



The Royal Society  
of Literature

Literature  
Matters

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## 2021 RSL LITERATURE MATTERS AWARDS ANNOUNCED



The Royal Society of Literature (RSL), the voice for the value of literature in the UK, has today announced the winners of the 2021 RSL Literature Matters Awards. The Awards aim to enable literary excellence and innovation, providing writers with financial support to undertake new literary projects that extend the reach of literature.

Seven projects from writers working across forms have been chosen by judges **Adjoa Andoh**, **Hannah Berry** and **Ian McMillan**. The judges commented: 'We were blown away by the level of industry and ambition on display. Creativity endures – there is so much still to be said and done, and no virus can stem the tide.'

**The 2021 RSL Literature Matters Awards winners:**

<b>Saleh Addonia</b>	<b>£2000</b>	<b>The Feeling House</b> Short story collection focusing on time, remembering, and forgetting, exile and alienation and hearing.
<b>Sawad Hussain</b>	<b>£3500</b>	<b>Bila Hudood: Arabic Literature Everywhere</b> An online literary festival showcasing Arabic literature.
<b>Carolyn Jess-Cooke</b>	<b>£2800</b>	<b>The Stay-At-Home! Literary Festival</b> A virtual literary festival dedicated to developing writers and readers.
<b>Axe Marnie</b>	<b>£1990</b>	<b>Fisher Cats of Newhaven</b> A children's comic, set in the historic fishing town of Newhaven in the mid-19th century recasting the fishing community as cats.

<b>Richard O'Neill</b>	<b>£2500</b>	<b>Bridges to Literature</b> Connecting Roma Gypsy pupils to literature through their cultural and oral history.
<b>Anita Sethi</b>	<b>£3600</b>	<b>I Belong Here - Northern Nature Writers Network &amp; Workshops</b> For northern writers from BAME and low-income backgrounds.
<b>Elsbeth Wilson</b>	<b>£3610</b>	<b>Un/Natural</b> Accessible workshops for D/deaf, disabled, and neurodiverse writers on nature writing.

First awarded in 2018, the RSL Literature Matters Awards aim to enable literary excellence and innovation, providing writers with financial support to undertake new literary projects that extend the reach of literature. Previous recipients of the Awards have included **Pascale Petit, Michael Caines, Kate Clanchy, Alycia Pirmohamed, Will Eaves, Charlotte Ansell** and **Janett Plummer**.

The RSL Literature Matters Awards are one of nine annual awards and prizes presented by the RSL which bring the widest possible community of writers and readers together in celebration of the breadth of UK literature. From debut works and unpublished short stories through to the notoriously challenging second novel and outstanding contributions to literature, the RSL's awards and prizes celebrate the value of the written word in all its forms, whilst supporting emerging and established writers at some of the most challenging moments of their careers. The RSL's other annual awards and prizes are: **Sky Arts RSL Writers Awards, RSL International Writers awards, RSL Ondaatje Prize, Encore Award, RSL Christopher Bland Prize, RSL Giles St Aubyn Awards for Non-Fiction, the V.S. Pritchett Short Story Prize** and **The Benson Medal**.

**For press enquiries relating to the RSL Literature Matters Awards  
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## Notes to Editors

### The Royal Society of Literature (RSL)

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. <https://rsliterature.org/>

Now in their fourth year, the **RSL Literature Matters Awards** aim to reward and enable literary excellence and innovation. The Awards provide individual writers or other literary creators, financial support to undertake a literary project. Priority is given to proposals which will help connect with audiences or topics outside the usual reach of literature, and/or will help generate public discussion about why literature matters. These Awards are made possible by the generous donations and legacies of RSL Fellows, and by the support of our Literature Matters Supporters' Circle.

### 2021 RSL Literature Matters Awards winners

**(£2000) – The Feeling House** will be a collection of short stories, focusing on time, remembering, and forgetting, exile and alienation, loss of home and hearing. **Saleh Addonia** is half Eritrean/Ethiopian, he lost his hearing at 11 and moved to UK as a refugee. He writes short stories and has published his first collection in Italy, titled: *She is Another Country*, translated from English to Italian by Nausikaa

Angelotti and published by Edizioni Casagrande.

'Writing this collection will be a chance to show other refugees in Britain who are living in another language that literature can be a vehicle for change.' – Saleh Addonia

'This is a vital project illuminating the realities of human beings on the move across this restless planet.' – Ian McMillan, Judge

**(£3500) – Bila Hudood: Arabic Literature Everywhere** is a free online literary festival which will showcase Arabic literature: that which is already in translation, and that which needs to be in English. The focus isn't only on the Middle East, but also on countries from Africa whose narratives aren't as feted in the Arab publishing sphere. **Sawad Hussain** is an award-winning Arabic translator and litterateur who is passionate about bringing narratives from the African continent to wider audiences.

