



The Royal Society
of Literature

RSL Giles St Aubyn Awards for first commissioned works of non-fiction 2020 winners announced

This year's Awards were judged by **Damian Le Bas, Ramita Navai and Fiona St Aubyn.**



£10,000 – DOREEN CUNNINGHAM – *SOUNDINGS: A*

JOURNEY WITH WHALES (Virago, 2022) is a memoir about a mother and child following the grey whales from Mexico to the Arctic. It is also a journey to the heart of climate change and a story of reclaiming a life from sudden poverty and isolation. **Damian Le Bas** says the book 'blends nature writing of the most urgent kind with precise and poetic observation of human tribulation and the interconnectedness of all things. This will be fresh, brave and unique.'

Doreen Cunningham worked in climate-related research before becoming a journalist. In 2013 she and her toddler followed the grey whale migration by public transport, from the Mexican birthing lagoons to the Arctic feeding grounds, and back to the family and culture she'd fallen in love with.

Doreen says 'I am overjoyed and blown away. The Award will help me so much practically. I can focus on writing my book! Whales have carried human culture on their backs throughout our shared history, they can inspire resilience and community during this time of climate emergency.'



£5,000 – ALICE SHERWOOD – *THE AUTHENTICITY*

PLAYBOOK (Harper Collins, 2022) examines authenticity and explores how fakery and deceit have become some of the most resonant elements in modern discourse. Alice introduces the world's greatest imposter, nature's impeccable mimics, a wartime forger who fooled a nation into rewriting its history and the artist who encouraged people to forge his pictures. For **Fiona St Aubyn**, the book 'is both thought-provoking and highly entertaining, with extraordinary and intriguing anecdotes that skilfully illustrate why we are susceptible to fakery and fraud in our own world, and how mimicry is played out in the natural world.' **Alice Sherwood** has worked in TV as a documentary producer and as Head of Audience for the BBC's Digital Curriculum. She is

currently a Senior Visiting Research Fellow at the Policy Institute at King's College London. Alice says 'I'm completely thrilled and very honoured to be given this Award. The imprimatur of the RSL means a great deal to me, and I thank the judges for it, and for supporting new writers in this way.'

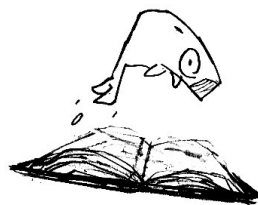


£2,500 – DANNY LAVELLE – *DOWN AND OUT: A JOURNEY*

THROUGH HOMELESSNESS (Wildfire, 2022) a state-of-the-nation book, assessing the significance of modern homelessness, its precursors and causes, and the ways society might reduce and one day bring it to an end to it by changing our practices and our attitudes. **Ramita Navai** said this book is 'a moving, compassionate treatise on poverty and inequality told through captivating stories.' **Danny Lavelle** spent 18 months homeless before graduating from Goldsmiths, University of London with an MA in Journalism. He works as a freelance feature writer and has covered topics such as mental health, homelessness, and culture. Danny says 'writing a book for the first time has been daunting. Winning this Award makes me feel confident that I can write a good book. I'm thrilled and immensely grateful.'

Notes to Editors

We celebrate the 2020 Awards with three specially commissioned animated films, by Josh Saunders, featuring the judges and winners that will be available to watch on the [RSL's YouTube Channel](#) on Thursday 3 December, 2pm.



'It's a great honour to be part of judging these Awards, exciting to recognise talent and joyous to tell writers of their win and pave the way to make their book even better.' – **Fiona St Aubyn**

History of the Prize

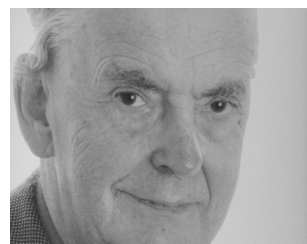
In 2017, the Royal Society of Literature established the annual RSL Giles St Aubyn Awards for first-time writers of non-fiction – in perpetuity – thanks to a significant bequest from author and RSL Fellow **Giles St Aubyn**. We are delighted in 2020, the RSL's 200th birthday year, we are able to offer three cash Awards. These Awards build on the RSL's experience of a previous set of non-fiction awards, generously supported by **Jerwood Charitable Foundation** from 2004 to 2016.

The Hon. Giles Rowan St Aubyn LVO FRSL

(1925–2015) was the author of 14 works of non-fiction, on subjects including Lord Macaulay, Edward VII, Queen Victoria, religion, science and 19th century poisoners.

He was elected a Fellow in 1964. In leaving his bequest to the RSL, Giles St Aubyn wrote:

'I wish to help aspiring authors to get their works published, particularly authors of works of non-fiction which require a good deal of preliminary research. The sort of authors I have in mind would be those who have not already been published and who are struggling to get their feet on the first rung of the ladder.'



Previous Winners of the RSL Giles St Aubyn Awards

2019

£10,000 – HARRY DAVIES – *Operation Information* (The Bodley Head, 2021)

£5,000 – OLIVE HEFFERNAN – *The High Seas* (Profile Books, 2021)

Judges' Special Commendation – REBECCA FOGG – *Beautiful Trauma* (Granta, 2022)

2018

£10,000 – LAURENCE BLAIR – *Lost Countries of South America* (The Bodley Head, 2020)

£5,000 – LILY LE BRUN – *Looking to Sea* (Hodder and Stoughton, 2020)

Judges' Special Commendation – PAUL CRADDOCK – *Dragon in a Suitcase* (Fig Tree, 2020)

2017

£10,000 – DAVID FARRIER – *Footprints: In Search of Future Fossils* (4th Estate, 2019)

£5,000 – LISA WOOLLETT – *Rag and Bone* (John Murray, 2019)

Judges' Special Commendation – JOANNA JOLLY – *Red River Girl* (Virago, 2019)

Founded in 1820, the **Royal Society of Literature** is the UK's charity for the advancement of literature. In addition to the RSL Giles St Aubyn Awards, the RSL awards annually the RSL Christopher Bland Prize for debut writers over 50, the RSL Ondaatje Prize for books best evoking the spirit of a place, the Encore Award for best second novel of the year, the V.S. Pritchett Short Story Prize and the RSL Literature Matters Awards to reward and enable literary innovation.

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