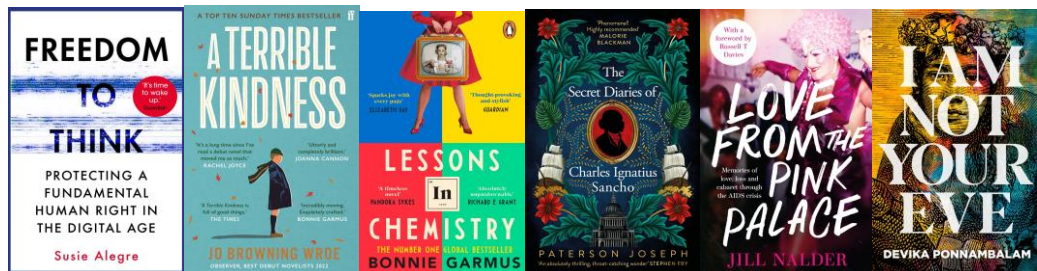




PRESS RELEASE

IMAGES CAN BE DOWNLOADED [HERE](#)
[Twitter](#) / [Facebook](#) / [Instagram](#) / [Website](#)

2023 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 2023 RSL Christopher Bland Prize.

Now in its fifth 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 **Lemn Sissay (Chair)**, **Meena Kandasamy**, and **Simon Savidge**.

The six shortlisted books are:

Susie Alegre, *Freedom to Think* (Atlantic Books)

Jo Browning Wroe, *A Terrible Kindness* (Faber & Faber)

Bonnie Garmus, *Lessons in Chemistry* (Doubleday)

Paterson Joseph, *The Secret Diaries of Charles Ignatius Sancho* (Dialogue Books)

Jill Nalder, *Love from the Pink Palace* (Wildfire)

Devika Ponnambalam, *I Am Not Your Eye* (Bluemoose Books)

Lemn Sissay commented: ‘*The RSL Christopher Bland Prize for debut authors over fifty means they are the bridge between the digital age and the analogue world. This is evident in Susie Alegre’s brilliant and timely Freedom to Think. It is a vital handbook of the history of*

human rights by a barrister, yet written in language which people like me can understand. It is vital because information and data are more remunerative than oil, and as we are the source of data we should know how it is being extracted and why. It is also vital because war and peace are negotiated and navigated by data. And it is essential because abuse of data is how human rights can be undermined. Susie Alegre's comprehensive overview of human rights, from the Babylonian Code of Hammurabi to the present day, shows us all how vulnerable we are to abuses and how we as a society need to understand the world through the focussing lens of human rights.'

Simon Savidge commented: *'With A Terrible Kindness, Jo Browning Wroe creates a fascinating character study of how we become the people we are, not just by the big moments of history we encounter, but also the smaller moments in our personal histories that change us forever. With the assurance of a writer who could be on their fifth or sixth book, she exposes the foibles of human nature, death and grief, how our childhoods can haunt us and how we should live for those who leave us behind. All this set in the shadow of the Aberfan disaster, which she deals with poignantly and without ever a moment of voyeurism, all the while shining a light on a period in history where many people couldn't be who they wanted to be or really were.'*

Meena Kandasamy commented: *'I loved Lessons in Chemistry. It was such a refreshing read, written with joviality and verve. I also related a lot to this book because it was about a woman in STEM, and as the daughter of a mathematician, this resonated a great deal. It is a book which employs incisive humour to great effect, and also has a lightness of touch which will make it widely read.'*

Lemn Sissay commented: *'The Secret Diaries of Charles Ignatius Sancho is historical fiction, bursting with the wit and perspicacity of its protagonist Ignatius Sancho. Paterson Joseph, an actor by trade, is clearly a writer in an actor's body. Many thespians feel the urge to inhabit the world of a writer, but few can fulfil it to the degree of Paterson Joseph. He inhabits characters and scenes as Dickens does, through the character and story. The Secret Diaries... leaves the reader frowning at the audacity of history for leaving out such a brilliant character. Equally we are slightly in awe of the author for turning history around.'*

Simon Savidge commented: *'Jill Nalder's Love from the Pink Palace is one of the most heart brimming and heartbreaking books that I have read in some time. Jill takes us right into the heart of the AIDS epidemic in London in the 1980's. Starting in a world filled with the joys of cabaret and camp and leading into the tragedy that followed, Jill gives us a frank, open, compassionate insight into a devastating period of recent history. At a time when allyship could not be more important once again, this is a book that everyone needs to be reading.'*

Meena Kandasamy commented: *'Devika Ponnambalam's novel I am Not Your Eve is a thing of beauty. I have read it twice, and I find the writing very lyrical and political. Ponnambalam sublimely deconstructs patriarchy and colonialism, even as she stays within the contours of the story she is telling: the story of Paul Gauguin's Tahitian child-bride and muse Teha'amana.'*

The shortlisted authors commented:

Susie Alegre: *'I have been writing for as long as I can remember but finally published Freedom to Think at the age of 50. Being shortlisted for the RSL Christopher Bland Prize feels like a real validation that all the years and words that went before were not wasted.'*

Joe Browning Wroe: *'Hearing I had been shortlisted for the RSL Christopher Bland Prize was a genuine thrill – something I wish I could have whispered in my younger self's ear. Like*

many writers, I spent years plugging away with no guarantee of publication or success. Being on this shortlist is a fabulous affirmation for which I'm very grateful.'

