



**The Royal Society
of Literature**

RSL Ondaatje Prize 2016: the shortlist

The **£10,000 RSL Ondaatje Prize** is awarded annually to a book of the highest literary merit – fiction, non-fiction or poetry – which best evokes the spirit of a place.

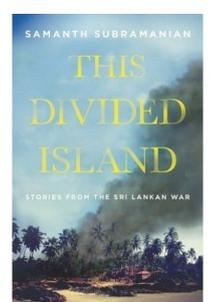
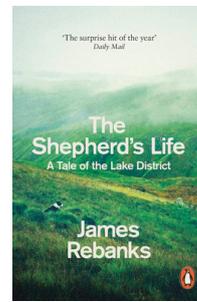
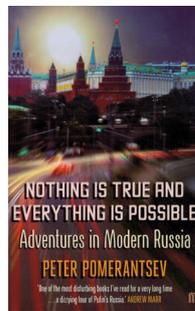
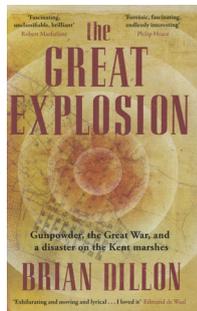
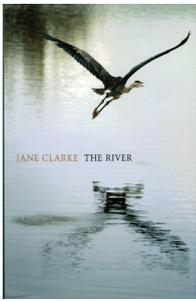
The judges, **Kate Adie, Moniza Alvi and Mark Lawson**, comment:

'The variety of fine entries across the genres made judging the RSL Ondaatje Prize an education, as well as an adventure in reading.'

2016 shortlist

Jane Clarke	<i>The River</i>	(Bloodaxe)
Brian Dillon	<i>The Great Explosion</i>	(Penguin Books)
Alexandra Harris	<i>Weatherland</i>	(Thames & Hudson)
Peter Pomerantsev	<i>Nothing is True and Everything is Possible</i>	(Faber)
James Rebanks	<i>The Shepherd's Life</i>	(Allen Lane)
Samanth Subramanian	<i>This Divided Island</i>	(Atlantic)

The winner will be announced on Monday 23 May 2016.



Jane Clarke, *The River* (Bloodaxe)

‘Quiet, lucid, subtle poems, nevertheless urgent in their presentation of a farming background in rural Ireland, and the poet’s enduring attachment to it.’ - Moniza Alvi.

Originally from a farm in the west of Ireland, **Jane Clarke** now lives in Co. Wicklow and combines writing with her work as a management consultant in not-for-profit organisations. She received the Listowel Writer’s Week Poetry Collection Prize in 2014 for her then unpublished first collection, *The River*, and also won the Trocaire/Poetry Ireland Competition (2014), Poems for Patience (2013), iYeats (2010) and Listowel Writers’ Week (2007).

Brian Dillon, *The Great Explosion:*

Gunpowder, the Great War, and a disaster on the Kent Marshes (Penguin Books)

‘In a strikingly unusual contribution to the literature marking the 100th anniversary of the Battle of the Somme, Dillon uses a 1916 fire at a munitions factory in Kent to explore the history of explosives and buried (sometimes literally so) aspects of British history and topography.’ - Mark Lawson.

Brian Dillon is the author of *In the Dark Room*, a memoir that won the Irish Book Award for Nonfiction 2005, and *Tormented Hope: Nine Hypochondriac Lives*, which was shortlisted for the Wellcome Trust Book Prize 2009. He teaches at the Royal College of Art.

Alexandra Harris, *Weatherland: Writers & Artists under English Skies* (Thames & Hudson)

‘Alexandra Harris’s book is scholarly, intimate, deft and witty, and in its cultural explorations through time, via the English weather, it makes an original contribution to the “spirit of place”.’ - Moniza Alvi

Alexandra Harris is a cultural historian and writer, who won the Guardian First Book Award and a Somerset Maugham Award for *Romantic Moderns*. She is a Senior Lecturer at the University of Liverpool, a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature and a New Generation Thinker on BBC Radio 3.

Peter Pomerantsev, *Nothing is True and Everything is Possible: Adventures in Modern Russia* (Faber)

‘A sort of anti-travelogue, making the reader desperately keen never to go near the places described: the Muscovite, Siberian, American and English haunts of those who became super-rich from the division of state assets and the new entrepreneurial possibilities that arose in post-Soviet Russia. Pomerantsev’s storytelling is funny, frightening, exhilarating.’ - Mark Lawson

Peter Pomerantsev is a contributor to the London Review of Books and his writing has been published in the *FT*, *New Yorker*, *El Pais*, *WSJ*, *Foreign Policy*, *Daily Beast*, *Newsweek*, *Le Monde Diplomatique*, among others. He has also worked as a consultant for the EU and World Bank. He lives in London.

James Rebanks, *The Shepherd’s Life: A Tale of the Lake District* (Allen Lane)

‘Compelling, authentic and absolutely unromanticised, *The Shepherd’s Life* illuminates an honorable tradition in a changing rural world and, in doing so, reveals little known aspects of a celebrated landscape.’ - Moniza Alvi

James Rebanks is the Herdwick Shepherd, whose account of shepherding has a strong following on Twitter. He is the latest in a long line of sheep farmers, that stretches back over 600 years in the Lake District. He holds a double first in History from the University of Oxford.

Samanth Subramanian, *This Divided Island: Stories from the Sri Lankan War* (Atlantic)

‘Set in an enchanting environment, an evocative dissection of the history of violence that seems entwined with the landscape and people of Sri Lanka.’ - Kate Adie

Samanth Subramanian studied journalism at Pennsylvania State University and international relations at Columbia University. He has written for the *Guardian*, the *New Yorker*, the *New York Times*, *Mint*, the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, *Foreign Policy*, *New Republic*, *Foreign Affairs*, *The National* and *The Hindu*. His first book was *Following Fish: Travels Around the Indian Coast* (2010).

Notes to editors

Now in its 13th year, **The RSL Ondaatje Prize** is an annual award of £10,000 for a distinguished work of fiction, non-fiction or poetry, evoking the spirit of a place. **The Royal Society of Literature**, founded by George IV in 1820, celebrates and nurtures all that is best in British literature, past and present. The RSL organises a programme of events; makes awards and grants to established and emerging writers with the **RSL Jerwood Awards** for first commissioned works of Non-Fiction and the **RSL Brookleaze Grants**. In addition to the **RSL Ondaatje Prize**, the RSL administers the **V.S. Pritchett Memorial Prize** for short stories, runs regular Masterclasses with the Booker Prize Foundation, and manages a Schools Outreach Programme.

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