



The Royal Society
of Literature

RSL 200



INTERNATIONAL
AUTHORS FORUM

PRESS RELEASE – 30 NOVEMBER 2020

IMAGES CAN BE DOWNLOADED [HERE](#)
BIOGRAPHIES CAN BE DOWNLOADED [HERE](#)
[Twitter](#) / [Facebook](#) / [Instagram](#) / [Website](#)

UNDER EMBARGO UNTIL 00.01 ON MONDAY 30 NOVEMBER

ROYAL SOCIETY OF LITERATURE CELEBRATES 200TH BIRTHDAY WITH 60 APPOINTMENTS AND FIVE-YEAR FESTIVAL



- NEW INITIATIVES CHAIRED BY **BERNARDINE EVARISTO** AND **DANIEL HAHN** TO CHAMPION UNDER-REPRESENTED VOICES AND CELEBRATE THE POWER OF LITERATURE TO TRANSCEND BORDERS
- **ANITA DESAI; KAZUO ISHIGURO; HILARY MANTEL; EDNA O'BRIEN; PHILIP PULLMAN AND COLIN THUBRON** ARE FIRST COMPANIONS OF LITERATURE TO BE ANNOUNCED SINCE 2012
- **ANDREA LEVY** AND **JEAN RHYS** HONOURED AS THEIR PENS JOIN THE RSL'S PERMANENT COLLECTION
- **5 NEW CELEBRATORY VIDEOS RELEASED TODAY** WITH **ADJOA ANDOH, NATALIE SIMPSON, SIMON CALLOW, JULIET STEVENSON, RICHARD ARMITAGE AND SULE RIMI** READING FROM THE PEN COLLECTION
- **DALJIT NAGRA** APPOINTED NEW CHAIR
- **9 NEW VICE-PRESIDENTS** INCLUDING **SIMON ARMITAGE, MARY BEARD, BERNARDINE EVARISTO, JACKIE KAY, BLAKE MORRISON, GRACE NICHOLS, ELIF SHAFAK, KAMILA SHAMSIE AND COLM TÓIBÍN**

- 29 NEW FELLOWS INCLUDING **RAYMOND ANTROBUS, DAMIAN BARR, MICHAEL PALIN, KATE MOSSE, JACK THORNE, KERRY HUDSON, ROGER ROBINSON, PETER FRANKOPAN, MAX PORTER, DIANA EVANS AND WINSOME PINNOCK**
- 15 HONORARY FELLOWS INCLUDING **URSULA OWEN, MELANIE ABRAHAMS, BARONESS LOLA YOUNG AND TOM SUTCLIFFE**
- **BOYD TONKIN AWARDED NEWLY DESIGNED BENSON MEDAL**

The Royal Society of Literature (RSL), the charity that represents the voice of literature in the UK, has today in celebration of its 200th birthday announced **RSL 200**, a five-year festival launched with a series of major new initiatives and 60 new appointments championing the great diversity of writing and writers in the UK. Two new pens have also been added to the RSL's collection for Roll Book signing, one from **Andrea Levy**, the first pen from a writer of colour and the other from **Jean Rhys**. To mark the additions five videos have been released featuring **Adjoa Andoh, Natalie Simpson, Simon Callow, Juliet Stevenson** and **Richard Armitage**.

Founded in 1820, the RSL acts as a voice for the value of literature, honouring and supporting emerging and established writers whilst creating a bridge between authors and audiences to engage as many people as possible with the breadth of UK literature.

RSL 200 will look to explore, interrogate and reimagine the UK's literary landscape as the RSL celebrates the best in British writing, past, present and future. Spanning a five-year period - encompassing defining bicentenary moments from the Society's early years, between its founding in 1820 and receipt of its Royal Charter and Roll Book in 1825 - the festival will examine how writers are remembered, as they address voices lost to history, left unrecognised and uncelebrated in their own time or subsequently. Through the festival we will continue to find new ways to share literature with the greatest number of people across the UK and beyond.

Dame Marina Warner, President of the RSL said: *'In the 200th year of the RSL, here and all over the world, literature – the attentive act of writing with imagination, with open eyes, with courage - is more crucial than ever. Exact, truthful expressiveness: this is a writer's home territory. As Virginia Woolf wrote, 'I am not concerned with the single life but with lives lived together.'* *In our mutual need today, in times of turmoil and illness, as 'truth decay' threatens and disinformation spreads, the writer's principal task of caring for every word, phrase, and image plays a crucial part in nourishing those lives lived together. The RSL Fellowship joins together many very different writers in many different genres in a common endeavour, as the inheritors and stewards of a long practice and innovators and pathfinders, archivists, storytellers, entertainers and scourges. Literature forms cultural memory, communicates diverse communities' experiences and heritage, counters loneliness and enables us to respond to suffering and survive. Writers have a paramount part to play in our collective and individual wellbeing. As we enter our third century, we at the RSL may be venerable but we are vigorous.'*

RSL 200 INITIATIVES

In its 200th year, the Society has set out plans both to celebrate excellence in the great diversity of outstanding writers and writing in the UK, and to pay credit to the power of literature to

bring us together with two new initiatives – **RSL Open** and **RSL International Writers Programme**.

