



PRESS RELEASE – 12 JULY 2022

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UNDER EMBARGO UNTIL 19.30 ON TUESDAY 12 JULY

ROYAL SOCIETY OF LITERATURE ANNOUNCES 60 NEW FELLOWS AND HONORARY FELLOWS FOR 2022 AT AN EVENT HELD AT BATTERSEA ARTS CENTRE

**FIRST INDUCTION OF WRITERS ELECTED TO FELLOWSHIP THROUGH
BICENTENARY RSL OPEN INITIATIVE CELEBRATING THE GREAT DIVERSITY
OF UK WRITING.**

**NICK CAVE, MICHAELA COEL, RUSSELL T DAVIES, ADJOA ANDOH, BONNIE
GREER, LEMN SISSAY, KIT DE WAAL, LISA MCGEE, FRANCESCA MARTINEZ
AND JOELLE TAYLOR ARE AMONG THE 60 NEW APPOINTMENTS.**

**BERNARDINE EVARISTO, PRESIDENT OF THE RSL CALLS FOR ‘LITERATURE
FOR AND BY EVERYONE’ IN AN ADDRESS THAT CELEBRATED UK READERS
AND WRITERS OF ALL BACKGROUNDS AND EXPERIENCES.**

**LARGEST MASS INDUCTION IN THE ROYAL SOCIETY OF LITERATURE’S
HISTORY, AS 148 WRITERS AND SUPPORTERS OF LITERATURE, ELECTED
BETWEEN 2020-2022, SIGN THEIR NAMES IN THE RSL’S HISTORIC ROLL
BOOK.**

SANDRA A. AGARD IS THE 2022 RECIPIENT OF THE BENSON MEDAL

This evening, at an event held at Battersea Arts Centre, **The Royal Society of Literature (RSL)**, the charity that represents the voice of literature in the UK, announced 60 new appointments including the first induction of writers elected to Fellowship through the Bicentenary RSL Open Initiative.

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 of all backgrounds and experiences to engage as many people as possible with the great diversity of literature in the UK.

Bernardine Evaristo President of the RSL said:

'Storytelling is at the heart of who we are as humans – it is how we understand, contextualise, mirror, examine, challenge, entertain and imagine life from multiple experiences and perspectives. We all deserve to be active and equal participants in the production and consumption of literature that is as wide-ranging as ourselves.'

The event also saw the largest mass induction in the history of the RSL. 148 writers and supporters of literature, who were elected Fellows or Honorary Fellows between the years of 2020-2022, signed their names in the RSL roll book using a pen from the charity's permanent collection. The RSL's pens are from some of the most historically influential UK writers including **Arnold Wesker, Andrea Levy, Jean Rhys, Charles Dickens, George Eliot, T.S. Eliot** and **Lord Byron**. Jean Rhys and Andrea Levy's pens were used for the first time alongside the newly introduced Arnold Wesker Pen. The RSL Roll Book dates back to 1825, five years after the founding of the charity in 1820, and features the signatures of Fellows and Honorary Fellows elected in the past 200 years.

Daljit Nagra, Chair of the RSL says:

'We at the RSL are a community of readers and writers coming together for the advancement of literature, bringing our multiple experiences and perspectives to bear on some of the biggest questions of our times. Fellowship isn't just an honour bestowed to a writer by their peers; being a Fellow gives you the opportunity to show what literature can do to change all our lives. Our Fellows inform the work we do, and our summer party is a joyous celebration of the writers who enrich our nations with the cultural wealth of their generous literature. I am delighted to be Chair of an organisation that shows the extraordinary and diverse excellence of writing in the UK, and makes it possible for us to create a society we want to live in.'

RSL FELLOWS

44 new Fellows have been announced, 29 of whom are the first induction of writers elected to Fellowship through the bicentenary RSL Open initiative. To be nominated as a Fellow, a writer must have published or produced two works of outstanding literary merit, and nominations must be made by two Fellows or Honorary Fellows.

The following were announced this evening: **Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, Michael Arditti, Claire Armitstead, Susie Boyt, Nick Cave, Michaela Coel, Russell T Davies, Ferdinand Dennis, Bonnie Greer, Joanne Harris, Hannah Lowe, Ian McMillan, Monique Roffey, Jacqueline Rose** and **Lemn Sissay**.

'With Samuel Taylor Coleridge as an early associate and Bernardine Evaristo as president I feel a great honour in becoming a fellow of The Royal Society of Literature. Once I was a gutter cleaner. Now I am fellow of The Royal Society of Literature. There is poetry in how rain falls through gutters on its way from the sky to the sea.'

Lemn Sissay

'It is an absolute honour to be elected as a Fellow of The Royal Society of Literature. I am thrilled to be part of this great community of writers.'

Nick Cave

RSL OPEN

Launched as part of RSL 200, a five-year festival championing the great diversity of writing and writers in the UK, RSL Open will see a total of 60 writers appointed as Fellows over the

course of two years, from communities, backgrounds and experiences currently under-represented in UK literary culture. The appointments will include writers of colour, LGBTQI+ writers, working class writers, disabled writers, and writers outside of London, to ensure the diversity of excellent writers in the UK is celebrated in the RSL Fellowship.