'I am tremendously humbled to have won an RSL Literature Matters Award, which I feel I am accepting on behalf of the Arabic literary translator community. It's validation for me that even the judges feel that everyone needs to know more about Arabic literature.' – Sawad Hussain

'This project, with its focus on bibliodiversity, is a timely resistance and much-needed antidote to these increasingly insular and inward-looking times.' – Hannah Berry, Judge

**(£2800) – The Stay-At-Home! Literary Festival** is a virtual literary festival dedicated to developing writers and readers, and to improving accessibility, diversity, and inclusivity in live literature. **Carolyn Jess-Cooke** is a poet and novelist published in 23 languages. She is also the founder and Director of the Stay-At-Home! Literary Festival.

'To win a RSL Literature Matters Award shows a vote of confidence from a literary organisation of prestige. It is very encouraging to have our work recognised, and most importantly it enables us to make this years' SAHLF the best it can be.' – Carolyn Jess-Cooke

'As things begin to return to normality and physical events once again replace the digital, we must not sacrifice the access that has been afforded to so many who would or could not otherwise attend these events, and I'm keen to support this superb festival which neatly sidesteps exclusivity, inviting and encouraging both guests and audiences outside of the usual literary festival crowd.' – Hannah Berry, Judge

**(£1990) Fisher Cats of Newhaven** is a children's comic, set in the historic fishing town of Newhaven in the mid-19th century, recasting the fishing community as a cast of cats. Focused on the village harbour, school, and summer gala in watercolour, ink and riso print, comics provide a path to representing a history preserved in visuals accessible to all ages. **Axe Marnie** is a queer Scottish cartoonist, poet, and cofounder of Two Rats Press. They have self-published short comics, zines and a webcomic and was awarded a MICE micro grant in 2020. Their work is distributed in the US by Radiator Comics.

'I'm so thankful that this incredible Award will let me bring to life my story of cats and lighthouses and bring the history of my fishing village to children's literature.' – Axe Marnie

'This is a fine example of the comic as community art, as profound and place-based storytelling, as a new way of seeing a location by making it familiar and unfamiliar at the same time.' – Ian McMillan, Judge

**(£2500) Bridges to Literature** is a project which connects Roma Gypsy pupils to literature through their cultural and oral history allowing them to identify GRT characters and the untold stories behind that representation inspiring them to create new and empowering narratives. **Richard O'Neill** is an award-winning storyteller, author, and workshop leader, delivering sessions for schools, libraries, festivals, universities, and theatres. He is a recipient of National Literacy Hero and Beacon Leadership Awards for community development and inclusion.

'I am delighted to win this Award for our students and teachers; it strengthens the links between underrepresented communities. The RSL is showing our students that literature is for everyone whatever your background and that everyone can contribute to it and benefit from it.' – Richard O'Neill

'We look forward to the stories shared and the ongoing work created as the workshops are chronicled in written and filmed.' – Adjoa Andoh, Judge

**(£3600) I Belong Here - Northern Nature Writers Network & Workshops** is a series of Nature Writing Workshops for northern writers from BAME and low-income backgrounds. Workshops will be held virtually and physically when possible, through 'walk-shops' in the great outdoors, exploring place, writing, and belonging and culminate in a series of readings and podcast. **Anita Sethi's** book *I Belong Here: A Journey Along the Backbone of Britain* (Bloomsbury, 29 April 2021) is the first in her nature writing trilogy. She has contributed to anthologies including *Common People* and *Women on Nature* and written for several publications including the *Guardian*, *Observer*, *i*, *Sunday Times*, *Vogue*, and *BBC Wildlife*. She has been shortlisted for Northern Writer of the Year at the Northern Soul Awards and has judged the British Book Awards and Society of Author Awards.

'As a nature writer from a northern, BAME working-class background, I'm delighted to get the chance to combine these audiences which are beyond the usual literary sphere. My RSL Literature Matters Award will help to break down financial, regional and racial barriers to what can seem like an exclusive genre of writing.' – Anita Sethi

'Anita reflects that in the UK Nature writing is still overwhelmingly a monocultural literary field yet 2020 has shown more than ever why nature matters to all of us, crucial for wellbeing and a sense of belonging.' – Adjoa Andoh, Judge

**(£3610) Un/Natural** is a series of free, accessible workshops for D/deaf, disabled, and neurodiverse writers on nature writing. **Elsbeth Wilson** is a writer and poet. She has been shortlisted for Canongate's Nan Shepherd Prize and Penguin's Write Now editorial programme and is currently working on her first book.

'There are still far too few opportunities for D/deaf, disabled and neurodiverse writers across literature and publishing, including in nature writing. Winning an RSL Literature Matters Award means that there will be a safe space specifically for us to explore writing in an area which has historically prioritised non-disabled voices.' – Elspeth Wilson

'Elsbeth's project rightly expands the conversation highlighted by the pandemic of just how precious nature is to the wellbeing and connectedness of all of us. We look forward to what the work brings.' – Adjoa Andoh, Judge