



Winners of the 2019 RSL Literature Matters Awards announced

The RSL is delighted to announce the recipients of the 2019 RSL Literature Matters Awards. The Awards aim to enable literary excellence and innovation, providing writers with financial support to undertake new literary projects that extend the reach of literature. **The judges this year are Menna Elfyn, Abdulrazak Gurnah and Barney Norris.**



£3,000 - WILL EAVES and SOPHIE SCOTT - The Neuromantics

A monthly podcast of discussion and readings on the intersection of literature and neuroscience.

Menna Elfyn says the judges felt the project ‘a thought-provoking and crystalline exploration which will generate the true meaning of “dialogue”.’

Will Eaves is a novelist, poet, editor and teacher. He has been shortlisted for prizes including the Ted Hughes Poetry Award, the Costa First Novel Award and the Goldsmiths Prize. **Sophie Scott** is a research scientist who investigates human communication and the brain. She was the 2017 Royal Institution Christmas Lecturer. Will and Sophie say ‘the Award will give us the chance to ask simple but difficult questions. There aren’t many grants that will let you do that.’

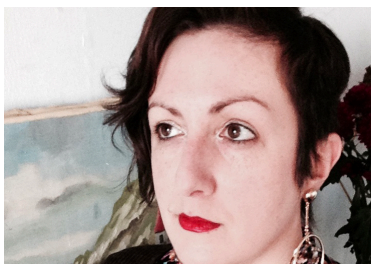


£3,500 - ROSEMARY HARRIS - Word Bridges

A series of creative writing workshops for young refugee and migrant participants, culminating in a live reading/performance.

Abdulrazak Gurnah noted the ‘project addresses an important phenomenon of our times, the reception of young refugees to Britain and the recovery of their experiences in stories shared between generations.’

Rosemary Harris is a writer for page and stage, whose work has been widely published. She has won the Middlesex University Poetry Competition and Index on Censorship’s 40th Anniversary Poetry Competition. Rosemary says ‘winning this Award provides me with a profound, joyful opportunity to connect creatively with others.’



£2,000 - MAB JONES - At the City’s Edge: The Wetlands of Wales

A podcast of poems, stories and sound art to explore the importance of the Welsh wetlands, which are now under threat.

Menna Elfyn admired ‘Mab Jones’s passion for awakening minds to a wetland area in Gwent through literature and psycho-geography.’

Mab Jones is the winner of numerous awards including the Word Factory Neil Gaiman Short Story Competition and the Geoff Stevens Memorial Poetry Prize. She teaches creative writing at Cardiff University. Mab says with her Award she can ‘do some important work promoting these natural habitats and increasing awareness both of them and of literature itself.’



£4,000 - WINNIE M LI and CLARE SHAW - Clear Lines: Writing About Trauma and Gender-Based Violence

A touring event of author readings, writing workshops and panel discussions, focusing on trauma and gender-based violence in novels, poetry, memoir, plays, and graphic literature. **Barney Norris** said, 'This is a superb resource that will help writers to approach sensitive subject matter responsibly, intelligently and creatively.'

Winnie M Li is the author of *Dark Chapter*, a fictional retelling of her own rape from victim and perpetrator perspectives. It won *The Guardian's* Not The Booker Prize. She has an honorary doctorate from the National University of Ireland. **Clare Shaw** has three poetry collections from Bloodaxe. She is a Royal Literary Fellow and a regular tutor for the Poetry School and the Arvon Foundation. Winnie and Clare say 'through literature, we hope to replace the shame and silence around sexual violence with insight and community — and enable others to transform that pain into something more meaningful and affirming.'



£2,500 - GREGORY MCCARTNEY - A Magazine for Revolution? An exploration of the Honest Ulsterman magazine

A print and online publication exploring different facets of the Northern Irish poetry magazine *Honest Ulsterman* magazine since its inception in 1968, inviting readers, writers, artists, editors and historians to compose a series of essays exploring the *Honest Ulsterman* and its context throughout its history. **Barney Norris** noted the need of 'taking stock of the value and legacy of different aspects of our literary culture, to recognise the impact of great work and seek to learn lessons from that.'

Dr Gregory McCartney is founder and editor of the Abridged project, one of the best-known Irish poetry/art magazines. He is also the editor of the *Honest Ulsterman*, one of the most prestigious literary journals in Ireland. Gregory says 'winning an Award means a lot to me. I am a great believer in the value of small magazines, of literary and art ones in particular, and this Award allows the articulation of this worth.'



£2,000 - SIAN NORTHEY - Food Bank Stories/Straeon y Banc Bwyd

Creation of a collection of short stories, in both Welsh and English, based on a residency at a food bank using techniques borrowed from verbatim theatre. **Abdulrazak Gurnah** said, 'the subject matter has a vital contemporary relevance, and its proposed method and technique are innovative and collaborative.'

Sian Northey is a freelance author, poet and translator working mainly in Welsh. She is interested in the connection between literature and health and well-being. Her third novel is *Perthyn* (Gomer, March 2019). Sian says the Award 'will enable me to afford the time to undertake a project which would probably have remained just an idea otherwise.'



£3,000 - ALYCIA PIRMOHAMED and JAY G. YING - Scottish BAME Writers' Group & Showcase

A series of writing workshops and two masterclasses for BAME writers in Scotland, culminating in a showcase event at the Scottish Poetry Library, where a pamphlet of work will be distributed. Building a network for writers of colour who are often isolated and under-represented in the literary community. **Barney Norris** said 'this project has identified a need to improve representation and create new connections in order to find an outlet for stories that aren't being adequately heard, and it is thrilling to support that process.'



Alycia Pirmohamed is a Ph.D. student in Edinburgh studying poetry written by second-generation immigrants. She is the author of the pamphlet *Faces that Fled the Wind* (forthcoming, BOAAT Press).

Jay G. Ying was the winner of the 2017 Poetry Book Society Student Poetry Prize and was shortlisted for *The White Review* Poet's Prize in 2018. He is currently a postgraduate student in Edinburgh. Alycia and Jay say 'the Award from the RSL will be invaluable as we set up our project. It will make our workshops more accessible to BAME writers all across Scotland.'

Notes to Editors

Now in their second year, the **RSL Literature Matters Awards** aim to reward and enable literary excellence and innovation. The Awards are given to individual writers or other literary creators, recognising their past achievements and providing them with financial support to undertake a proposed new piece of writing or literary project. Priority is given to proposals which will help connect with audiences or topics outside the usual reach of literature, and/or will help generate public discussion about why literature matters.

These Awards are made possible by the generous donations and legacies of RSL Fellows, and by the support of our Literature Matters Supporters' Circle.

It is hoped that the number and size of the Literature Matters Awards will grow in future years, as the books and other literary activities resulting from the Awards inspire more donations and legacies. The RSL's long-term aspiration is to become a significant instigator and financial supporter of literary endeavour across the UK.

The recipients were presented with their Awards on Friday 8 March at an event held at the British Library.

A call for applications for the 2020 Awards will be announced in September 2019.

Founded in 1820, the **Royal Society of Literature** is Britain's national charity for the advancement of literature. We act as a national voice for the value of literature, engage people in appreciating literature and encourage and honour writers. The RSL's other annual awards are the RSL Ondaatje Prize, the RSL Christopher Bland Prize, the RSL Giles St Aubyn Awards, the Encore Award and the V.S. Pritchett Short Story Prize. rsliterature.org

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