This evening, the 29 writers elected to Fellowship in the first year of the RSL Open programme were announced. They are: **Sulaiman Addonia, Mona Arshi, Polly Atkin, Rachael Boast, Malika Booker, Melvin Burgess, Kayo Chingonyi, Fred D'Aguiar, Carys Davies, Kit de Waal, Kit Fan, Leontia Flynn, Niall Griffiths, Xiaolu Guo, Meena Kandasamy, Bhanu Kapil, Hannah Khalil, Zaffar Kunial, Joanne Limburg, Francesca Martinez, Karen McCarthy Woolf, Lisa McGee, Fiona Mozley, Raman Mundair, Musa Okwonga, Frances Ryan, Cherry Smyth, Charlie Swinbourne, and Joelle Taylor.**

Readers and writers from across the UK recommended writers for nomination who were then considered by a panel made up of some of the UK's most prolific writers. The panel was chaired by **Bernardine Evaristo**, with **Jay Bernard, Vahni (Anthony Ezekiel) Capildeo, Ian Duhig, Cynan Jones, Val McDermid, Daljit Nagra, Nikesh Shukla, Ali Smith, Sinéad Morrissey, Jack Thorne, Colm Tóibín** and **Eley Williams**. The deadline for recommending writers for nomination for the second year of the programme is 17 July. The panel will be chaired by RSL Fellow **Damian Barr**.

Joining Damian Barr on the year two panel are RSL Fellows **Monica Ali, Kerry Hudson, Nick Laird, Sabrina Mahfouz, Charlotte Mendelson, Daljit Nagra, Irenosen Okojie** and **Chibundu Onuzo**.

'The RSL Open Panel takes outstanding writing as its starting point then listens closely to those voices that are still not always heard. Evaristo and the committee she has chaired have produced a list of writers that affirms our purpose and I am delighted to welcome each new Fellow to the RSL. I am a new chair of a new group of committee members and I know we all look to the work done by those before us to guide and inspire as we consider new Fellows.'

Damian Barr

'It's an honour unlike any other I have experienced to know that I share a society with esteemed writers I both respect and can learn from. I intend to make good use of the Fellowship, highlighting the works of other marginalised poets and authors, especially those from working class lgbt communities.'

Joelle Taylor

'There are dreams which came true for me as a writer- getting a book of poetry or a novel published; seeing it get press, a readership, generate debate in society. Then, there is the stuff which exists beyond the realm of aspiration, something so distant and far away-- something reserved only for the very best in your line of work. The Fellowship of the Royal Society of Literature was something like that--hallowed, prestigious, unattainable. When I received the letter from the President, Bernardine Evaristo, I was elated, I burst into tears. I am at a loss of words to say how much this means to me. It still feels surreal.'

Meena Kandasamy

'It's a real honour to be invited to join this fellowship of writers, and to have my own writing practice acknowledged by a group of such incredible practitioners. I hope I'll be able to use

the Fellowship to support and promote the work of other disabled and neurodivergent writers.'

Joanne Limburg

RSL HONORARY FELLOWS

The RSL's Honorary Fellows are individuals who have made a significant contribution to the advancement of literature in the UK, or who have rendered special service to the Society.

16 new Honorary Fellows were announced today, they include: **Sandra Agard, Adjoa Andoh, Suresh Ariaratnam, Nicola Beaman, Julie Blake, Steve Cook, Steve Dearden, Joy Francis, Helen Garnons-Williams, Jane Gregory, Christie Hickman, Nicolette Jones, Julian May, Deirdre Osborne, Polly Pattullo, and Di Speirs.**

'As a child growing up in the Cotswolds of the 1960's, in the face of abuse I was often encouraged to subscribe to the notion that "sticks and stones may break my bones but words can never hurt me." Even as a small child I understood that hoary old phrase to be patently untrue. I felt the weight of words to distress me, transport me or bring me great joy.

Words have been the lodestars of my life and I feel the privilege and the blessing of a living and a life made in words. Thank you for admitting me into such an august body of word lovers and smiths. I am so sad not to be among you tonight clutching Jean Rhys' pen, but the honour is for life and I am thrilled to become an honorary fellow of the Royal Society of Literature!

Adjoa Andoh

BENSON MEDAL

Founded in 1916 by scholar, author and RSL Fellow A.C. Benson, the Benson Medal honours service to literature across a whole career. This year the Benson Medal has been awarded to **Sandra A Agard**. Sandra is a professional storyteller, author, tutor, playwright, literary consultant, editor and cultural historian. She has worked for over forty years in libraries as a literature development officer. She has worked in educational, cultural institutions, organisations and literary festivals throughout the UK and in the United States. Her published works include numerous books, poems, and short stories. Her plays have been performed in London and Northampton. She is currently a Learning Facilitator for Schools at The British Library.

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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/>