Over the next two years **RSL Open** will elect an unprecedented 60 new Fellows from communities, backgrounds and experiences currently under-represented in UK literary culture, including writers of colour, LGBTQ+ writers, writers from lower socio-economic backgrounds, writers who identify as having a disability and writers outside of London, to ensure the diversity of the UK's literary culture is reflected in their Fellowship. Readers and writers from across the UK will be asked to recommend writers for nomination who will then be considered by a panel made up of some of the UK's most prolific writers. **Bernardine Evaristo** (also announced today as a new RSL Vice-President) will chair the panel, with **Jay Bernard, Vahni Capildeo, Ian Duhig, Cynan Jones, Val McDermid, Daljit Nagra** (also announced today as the new RSL Chair), **Nikesh Shukla, Ali Smith, Sinéad Morrissey, Jack Thorne** (also announced today as a new Fellow), **Colm Tóibín** (also announced today as a Vice-President) and **Eley Williams**. The new Fellows will be involved in all that the RSL do including judging prizes, outreach programmes and leading initiatives.

RSL International Writers programme will recognise the contribution of writers across the globe to literature in English, and the power of literature to transcend borders and cultures to bring people together. As with RSL Open, readers and writers will be asked to recommend writers outside the UK for nomination. **Daniel Hahn** (new RSL Fellow) will chair a panel of Fellows and Honorary Fellows including **Lisa Appignanesi, Syima Aslam, Max Porter, Sasha Dugdale** (new Fellow), **Philippe Sands** (new Fellow), **Sophie Collins and Elif Shafak** (new Vice-President). The panel will nominate the RSL International Writers, who will then be elected by Council.

Professor Bernardine Evaristo OBE FRSL said: *'It's so important to create new initiatives designed to help make our culture more inclusive for writers from under-represented communities. There are so many stories waiting to be told and I'm looking forward to discovering and nurturing the next generation of talented writers through this mentoring Award.'*

Daniel Hahn said: *'As a translator, it's hardly surprising that I should think of literature as operating on an international scale, as a vast and (ideally) borderless thing, a network in which the writers over here can be immeasurably enriched by the writers over there. So I'm proud to be working with the RSL on their new International Writers scheme, which each year will invite a distinguished panel of our UK Fellows to recognise and celebrate writers from around the world who have made an extraordinary contribution to the world's literature and to ours.'*

NEW PENS ADDED TO THE RSL COLLECTION

The RSL's collection features pens from some of the most historically influential UK writers including Charles Dickens, George Eliot, T.S. Eliot and Lord Byron. This year two new pens have been added, one from **Andrea Levy**, the first pen from a writer of colour and the other from **Jean Rhys**. They are the second and third women to join the collection. To honour the writers featured, RSL have released five new videos featuring **Adjoa Andoh** reading **Andrea Levy**, **Natalie Simpson** reading **Jean Rhys**, **Simon Callow** reading **Charles Dickens**, **Juliet Stevenson** reading **George Eliot**, **Richard Armitage** reading **Lord Byron** and **Sule Rimi** reading **T.S. Eliot**. The videos can be viewed and downloaded [here](#).

Bill Mayblin (Andrea's husband) said: *'Andrea always wrote her first drafts by hand and it would be nice to be able to say that she used this pen from that time onwards. But the truth is that to her mind it was too posh and valuable to be used for scribbling in her notebooks. She kept it neatly in its box on her work desk and took it out for certain tasks – signing books, writing special letters, birthday, Christmas and thank-you cards – for 'ceremonial purposes' you might say. Certainly as a gift from the world of literature it had a symbolic importance for her and she always used it with pride and treasured it as a possession. She would be thrilled to know that it will now continue its ceremonial role with the Royal Society of Literature.'*

NEW APPOINTMENTS

The RSL has today announced the election collectively of **60 new Fellows, Honorary Fellows, Benson Medallist, Vice-Presidents, Companions of Literature**. It was also announced that award-winning poet **Daljit Nagra**, a Fellow of the Society since 2017, has been appointed new Chair of the Council, taking over from Lisa Appignanesi, who has held the position since 2016.

