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LEA YPI ANNOUNCED AS WINNER OF THE 2022 RSL ONDAATJE PRIZE FOR *FREE*



The Royal Society of Literature (RSL), the voice for the value of literature in the UK, has this evening announced **Lea Ypi** as the winner of the 2022 RSL Ondaatje Prize for *Free* (Allen Lane, 2022), an engrossing coming of age memoir set amid political upheaval. An annual prize of £10,000, the RSL Ondaatje Prize is awarded by the RSL to an outstanding work of fiction, non-fiction or poetry that best evokes the spirit of a place.

Lea Ypi was announced as the winner of the prestigious prize by RSL President Emeritus **Colin Thubron** – who was involved with the Prize from its very beginnings – on behalf of the Prize founder and funder, Sir Christopher Ondaatje. The winner was announced at an event on Wednesday evening held at Two Temple Place.

Lea Ypi said: *“This started as a book about concepts and so it is incredible to receive this prize for the best book that evokes the spirit of a place. It goes to show that concepts and places are connected to each other. It is really important to me because the place whose spirit is evoked is Albania, a place people don’t usually think about - it’s not somewhere that makes headlines unless there is something problematic happening. I hope that it will make people have an interest in the history of this country, which is also a history of universal significance. The book is about the transition from communism to liberalism in Albania and also the dilemmas of freedom that arise as people navigate these different systems. It connects these ideas with ordinary lives, the conflicts, hopes and tragedies that people lived through. I hope this book will make people more sensitive to the realities that should be paid attention to, regardless of whether there is a recognised crisis in a place or not.”*

The judges of this year’s Prize, Chair **Sandeep Parmar**, **Patrice Lawrence** and **Philippe Sands**, said: *“Reading and re-reading Lea Ypi’s ‘Free’ we felt very strongly that the book’s central concerns—politics, personal history, the very meaning of freedom—spoke so resonantly to our lived moment. How do nations dream about themselves; how do individuals think of themselves within these fantasies? How do we feel within histories and how they are institutionalised? Ypi is a master at the juxtaposition of these grand and personal narratives--of family secrets and political crises--and repeatedly we returned in our judging conversations to history’s long shadow, asking what darkness lies where things remain unquestioned. Ypi’s both darkly humorous and deeply serious work made us reflect forcefully on the need for truthfulness about the stories we are told and how we negotiate our own lives within them.”*

Lea Ypi is Professor of Political Theory at the London School of Economics, and Political Science and Adjunct Professor in Philosophy at the Australian National University. A native of Albania, she has degrees in Philosophy and in Literature from the University of Rome La Sapienza, a PhD from the European University Institute, and was a Post-Doctoral Prize Research Fellow at Nuffield College, Oxford University. Her work has been recognised with several prizes such as the British Academy Prize for Excellence in Political Science and the Leverhulme Prize for Outstanding Research Achievement. She speaks six languages and lives in London. She was selected by the judges from a shortlist of six authors, made up of **A.K. Blakemore** (*The Manningtree Witches*), **Cal Flynn** (*Islands of Abandonment: Life in the Post-Human Landscape*), **Yousif M. Qasmiyeh** (*Writing the Camp*), **Sathnam Sanghera** (*Empireland*) and **Elif Shafak** (*The Island of Missing Trees*).

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

The RSL Ondaatje Prize is one of 10 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 literature today. 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 writing 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: **RSL International Writers awards, Companions of Literature, the Encore Award, the RSL Christopher Bland Prize, the RSL Giles St Aubyn Awards for Non-Fiction, the V.S. Pritchett Short Story Prize, the RSL Literature Matters Awards, the Sky Arts RSL Writers Awards and the Benson Medal.**

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Notes to Editors

The Royal Society of Literature (RSL)

Founded in 1820, the Royal Society of Literature is the UK's charity for the advancement of literature. The RSL acts as a voice for the value of literature, engages people in appreciating literature, and encourages and honours writers. <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 sponsoring the Prize.

Past Winners

2021	Ruth Gilligan	<i>The Butchers</i>
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>