



## PRESS RELEASE

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## RSL CHRISTOPHER BLAND PRIZE SHORTLIST ANNOUNCED



The Royal Society of Literature (RSL), the voice for the value of literature in the UK, has today unveiled the shortlist for the 2021 RSL Christopher Bland Prize.

Now in its third year, the Prize is an annual award of £10,000 celebrating outstanding achievements for a debut novelist or non-fiction writer first published aged 50 or over. This year's judges are **Mary Beard** (Chair), **Monica Ali**, **Georgia Byng** and **Ben Hunte**.

The six shortlisted novels are:

- Rosanna Amaka *The Book of Echoes* (Doubleday)
- Richard Atkinson *Mr Atkinson's Rum Contract* (4th Estate)
- Michael Cashman *One of Them* (Bloomsbury Publishing)
- Louise Fein *People Like Us* (Head of Zeus)
- Pete Paphides *Broken Greek* (Quercus Non-Fiction)
- Marina Wheeler *The Lost Homestead* (Hodder & Stoughton)

## The judges commented

'*The Book of Echoes* feels like a letter to the African diaspora; people who have experienced so much while trying to find their place in the world. It is hauntingly dark, but laced with hope and determination. The vivid imagery used in the book forced me to examine my family's hidden past, before leaving me questioning my present and my future.'

Ben Hunte

'*Mr Atkinson's Rum Contract* is an epic tale of war, commerce and slavery, bound up in an intimate story of the rise and fall of the author's ancestors. It is a towering achievement, founded on painstaking research, written with elegance and élan, salted with humour and shot-through with intelligent warmth and compassion.'

Monica Ali

'*One of Them* is a riveting memoir of growing up in the impoverished East End and becoming an actor, and then a Lord. But it's so much more than that. Cashman illuminates the worlds through which he moves with a tender yet unsparing gaze, and his journey as a gay man - with all its difficulties and joys - furnishes the reader with a lively and thought-provoking history of post-war Britain.'

Monica Ali

'*People Like Us* is an impressive and brilliantly-imagined page-turner that has us inhabit a girl's Nazi-indoctrinated mind. A wonderful teenage love story too between that girl, Hetty, and Walter, a Jewish boy, reminding us of the horrors of fascism, racism, sexism and genocide, of how easily truth can be hidden by lies, but of love and hope as well. "We all have a choice. We choose how we treat each other", Walter's voice echoes.'

Georgia Byng

'*Broken Greek* is an original, wry and radical memoir, tracing Paphides's life against the music that formed its backing track, from Abba to Dexys Midnight Runners. It takes the reader to the complicated heart of popular music and its paradoxes -- it's a book about sound that starts from the silence of Paphides himself, who as a child refused to speak for almost four years.'

Mary Beard

'*The Lost Homestead* is a memoir of Wheeler's mother and her family, which turns out to be so much more than that. Tautly written (there is no gush here!), it takes the reader into the contested history of India and Pakistan in the 1940s, and explores the impact of partition and division (from the Punjab to Berlin) on the lives of individuals.'

Mary Beard

**Raynor Winn** won the Prize in its inaugural year for *The Salt Path* and last year's winner was **Michele Kirsch** with her memoir *Clean*.

The RSL Christopher Bland 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, **RSL Ondaatje Prize**, **Encore Award**,

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

**The 2021 RSL Christopher Bland Prize winner will be announced on Thursday 3 June.**

**Ends/**

**For further information and press enquiries relating to the RSL Christopher Bland Prize please contact Clair Chamberlain 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 Christopher Bland Prize is an annual award of £10,000 to a debut novelist or non-fiction writer first published aged 50 or over. The Prize was launched in 2018 by the Bland family and friends, with the RSL, in memory of Sir Christopher Bland who died in 2017.

### **RSL Christopher Bland Prize 2021 Shortlisted Author Bios**

**Rosanna Amaka** was born to African and Caribbean parents. She began writing *The Book of Echoes* twenty years ago to give voice to the Brixton community in which she grew up. Rosanna Amaka lives in South London. This is her first novel. Meet her at @RosannaAmaka

**Richard Atkinson** is a book publisher. He lives in London but holds a deep-rooted affection for the north of England, the land of his ancestors.

Actor, campaigner, and politician **Michael Cashman** CBE was born in East London. The co-founder of Stonewall, he was an MEP for fifteen years and the UK's first envoy on LGBT issues. He was awarded Stonewall Politician of the Year and a Lifetime Achievement Award from the European Diversity Awards and became a peer in 2014. He lives in East London.

**Louise Fein** holds an MA in Creative Writing from St Mary's University. Prior to studying for her master's, she ran a commodity consultancy business following a career in banking and law. She lives in Surrey with her family. Her debut novel, *People Like Us*, was inspired by her family history, and by the alarming parallels she sees between the early 30s and today. A theme that is present throughout her books.

**Pete Paphides** started his career in music journalism at *Melody Maker* before going on to write for *Time Out*, *the Guardian*, *Mojo*, *Q*, *Observer Music Monthly*, *Uncut*, *Record Collector* and *The Times*, where he spent five years as their Chief Rock Critic. He is married to the writer and journalist Caitlin Moran. *Broken Greek* is his first book.

**Marina Wheeler** is an Anglo-Indian, London-based barrister specialising in constitutional and human rights law. She was made Queen's Counsel in 2016 and also teaches mediation and conflict resolution, part-time. She writes regularly for the UK Human Rights Blog as well as national newspapers, usually on legal subjects.