Daljit Nagra, FRSL said: *'Becoming Chair of the RSL is the greatest professional honour of my life. I look forward to continuing our work in celebrating the diversity and wealth of classic and contemporary literature. As literature finds new readers and as authors from under-represented backgrounds continue to find a voice, the work of the RSL has never been more important in safeguarding literature's broadening contribution to our lives.'*

Lisa Appignanesi OBE FRSL said: *'From Shakespeare to Shamsie, from Milton to Mantel, from Eliot to Evaristo, literature has shown its deep and restorative value through these difficult times.'*

To mark the bicentenary of Britain's oldest literary institution, ever invigorated by its new and eminent Fellows, is to celebrate the many shaping ways in which 'Literature Matters'.

I have been proud to guide the RSL as its Chair since January 2016 and I am now pleased to turn this adventure over to the fine poet, Daljit Nagra, on the cusp of what will certainly prove to be a remarkable third century of activity by writers in constant collaboration with their readers.'

Anita Desai; Kazuo Ishiguro; Hilary Mantel; Edna O'Brien; Philip Pullman; Colin Thubron have today been made Companions of Literature, receiving the highest award bestowed by the RSL. They are the first writers to be elected since 2012, and the greatest number appointed at any time in the RSL's history. They will be announced later today. The Companions of Literature was inaugurated in 1961 and can only be held by up to 12 writers at any one time. The writers announced join: Sir Michael Holroyd; Sir Tom Stoppard; Michael Frayn; Margaret Atwood; Alice Munro.

Dame Hilary Mantel, FRSL, said: *'Over many years as a Fellow of the RSL, I have been proud to see a venerable and learned body evolve into a forward-looking organisation, ready to play a full part in our national conversation. I am deeply honoured to be appointed a Companion of Literature. It puts a writer in the most distinguished company, living and dead, and it recognises and validates a lifetime's work.'*

Simon Armitage; Mary Beard; Bernardine Evaristo; Jackie Kay; Blake Morrison; Grace Nichols; Elif Shafak; Kamila Shamsie; Colm Tóibín have today been appointed Vice-Presidents of the RSL. Becoming a Vice-President is a lifetime honour bestowed on RSL Fellows by the RSL Council which provides them with lifetime voting rights in the Fellowship elections. They are elected for their service to both the advancement of literature and to the Society. Current Vice-Presidents include: Anne Chisholm OBE; Maureen Duffy, Benson Medallist; Maggie Gee OBE; The Hon Victoria Glendinning CBE; Dame Hilary Mantel; Sir Philip Pullman CBE; Claire Tomalin; Jenny Uglow OBE, Benson Medallist.

Elif Shafak said: *'I feel a Fellowship of writers is so important and so necessary. At first glance it might appear a bit contradictory because writers are solitary creatures. We're used to working on our own, but that doesn't mean that we don't need solidarity, sisterhood, fellowship. We need to create open, democratic, egalitarian spaces, of diversity and inclusion, where every writer from every background, every race, culture and ethnicity and social class will be equally welcome, and will have an equal voice.'*

29 new Fellows have been announced. To be nominated, a writer must have published two works of outstanding literary merit, and nominations must be seconded by an RSL Fellow or Honorary Fellow. The following are announced today: **Raymond Antrobus** (*To Sweeten Bitter, The Perseverance*); **Chloe Aridjis** (*Book of Clouds, Sea Monsters*); **Damian Barr** (*You Will Be Safe Here, Maggie & Me*); **Cressida Connolly** (*After the Party, The Happiest Days*); **Susan Cooper** (*The Dark is Rising, the Boggart trilogy*); **Jill Dawson** (*The Language of Birds, Fred & Edie*); playwright **April De Angelis** (*Jumpy, A Laughing Matter*), poet and translator **Jane Draycott** (*The Night Tree, Over*), **Sasha Dugdale** (*Deformations*), **Yvette Edwards** (*A Cupboard Full of Coats, The Mother*), **Diana Evans** (*Ordinary People, The Wonder, 26a*), **Peter Frankopan** (*The Silk Roads, The First Crusade*), **Salena Godden** (*Fishing in the Aftermath*); **Colin Grant** (*Bageye at the Wheel*); **Kirsty Gunn** (*Caroline's Bikini*); **Daniel Hahn** (*The Oxford Companion to Children's Literature*); **Kerry Hudson** (*Tony Hogan Bought Me An Ice-cream Float Before He Stole My Ma*); **Andrew McMillan** (*Physical, Playtime*); **James Meek** (*Private Island*); **Kate Mosse** (the Languedoc Trilogy, *The Taxidermist's Daughter*); **Michael Palin** (*Hemingway's Chair, The Truth*), **Sandeep Parmar** (*The Marble Orchard, Eidolon*); **Winsome Pinnock** (*The Winds of Change, Leave Taking*); **Max Porter** (*Grief Is the Thing with Feathers*); **Sigrid Rausing** (*Mayhem*); **Roger Robinson** (*A Portable Paradise*); **Katherine Rundell** (*Rooftoppers, The Explorer*); **Philippe Sands QC** (*East West Street, The Ratline*); **Jack Thorne** (*Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*).

