



**PRESS RELEASE – 27 April 2021**  
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## SHORTLIST ANNOUNCED FOR RSL ONDAATJE PRIZE 2021



The Royal Society of Literature (RSL), the voice for the value of literature in the UK, has today revealed the shortlist for the 2021 RSL Ondaatje Prize. An annual prize of £10,000, the RSL Ondaatje Prize is awarded to an outstanding work of fiction, non-fiction or poetry that best evokes the spirit of a place.

Six authors, out of the initial longlist of thirteen, have been selected by judges **Lola, Baroness Young of Hornsey** (chair), **Helen Mort** and **Adam Rutherford**, to form this year's shortlist.

### The 2021 RSL Ondaatje Shortlist is:

Ruth Gilligan	<i>The Butchers</i>	(Atlantic Books)
Louise Hare	<i>This Lovely City</i>	(HQ)
Adam Mars-Jones	<i>Box Hill</i>	(Fitzcarraldo Editions)
Nina Mingya Powles	<i>Magnolia, 木蘭</i>	(Nine Arches Press)
James Rebanks	<i>English Pastoral</i>	(Allen Lane)
Francesca Wade	<i>Square Haunting</i>	(Faber & Faber)

**Ruth Gilligan** is an Irish novelist and journalist and lectures at the University of Birmingham. She has written four novels, including the Irish bestsellers *Forget* and *Nine Folds Make a Paper Swan*, and she writes and reviews for the *Irish Times*, the *Irish Independent*, *TLS* and the *Guardian*

**Louise Hare** is a London-based writer and has an MA in Creative Writing from Birkbeck, University of London. Originally from Warrington, the capital is the inspiration for much of her work, including *This Lovely City*, which began life after a trip into the deep level shelter below Clapham Common.

**Adam Mars-Jones'** first collection of stories, *Lantern Lecture*, won a Somerset Maugham Award in 1982, and he appeared on *Granta's* Best of Young British Novelists' lists in 1983 and 1993. His debut novel, *The Waters of Thirst*, was published in 1993 by Faber & Faber. He has since published several books including *Box Hill* and the forthcoming *Batlava Lake*, publishing June 2021, both with Fitzcarraldo Editions. He writes book reviews for the *Observer* and the *LRB*, and about film for the *TLS*.

**Nina Mingya Powles** is the author of poetry pamphlets *Luminescent* and *Girls of the Drift* from Seraph Press and of a food memoir, *Tiny Moons: A Year of Eating in Shanghai* from The Emma Press. She was a winner of the Women Poets' Prize in 2018, and the Nan Shepherd Prize for Nature Writing in 2019. She is founding editor of Bitter Melon 苦瓜.

**James Rebanks** is a farmer based in the Lake District, where his family have lived and worked for over six hundred years. His No.1 bestselling debut, *The Shepherd's Life*, won the Lake District Book of the Year, was shortlisted for the Wainwright, and RSL Ondaatje prizes, and has been translated into sixteen languages.

**Francesca Wade** has written for publications including the *London Review of Books*, *Times Literary Supplement*, *Frieze* and *Prospect*. She is outgoing editor of the *White Review* and a recipient of a Robert B Silvers Grant for Work in Progress and a 2020–21 Fellowship at the Leon Levy Center for Biography. Her first book, *Square Haunting*, was a Sunday Times Literary Non-Fiction Book of the Year, a Guardian Best Book of the Year (As Chosen by Authors), and was longlisted for the Baille Gifford Prize.

This year the RSL Ondaatje Prize and listed works take on perhaps an even greater significance, given the context of the past 12 months, during which we have remained at home, unable to travel to new places or return to the locations that hold a particular meaning for us.

First awarded in 2004, the premise and broad remit of the Prize is to create unique lists of outstanding works and authors that you would not usually find sitting side by side. Previous recipients of the Prize have included **Roger Robinson**, **Aida Edemariam**, **Pascale Petit**, **Francis Spufford**, **Alan Johnson**, **Edmund de Waal**, **Hisham Matar** and **Louisa Waugh**.

The RSL Ondaatje Prize is 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**, **Encore Award**, **RSL Christopher Bland Prize**, **RSL Giles St Aubyn Awards for Non-Fiction**, **RSL Literature Matters Awards**, the **V.S. Pritchett Short Story Prize** and **The Benson Medal**.

**The winner of the 2021 RSL Ondaatje Prize will be announced on Tuesday 11 May.**

**For further information and press enquiries relating to the RSL Ondaatje Prize please contact Kate Hassell at Bread and Butter PR  
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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/>

The RSL Ondaatje Prize is an annual award of £10,000 for a distinguished work of fiction, non-fiction or poetry, best evoking the spirit of a place. The RSL is grateful to Sir Christopher Ondaatje for founding and sponsoring the Prize.

### **Past Winners**

2020	Roger Robinson	<i>A Portable Paradise</i>
2019	Aida Edemariam	<i>The Wife's Tale: A Personal History</i>
2018	Pascale Petit	<i>Mama Amazonica</i>
2017	Francis Spufford	<i>Golden Hill</i>
2016	Peter Pomerantsev	<i>Nothing Is True and Everything Is Possible: The Surreal Heart of the New Russia</i>
2015	Justin Marozzi	<i>Baghdad: City of Peace, City of Blood</i>
2014	Alan Johnson	<i>This Boy: A Memoir of Childhood</i>
2013	Philip Hensher	<i>Scenes from Early Life</i>
2012	Rahul Bhattacharya	<i>The Sly Company of People Who Care</i>
2011	Edmund de Waal	<i>The Hare with Amber Eyes</i>
2010	Ian Thomson	<i>The Dead Yard: Tales of Modern Jamaica</i>
2009	Adam Nicolson	<i>Sissinghurst: An Unfinished History</i>
2008	Graham Robb	<i>The Discovery of France</i>
2007	Hisham Matar	<i>In the Country of Men</i>
2006	James Meek	<i>The People's Act of Love</i>
2005	Rory Stewart	<i>The Places In Between</i>
2004	Louisa Waugh	<i>Hearing Birds Fly</i>