

WEDNESDAY 8 DECEMBER 2021



**RSL Giles St Aubyn Awards
for first commissioned works of non-fiction
2021 winners announced**

This year's Awards were judged by **Gwen Adshead, Fiona Boyle and Clive Myrie.**



£10,000 – TOMIWA OWOLADE – *This is Not America* (Atlantic Books, 2022) seeks to interrogate the many discussions about diversity that have arisen since the murder of George Floyd and the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement. It injects nuance and understanding and argues against the homogenisation of the Black experience across the world. **Gwen Adshead** says 'this powerful book appealed strongly to all of the judges; for the calm clarity of its voice, and its call to a nuanced and complex conversation about the diversity of Black identity in Britain today. The book's premise will draw on evidence that the American experience of race may not be true for Britain, and that if we want to challenge racism and bigotry, we must do so using the best quality arguments about the truth of experience. Owolade's book will stimulate argument and

reflection in the best sense and has the potential to change minds for the better, increasing respect and dignity for all.' **Tomiwa Owolade** is a writer and critic. He has written columns, essays and book reviews for many publications, including *The Times*, *The Sunday Times* and *The Financial Times*. He is a contributing editor at *UnHerd*. On receiving the Award, Tomiwa says 'I am absolutely delighted and frankly stunned to have won the RSL Giles St Aubyn Award. I have never written a book before, and winning this prize is fantastic encouragement for completing *This is Not America*. I have wanted to be a writer since I was 13: if I wasn't doing so professionally, I would still be writing. So, to be recognised in this way for doing something I love is wonderful. I am incredibly thankful to the judges for valuing the book I am working on.'



£5,000 – TOM IRELAND – *The Good Virus* (Hodder & Stoughton, 2022) will be the first trade book to tell the full story of bacteriophages (known as 'phages'), the most under-appreciated yet abundant life form on our planet. It will show how mysterious phages in fact play a crucial role in our lives, our health and the health of our planet. **Clive Myrie** says Ireland's work 'has the makings of a fascinating and revelatory book. Well written and full of intrigue, *The Good Virus* is timely as fears grow over antibiotic resistance. What can the West now learn from the common practice in the Soviet Union of using viruses to infect and kill bacteria, and why wasn't this an accepted method of treatment in the West? Hopefully the RSL Giles St Aubyn Award will help Tom do a little more digging to complete what will be a fine work of non-fiction.' **Tom Ireland** is an award-winning

magazine editor and freelance science journalist, specialising in the science of life. Tom says 'Receiving an RSL Giles St Aubyn award is a huge honour and, as my deadline approaches in the new year, will provide a huge boost to my project. Like most first-time authors, I am juggling my research and writing around a full-time job. The Awards are a fantastic initiative - as I understand it, there are very few book prizes for as-yet unpublished works, so I'm grateful that Giles St Aubyn and the RSL have identified how useful support at this stage can be. The prize money will help fund invaluable additional dedicated days in each week to research,

write and finesse the book and to complete the extensive intercontinental research this fascinating and important subject deserves.'



£2,500 – DAVID VEEVERS – *A New History of the World at the Dawn of British Expansion* (Penguin Random House / Ebury, 2022) is an ambitious new world history of the early modern period that challenges the Victorian myth of the ubiquity of the British Empire and explores the diversity of the world at that time. For **Fiona Boyle** '*A New History of the World at the Dawn of British Expansion* not only gives a timely and empowering voice to indigenous populations before colonisation but is also a compelling read.' **David Veevers** is a historian at Queen Mary, University of London. He teaches and writes on the British Empire and Global History more widely. His first book, *The Origins of the British Empire in Asia, 1600-1750*, was published in 2020 by Cambridge University Press. David says 'the RSL Giles St Aubyn Award is a thrilling achievement which allows me to undertake critical outstanding research for the completion of my book. It's not easy writing a global history of three centuries any time, but during a pandemic with travel restrictions it has been almost impossible! This Award will fund a research trip to the United States allowing me to draw on archival material that will enrich the final chapters of my manuscript. It's also a wonderful validation of a work in progress that few people have yet had the opportunity to read. It's delightful to hear that the panel of judges enjoyed the writing and the core theme of the book: empowering the agency and voices of non-European actors in a crucial period of world history that is too often told from the perspective of dominant colonial voices.'

Notes to Editors

We celebrate the 2021 Awards with three specially commissioned animated films by Josh Saunders, featuring recordings of the judges informing the winners of their Awards for the first time. All three will be available to watch on the RSL's YouTube Channel on Wednesday 8 December, 8am.

'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 Boyle, *Giles St Aubyn's niece and Awards judge***

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 were delighted to introduce a third award of £2,500 in 2020 for the RSL's 200th birthday. 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

2020

- £10,000 – DOREEN CUNNINGHAM** – Soundings: A Journey in the Company of Whales (Virago, 2022)
£5,000 – ALICE SHERWOOD – Authenticity: Reclaiming Reality in a Counterfeit Culture (Harper Collins, 2022)
£2,500 – DANNY LAVELLE – Down and Out: A Journey through Homelessness (Wildfire, 2022)

2019

- £10,000 – HARRY DAVIES** – Operation Information (The Bodley Head)
£5,000 – OLIVE HEFFERNAN – The High Seas (Profile Books, 2023)
Judges' Special Commendation – REBECCA FOGG – Beautiful Trauma (Granta, 2022)

2018

- £10,000 – LAURENCE BLAIR** – Lost Countries of South America (The Bodley Head)
£5,000 – LILY LE BRUN – Looking to Sea (Hodder and Stoughton, 2022)
Judges' Special Commendation – PAUL CRADDOCK – Dragon in a Suitcase (Fig Tree, 2021)

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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