Sir Michael Palin said: *'Books have been, and still are, such a potent force in my life, that to be elected to Fellowship of a Society which has been celebrating books and authors for the last 200 years is an ultimate accolade, and a great and unexpected honour.'*

15 new Honorary Fellows, those who have made a significant contribution to the advancement of literature as publishers, agents, booksellers, librarians or producers have been elected in 2020. The new Honorary Fellows include: **Melanie Abrahams** FRSA, Creative Director of Renaissance One and Tilt and curator of CaribbeanFest and Black Arts World; **Linda Anderson**, Professor of English and American Literature at Newcastle University; BBC radio producer **Mair Bosworth**; **Tony Brown** who has worked for Islington Libraries since 1981 and co-founded the annual Islington Word Festival; **Kate Gavron** Chair of Carcanet Press and The Folio Society; Literary agent **David Godwin**; Chair of Virago Press **Lennie Goodings**; **Andrew Holgate**, literary editor of *The Sunday Times*; Poet and

Director of Young Identity **Shirley May**; **Ursula Owen** Founder and Director of Virago and Free Word; Award winning BBC journalist and founder and director of Bocas Lit Fest - the writer and reader development organisation in Trinidad and Tobago **Marina Salandy-Brown**; **Sarah Sanders**, co-founder of Speaking Volumes Live Literature Productions; broadcaster and writer **Tom Sutcliffe**; journalist, editor and critic **Boyd Tonkin**; Former actor, professor of Cultural Studies, and Head of Culture at the Greater London Authority, **Baroness Lola Young**.

Baroness Lola Young said: *'As increased book sales indicate, many people finding themselves isolated and stuck indoors during this really difficult period, found comfort in a good read. The RSL is devoted to the celebration of great writing. To be elected an Honorary Fellow at any time is a huge honour: to be appointed in the year of RSL's 200th anniversary feels extra special.'*

BENSON MEDAL

In honour of its 200th anniversary the RSL has today unveiled a new iteration of the Benson Medal, designed by Linda Crook. Founded in 1916 by scholar, author and RSL Fellow A.C. Benson, the Benson Medal honours service to literature across a whole career. This year the Benson Medal has been awarded to journalist, editor and critic Boyd Tonkin, who re-founded the Independent Foreign Fiction Prize in 2001 and acted as the Man Booker International Prize special advisor between 2016-2019. Previous recipients include Philip Larkin, J.R.R. Tolkien, Wole Soyinka, Diana Athill, Margaret Busby and Susheila Nasta.

Boyd Tonkin said: *'I'm delighted to become an Honorary Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature: a recognition that comes from writers themselves, and one I deeply appreciate. And I feel both thrilled and privileged to be named as this year's Benson Medallist by the Society. When I look at the list of recent medallists, I see many of the distinguished figures who have done most to shape and guide my own understanding of literature in all its many forms and voices. To join this company of giants is an enormous honour.'*

ENDS

For more information contact Maisie Lawrence and Kate Hassell at The Corner Shop PR
maisie@thecornershoppr.com / kate@thecornershoppr.com

NOTES TO EDITORS

The Royal Society of Literature (RSL)

Founded in 1820, the RSL is the UK's charity for the advancement of literature. We act as a voice for the value of literature, engage people in appreciating literature, and encourage and honour writers. <https://rsliterature.org/>

The Authors' Licensing and Collecting Society (ALCS) is a not-for-profit organisation started by writers for the benefit of all types of writers. Owned by its members, ALCS collects money due for secondary uses of writers' work. It is designed to support authors and their creativity, ensure they receive fair payment and see their rights are respected. It promotes and teaches the principles of copyright and campaigns for a fair deal. It represents over 110,000 members, and since 1977 has paid around £500 million to writers (<https://www.alcs.co.uk/>).

The **International Authors Forum** (IAF) represents authors from the text, screenwriting and visual arts sectors and their interests in copyright. Its members are over 70 organisations representing well over 700,000 authors worldwide. IAF campaigns for authors in a variety of areas including fair contracts, remuneration rights and copyright issues. (<https://www.internationalauthors.org/>)