Bonnie Garmus: *'What an honour it is to be shortlisted for the RSL Christopher Bland Prize. While publishing tends to favour the young, this award is proof that when it comes to storytelling, age doesn't matter. I'm so glad to be part of a movement that seeks to recognize writers as people instead of numbers. It's never too late to do anything! This prize is proof.'*

Paterson Joseph: *'Being shortlisted for the RSL Christopher Bland Prize is a wonderful pat on the back for any writer. I'm certain that receiving a nomination from a society of, and for, writers is the highest accolade for any fledgling novelist.'*

Jill Nalder: *'I am truly amazed and honoured to be selected for this brilliant Prize. I never imagined anything so fantastic. It really shows that anything can happen at any time in life, even when you least expect it. It is so special to me that through a book, those I wrote about, whose lives were so short, live on and in a way are reborn for a new generation.'*

Devika Ponnambalam: *'I am thrilled to be shortlisted for the RSL Christopher Bland Prize for my debut novel I Am Not Your Eve. I began writing the story of Teha'amana, Tahitian muse and child-wife to the painter Paul Gauguin, in 2003. It has been a long and difficult journey, but the desire to tell her version of the truth kept the fire burning these many years. I hope her-story now reaches a wider audience and touches hearts, just as the image of her first did mine, in that famous painting of Gauguin's "The Spirit Of The Dead Keeps Watch."*

Raynor Winn won the Prize in its inaugural year for *The Salt Path*. The 2020 winner was **Michele Kirsch** with her memoir *Clean*. The winner in 2021 was **Pete Paphides** for *Broken Greek* and **Julia Parry** was last year's winner for *The Shadowy Third: Love, Letters, and Elizabeth Bowen*.

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 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: the **Sky Arts RSL Writers Awards**, the **RSL International Writers awards**, the **RSL Ondaatje Prize**, the **Encore Award**, the **RSL Giles St Aubyn Awards for Non-Fiction**, the **RSL Literature Matters Awards**, the **V.S. Pritchett Short Story Prize** and the **Benson Medal**.

The 2023 RSL Christopher Bland Prize winner will be announced on Thursday 8 June.

Ends/

For further information and press enquiries please contact Clair Chamberlain at Bread and Butter PR: clair@breadandbutterpr.uk | 07957 272 534

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 thanks to the generosity of the Bland family and friends, in memory of Sir Christopher Bland who died in 2017.

RSL Christopher Bland Prize 2022 Shortlisted Author Bios

Susie Alegre is a leading human rights barrister at the internationally renowned Doughty Street Chambers. She has been a legal pioneer in digital human rights, in particular the impact of artificial intelligence on the human rights of freedom of thought and opinion. She is also Senior Research Fellow at the University of Roehampton.

Jo Browning Wroe grew up in a crematorium in Birmingham. She has an MA in Creative Writing from the University of East Anglia and teaches at the University of Cambridge Institute of Continuing Education on their Post Graduate Certificate in Teaching Creative Writing. Her debut novel, *A Terrible Kindness*, was a *Sunday Times* bestseller shortlisted for the Bridport Peggy Chapman-Andrews award, and longlisted for the Prix du Roman Fnac. She has two adult daughters and lives with her husband in Cambridge.

Bonnie Garmus is a copywriter and creative director who has worked widely in the fields of technology, medicine and education. She is an open-water swimmer, a rower, and mother to two wonderful daughters. Born in California and most recently from Seattle, she currently lives in London with her husband and her dog, 99. Her first novel, *Lessons in Chemistry*, is a No.1 *Sunday Times* and No. 1 *New York Times* bestseller. It was voted Hay Festival Book of the Year by readers, won the Goodreads Choice Award for Best Debut Novel and was shortlisted for the Waterstones Debut Fiction Prize. Translated into more than thirty-five languages, it is being adapted as an Apple TV series starring Brie Larson.

Jill Nalder is originally from Neath, South Wales. She is a successful West End actress and was the inspiration behind Jill Baxter's character in Russell T. Davies' Channel 4 programme *It's A Sin*. She was also one of the founders and first chairperson of West End Cares, now called Theatre MAD: Make A Difference. To date the charity has raised over £10 million for HIV/AIDS.

Paterson Joseph is a beloved British actor and writer. Recently seen on *Vigil* and *Noughts and Crosses*, he has also starred in *Peep Show* and *Law & Order UK* and he plays Arthur Slugworth in the forthcoming *Wonka* movie. *The Secret Diaries of Charles Ignatius Sancho* is his debut novel.

Devika Ponnambalam was born in Bandar Seri Begawan, Brunei and grew up in London. She graduated from the National Film and Television School in 1998. Devika has directed for mainstream TV in the UK and in Malaysia. In 2003 Devika graduated with an MA in Creative Writing from the University of East Anglia, where she started writing *I Am Not Your Eve*. In 2018 she travelled to Tahiti with the assistance of a research grant awarded by Creative Scotland. She lives in Edinburgh.

Previous winners of the Christopher Bland Prize:

2022 Julia Parry, *The Shadowy Third: Love, Letters, and Elizabeth Bowen*

2021 Peter Paphides, *Broken Greek*

2020 Michele Kirsch, *Clean*

2019 Raynor Winn, *The Salt Path*