Aida Edemariam
wins
the £10,000
RSL Ondaatje Prize
in its 15th year
for
The Wife’s Tale: A Personal History
(4th Estate)

The 2019 judges Sabrina Mahfouz, Michèle Roberts and Ian Thomson commented:

‘Aida Edemariam mixes memoir, oral history, fiction and snatches of prayer to compose this beautiful, complicated, sensual account of her grandmother’s life. Her original form and newly-minted language create a strong, delicate structure embodying her grandmother’s spirit and will to survive.’ Michèle Roberts

‘Lyrical, loving storytelling of a family history at an epic time in Ethiopia’s own history. The writing pulses spectacularly with heart and soul, vividly depicting one inimitable woman centred within the swirling winds of politics, religion, patriotism and change.’ Sabrina Mahfouz

‘Aida Edemariam’s is an outstanding and highly unusual memoir, that absorbs the reader from start to finish. I was moved by the book’s strong poetic voice and the marvellous quality of the writing throughout.’ Ian Thomson

The RSL Ondaatje Prize is an annual award of £10,000 for a distinguished work of fiction, non-fiction or poetry, evoking the spirit of a place.
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. The Wife’s Tale won a Royal Society of Literature Jerwood Award for a work of non-fiction in progress, and was a finalist for a Governor General’s Literary Award. She lives in Oxford.

All publicity enquiries for Aida Edemariam should be directed to Patrick Hargadon patrick.hargadon@harpercollins.co.uk

The other shortlisted books in 2019:

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

Publicist: Margot Weale mweale@oneworld-publications.com

Aminatta Forna
Happiness (Bloomsbury)
‘Aminatta Forna charts a hidden geography, a secret topography, of city life, connecting urban landscapes with images of animal and human outsiders. She creates an unforgettable portrait of people surviving in unexpected ways, helped by each other’s courage and love.’ Michèle Roberts

Publicist: Philippa Cotton Philippa.cotton@bloomsbury.com
Sarah Moss
Ghost Wall (Granta)
‘An inventive novel, fraught with menace, which conjures darkest Northumbria as a group of archaeologists set out to recreate life as it might have been lived in the Iron Age.’ Ian Thomson

Publicist: Natalie Shaw nshaw@granta.com

Guy Stagg
The Crossway (Picador)
‘A poignant memoir describing the turning away from modern life and modern politics, to travel an ancient route of pilgrimage. A beautifully written account of an inner and outer journey.’ Michèle Roberts

Publicist: Camilla Elworthy c.elworthy@macmillan.co.uk

Adam Weymouth
Kings of the Yukon: A River Journey (Particular Books)
‘An engagingly eccentric travelogue, fraught with an autumnal sense of elegy and sadness for the human despoliation of nature, that absorbs from start to finish.’ Ian Thomson

Publicist: Kate Smith ksmith2@penguinrandomhouse.co.uk

Previous RSL Ondaatje Prize winners:

2018 Pascale Petit Mama Amazonica
2017 Francis Spufford Golden Hill
2016 Peter Pomerantsev Nothing is True and Everything is Possible
2015 Justin Marozzi Baghdad: City of Peace, City of Blood
2014 Alan Johnson This Boy
2013 Philip Hensher Scenes from Early Life
2012 Rahul Bhattacharya The Sly Company of People Who Care
2011 Edmund de Waal The Hare with Amber Eyes
2010 Ian Thomson The Dead Yard: Tales of Modern Jamaica
2009 Adam Nicolson Sissinghurst: An Unfinished History
2008 Graham Robb The Discovery of France
2007 Hisham Matar In the Country of Men
2006 James Meek The People’s Act of Love
2005 Rory Stewart The Places In Between
2004 Louisa Waugh Hearing Birds Fly

For further information about the RSL or the RSL Ondaatje Prize, please contact annette@rsliterature.org | 020 7845 4680 | @RSLiterature | rsliterature.org