

MEDIA RELEASE | STRICTLY EMBARGOED UNTIL 19.30 GMT, MONDAY 23 MARCH

VALERIA LUISELLI WINS 2020 RATHBONES FOLIO PRIZE FOR ‘SINGULAR, TEEMING, EXTRAORDINARY’ *LOST CHILDREN ARCHIVE*

One of the brightest young stars in world literature, Valeria Luiselli is tonight, Monday 23 March, named the winner of the £30,00 Rathbones Folio Prize, for her third novel and the first to be written in English, *Lost Children Archive*.

It is the first time the annual prize – which rewards the best work of literature of the year, regardless of form – has been awarded to a woman since its inception in 2013, with Mexican novelist and essayist Luiselli beating off stiff competition from literary heavyweights including **Zadie Smith** and **Ben Lerner**. In a year of firsts, tonight is also the first fully digital awards ceremony for the prize. With the event at the British Library cancelled due to Covid-19 (Coronavirus), audiences around the world can follow winner speeches, judges comments and written contributions live on Twitter and the prize website from 7.15pm tonight.

Luiselli, who was born in Mexico and lives in New York, was inspired by her work with young migrants on the Mexico-US border to write *Lost Children Archive* (4th Estate), a fiercely imaginative autobiographical work of fiction. In a breath-taking feat of literary virtuosity, it intertwines two journeys – a family road trip and the stories of thousands of children trying to cross the Southern border into the US – to create a masterful novel full of echoes and reflections. A moving, powerful, and urgent novel, it tells a prescient story about what it is to be human in an inhuman world.

Chair of judges Paul Farley said: *‘In a year of brilliant books, Lost Children Archive by Valeria Luiselli is our unanimous choice as winner of the 2020 Rathbones Folio Prize—and we’re all thrilled and delighted to be able to*



celebrate this genuinely original and bravura performance of a novel: a road trip, a documentary, a portrait of a family and of the American borderlands, and a journey into the idea of home and belonging doesn't even begin to do justice to this singular, teeming, extraordinary book.'

Paul Stockton, CEO of Rathbones said: *'As we watch how rapidly our world can change and impact people's lives, the judges of the Rathbones Folio Prize have unanimously rallied behind a book that will bring the personal story of a disintegrating American family embarking on a fraught road trip to a worldwide audience. Rathbones is very proud to sponsor this prize which is uniquely backed by an Academy of writers and crosses many genres to find the very best book written in the English language. Lost Children Archive by Valeria Luiselli is a piece of writing that will have a powerful, and long-lasting impact on readers everywhere.'*

Waterstones is also getting behind the winning book, offering 500 people currently self-isolating the chance to win a copy of *Lost Children Archive*, which will be delivered to them at home.

Bea Carvalho, Waterstones Fiction Buyer, said: *'The judges certainly had an unenviable task choosing from this shortlist, but in Valeria Luiselli they have found a truly worthy winner. In a year rich with excellent new books, Lost Children Archive stands out as an especially impressive work which exemplifies how exciting, intelligent, and creative fiction is today. It is a beautiful novel and an important study of modern humanity which deserves to be read widely. I'm thrilled that it has been chosen as the Rathbones Folio Prize winner this year, and that this gives us a new opportunity to share it with even more of our customers.'*

The 2020 judges were the multi award-winning poet and non-fiction writer **Paul Farley**, the Desmond Elliot Prize-winning novelist **Nikita Lalwani** and **Ross Raisin**, *Sunday Times* Young Writer of the Year winner and a Granta Best of Young British Novelists.

Lost Children Archive was chosen from a shortlist that contained three novels, one collection of poetry, a short story collection, a book of essays and two works of non-fiction from the UK, Ireland, Mexico and North America.

Valeria Luiselli was tonight awarded a cheque for £30,000 and joins **Raymond Antrobus** (2019), **Richard Lloyd Parry** (2018), **Hisham Matar** (2017), **Akhil Sharma** (2015) and **George Saunders** (2014) as previous winners of the prize.

The Rathbones Folio Prize – also known as the Writers' Prize – is the only prize governed by an international academy of distinguished writers and critics, the Folio Academy. It is borderless and open to all genres – fiction, non-fiction, and poetry – which means it reflects a greater diversity and variety of voices present in our literary culture and society as a whole.

The Rathbones Folio Prize is the flagship of the Rathbones Folio Programme, which also includes the Rathbones Folio Mentorships for aspiring young writers and Rathbones Folio Prize Sessions at literary festivals across the UK.

