select their favourite 5 for the shortlist. Readers of romantic fiction were then invited to read as many of the paperbacks as possible and vote for their favourite at the poll website www.lovereadings.co.uk.

WINNER: *Missing You* by Louise Douglas (Pan)

Haunted by guilt, Fen lives a compromised life, too afraid of the past to risk becoming close to anyone. She is constantly looking over her shoulder, knowing that one day the truth will catch up with her. A quiet developing friendship with Sean slowly helps her to trust again. But will the past tear them apart just as they find happiness?

Louise Douglas is a journalist and lives near Bristol.

- **The Harry Bowling Prize for New Writing, sponsored by Headline**

Awarded every two years, sponsored by Headline Publishing, and now for the first time included in the RNA Awards, this prize is given to the best first chapter and synopsis submitted by an author who has not yet had an adult novel published.

WINNER: *Fear No Evil* by Debbie Johnson

Private eye Scouser Jayne McCartney is deeply sceptical when a middle-aged couple asks her to investigate their daughter's murder by, according to them, a ghost. Reluctantly she takes on the case and decides to involve a local priest with, according to the Internet, relevant experience. He turns out to be an ex priest, part-time expert on all things paranormal and full-time Adonis. And his name is Dan Lennon. How could they not be the perfect team?

Debbie Johnson lives in Liverpool.

www.harrybowlingprize.com