



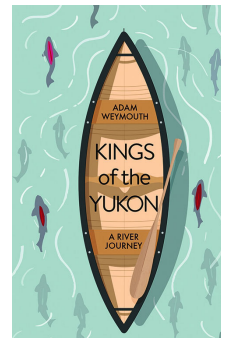
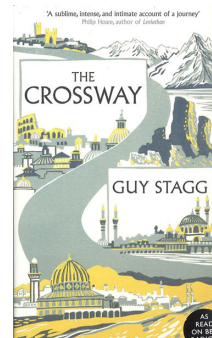
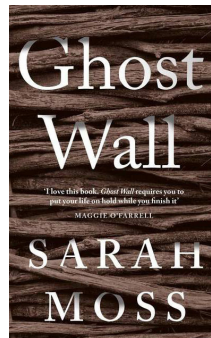
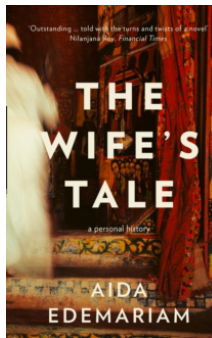
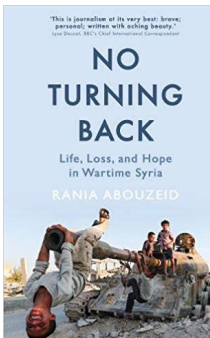
The Royal Society
of Literature



RSL Ondaatje Prize 2019 The Shortlist

The £10,000 RSL Ondaatje Prize is awarded annually to a book of the highest literary merit – fiction, non-fiction or poetry – which best evokes the spirit of a place.

This year's judges are **Sabrina Mahfouz**, **Michèle Roberts** and **Ian Thomson**.



Rania Abouzeid

No Turning Back: Life, Loss, and Hope in Wartime Syria (Oneworld)

Aida Edemariam

The Wife's Tale: A Personal History (4th Estate)

Aminatta Forna

Happiness (Bloomsbury)

Sarah Moss

Ghost Wall (Granta)

Guy Stagg

The Crossway (Picador)

Adam Weymouth

Kings of the Yukon: A River Journey (Particular Books)

The winner will be announced on Monday 13 May 2019.

Notes to editors



Rania Abouzeid, *No Turning Back: Life, Loss, and Hope in Wartime Syria* (Oneworld)

‘Despite Syria being so much in the news, this striking, beautifully written book manages to highlight many threads that have often been ignored in favour of “covering the conflict” - those of peoples’ stories from all walks of Syrian life, deftly linked into the global political landscape across decades.’ - Sabrina Mahfouz

Rania Abouzeid has spent more than fifteen years reporting on the Middle East, and has written for *The New Yorker*, *The Guardian* and *TIME* magazine among others. A former New America fellow, she has won several international prizes for her work including the Frontline Club Print Award, the Michael Kelly Award and the George Polk Award. Rania grew up in Australia and now lives in Beirut, Lebanon.



Aida Edemariam, *The Wife’s Tale: a personal history* (4th Estate)

‘Over a period of 20 years the author tape-recorded the thoughts and recollections of her Ethiopian grandmother, Yetemegnu, and used them as the basis for this outstanding and unusual memoir, which combines history with one woman’s story of survival against the odds.’ - Ian Thomson

Aida Edemariam, who is of dual Ethiopian and Canadian heritage, grew up in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. She studied English Literature at Oxford University and the University of Toronto, and has worked as a journalist in New York, Toronto and London, where she is currently a senior feature writer and editor for *The Guardian*. She won an RSL Jerwood Award (for first-commissioned works of non-fiction) for this book in 2014. She lives in Oxford.



Aminatta Forna, *Happiness* (Bloomsbury)

‘A startlingly different lens is placed on London as a place of untamed nature and unexpected love in this wonderful novel that takes even a London-born reader on an epic, extraordinary journey through many familiar, yet strange layers of the city.’

- Sabrina Mahfouz

Aminatta Forna is the author of *Ancestor Stones*, *The Hired Man* and *The Memory of Love*, winner of the Commonwealth Writers’ Prize for Best Book and shortlisted for the Orange Prize for Fiction. Her memoir *The Devil That Danced on the Water* was a Samuel Johnson Prize finalist. She was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature in 2012 and lives in London and Virginia.



Sarah Moss, *Ghost Wall* (Granta)

‘A gripping, beautifully observed, terrifying novel exploring history, archaeology and fantasy, mapping a patriarchal family structure onto the landscape of Northumberland. Intense as a poem; sharp as an arrow.’ - Michèle Roberts

Sarah Moss is an Associate Professor of Creative Writing at the University of Warwick. Her novels include *Night Walking*, which was selected for the Fiction Uncovered Award in 2011, *Bodies of Light*, *Signs for Lost Children* and *The Tidal Zones*. She spent 2009-10 as a visiting lecturer at the University of Iceland, and wrote an account of her time there in *Names for the Sea: Strangers in Iceland*, which was shortlisted for the RSL Ondaatje Prize 2013.



Guy Stagg, *The Crossway* (Picador)

‘Guy Stagg chronicles a pilgrimage he undertook on foot from Canterbury to Jerusalem, by way of Albania, Turkey and Greece. The book, a hosanna to the therapeutic potential of walking, is brocaded with self-revelatory reflections on depression, addiction and the meaning of religious faith.’ - Ian Thomson

Guy Stagg was born in 1988 and grew up in Paris, Heidelberg, Yorkshire and London. He was an assistant comment editor at the *Daily Telegraph*, and has also written for the *New Statesman* and the *Literary Review*. *The Crossway* was named as the Edward Stanford Travel Memoir Book of the Year 2019.



Adam Weymouth, *Kings of the Yukon: A River Journey* (Particular Books)

‘Kings of the Yukon sparkles like river water in sunlight as it traces the journeying leaps of salmon and people. He brings a changing landscape to life with sharp observation and humour.’
- Michèle Roberts

Adam Weymouth’s work has been published in *The Guardian*, *The Atlantic* and the *New Internationalist*. His interest in the relationship between humans and the world around them has led him to write on issues of climate change and environmentalism. He lives on a 100-year-old Dutch barge on the River Lea in London. *Kings of the Yukon* is his first book and won The Sunday Times/University of Warwick Young Writer of the Year Award 2018.

The RSL Ondaatje Prize, now in its 15th year, is an annual award of £10,000 for a distinguished work of fiction, non-fiction or poetry, best evoking the spirit of a place.

Founded in 1820, **the Royal Society of Literature** is Britain’s national charity for the advancement of literature. In addition to the **RSL Ondaatje Prize**, the RSL runs the **RSL Christopher Bland Prize** for best debut from a writer over 50, the **Encore Award** for best second novel of the year, the **V. S. Pritchett Short Story Prize**, **RSL Literature Matters Awards** and the **RSL Giles St Aubyn Awards for Non-Fiction**.

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