Valeria Luiselli was born in Mexico City in 1983. She is the author of the novels *Faces in the Crowd* and *The Story of My Teeth*, which won the 2016 *LA Times* Book Prize for Fiction; the essay collection *Sidewalks*; and *Tell Me How It Ends*, an essay about the situation facing children arriving at the US-Mexico border without papers. *Lost Children Archive* is her first novel written in English and was longlisted for the Booker Prize 2019 and the Women's Prize for fiction.

'Fascinating, haunting, poetic' **Sunday Times**

'Beautiful, pleasurable, engrossing' **James Wood, New Yorker**

'A mould-breaking new classic ... The novel truly becomes novel again in her hands – electric, elastic, alluring, new' **New York Times**

'Daring, wholly original, brilliant ... a twist on the great American road trip novel, a book about alienation that chronicles fractures, divides, and estrangement' **NPR**

'Timely and poignant' **Vogue**

'A wonderfully subtle story in which the experience of migrant children is filtered through the delicate, funny, effortlessly poetic account of a family's road trip from New York to the Mexican border' **Guardian**

To be part of the winner ceremony on Monday evening, follow the prize on Twitter @rathbonesfolio or visit the website rathbonesfolioprize.com.

Notes to editors

The shortlist for the 2020 Rathbones Folio Prize:

- *Vertigo & Ghost* by Fiona Benson (PRH/Cape)
- *On Chapel Sands* by Laura Cumming (PRH/Chatto)
- *Constellations* by Sinead Gleeson (Picador)
- *Victory* by James Lasdun (PRH/Cape)
- *The Topeka School* by Ben Lerner (Granta)
- *Lost Children Archive* by Valeria Luiselli (4th Estate)
- *Guest House for Young Widows* by Azadeh Moaveni (Scribe)
- *Grand Union* by Zadie Smith (PRH/Hamish Hamilton)



About the Rathbones Folio Prize

The Folio Prize was established in 2013 as the first major English language book prize open to writers from around the world. It is the only prize in which all the books considered for the prize are selected and judged by an academy of peers. When new sponsors, Rathbone Investment Management, came on board the prize was expanded to include all works of literature, regardless of form. Previous winners were George Saunders in 2014, Akhil Sharma in 2015, Hisham Matar in 2017, Richard Lloyd-Parry in 2018 and Raymond Antrobus in 2019.

www.rathbonesfolioprize.com

About The Folio Academy

The Folio Academy is a community of 300+ writers who represent excellence in literature. Academicians include: **Margaret Atwood, Carol Ann Duffy, Ian McEwan, Salman Rushdie, Zadie Smith** and **Sir Tom Stoppard**. The Academy recently recruited members including **Amanda Foreman, William Dalrymple, Jon Ronson, Alan Johnson** and **Andrew Marr**. Between them, Academicians have won thousands of literary awards, including 16 Man Booker Prizes. Academicians may be called upon to comment on literature matters in the media, to appear at festivals and public events, and may volunteer to mentor young writers in association with the charity First Story, which runs 320 residencies in secondary schools serving low-income communities.

About The Literature/Folio Prize Foundation

The Literature/Folio Prize Foundation is a registered charity committed to bringing the most outstanding works of English language literature to public attention through the awarding of the Prize and other initiatives. Overseen by its trustees, the Foundation seeks to engage readers and writers Throughout the English-speaking world in cultural debate and in the celebration and sustainment of the art of literature, which it believes has the capacity to enrich and change people's lives

Rathbones
Look forward

About Rathbone Investment Management

Rathbone Investment Management is one of the UK's leading providers of high-quality discretionary investment management services. It manages over £43 billion* of funds for individuals, charities and trustees, and is part of Rathbone Brothers Plc, an independently owned company with a listing on the London Stock Exchange. Investment management services are offered in Aberdeen, Birmingham, Bristol, Cambridge, Chichester, Edinburgh, Exeter, Glasgow, Kendal, Liverpool, London, Lymington, Newcastle and Winchester. Offshore investment management services are offered by subsidiary Rathbone Investment Management International in Jersey.

**As at 31 December 2019, includes funds managed by Rathbone Unit Trust Management*

Rathbones
Folio Prize
MENTORSHIPS

About the Rathbones Folio Prize Mentorships

Four Rathbones Folio Academicians are selected from a pool of nearly 300 writers who put themselves forward for the annual Rathbones Folio Mentorship scheme. They are each paired with a student who has taken part in First Story writing residencies in over 70 different schools across the country. In 2017/18, the mentors were AL Kennedy, Ross Raisin, Kamila Shamsie and Evie Wyld; in 2018/19 Francesca Beard, Joe Dunthorne, Louise Doughty, and Adam Foulds; and in 2020 Alice Jolly, Nikesh Shukla, Lucy Caldwell and Sharlene Teo.