

**Due North? *Uprooting* (Farrell 2023),  
*English Pastoral* (Rebanks 2021):  
reworking cardinal points in  
contemporary British nature writing**

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# MAPPING THE TERRITORY

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- ▶ « New nature writing »
- ▶ The predominance of the North?
- ▶ Surveying the island

## GRANTA

THE MAGAZINE OF NEW WRITING | 102

### The New Nature Writing

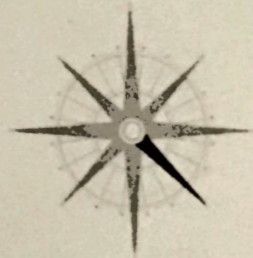
Kathleen Jamie, Jonathan Raban, Richard Mabey,  
Robert Macfarlane, Benjamin Kunkel, Lydia Peelle  
*plus a graphic story by David Heatley*



# ROBERT MACFARLANE, THE OLD WAYS

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## PATH



Foil — Trods & holloways — The blue & lucid ice — Utsi's Stone — A labyrinth of liberty — Consensual making — Desire lines — George Borrow — The Horrors — Ghost-lines — A territorial imperative — Cosmi-comic visions — Edward Thomas — 'Patient sublunary legs' — Hansel & Gretel — Hodology — Footfall as knowledge — Songlines — The Doomway & meteor showers — Biogeography — The pylon's lyric crackle.

5

## WATER — SOUTH



Our cockle-shell — The sea roads — Land bias — Poetic log-books — Raiders & *peregrini* — *Immrama* — Dream islands — Boulder ballast — Sea stories & *astar mara* — A Stornoway crow's nest — 'The way one phrase talks to another' — The Hoil — In pursuit of the optimal — The Blue Men of the Minch — Shapes standing clear — Tide-turn — A ruffle of puffins — Phosphorescence — Mafic glass — Islomania & the limits of knowledge — Surfing — A story-boat — The congress of substances — A voyage north.

1 The Word-Hoard

2 A Counter-Desecration Phrasebook

GLOSSARY I: *Flatlands*

3 The Living Mountain

GLOSSARY II: *Uplands*

4 The Woods and the Water

GLOSSARY III: *Waterlands*

5 Hunting Life

GLOSSARY IV: *Coastlands*

6 The Tunnel of Swords and Axes

GLOSSARY V: *Underlands*

7 North-Minded

GLOSSARY VI: *Northlands*

8 Bastard Countryside

GLOSSARY VII: *Edgelands*

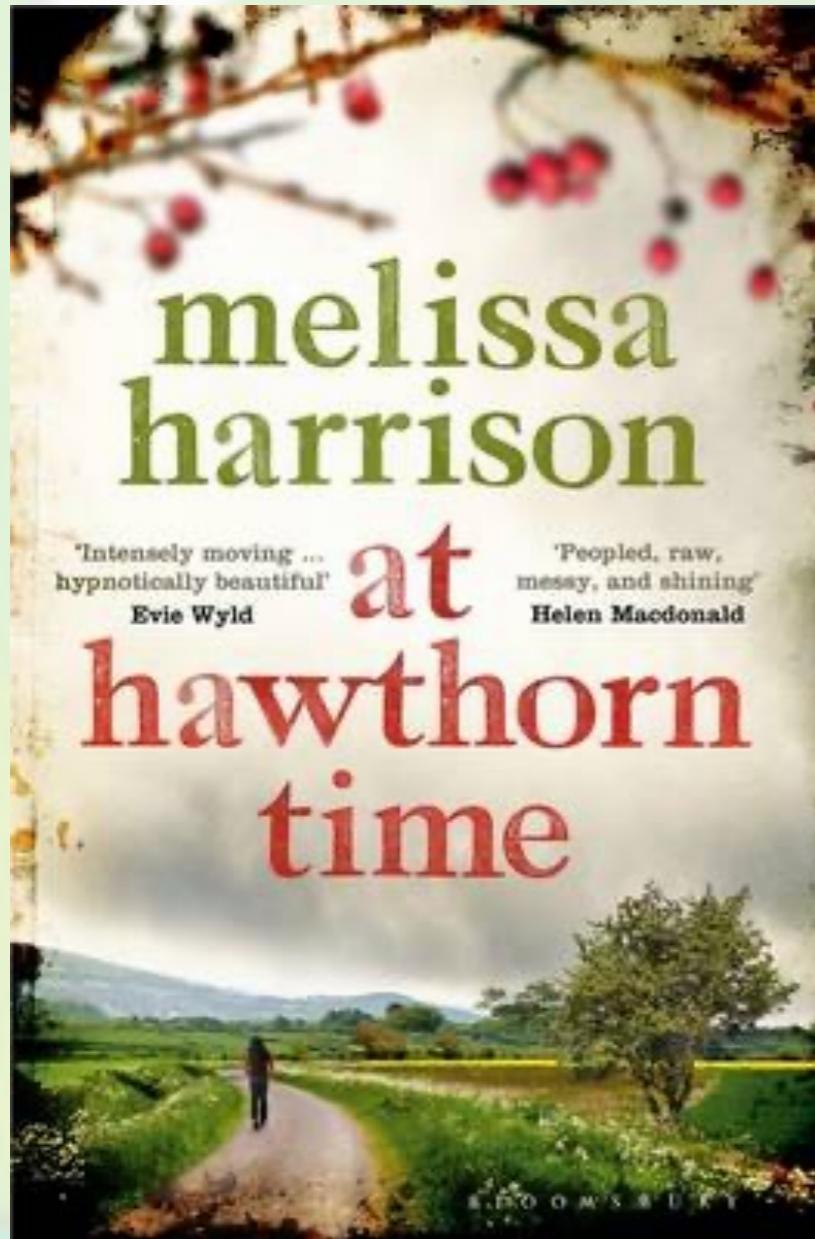
9 Stone-Books

GLOSSARY VIII: *Earthlands*

10 The Black Locust and the Silver Pine

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# ROBERT MACFARLANE, LANDMARKS



"Mostly self-educated, once a haunter of libraries, Jack **walked the lost ways from town to town, keeping to clear old paths that no one used**, avoiding company for the most part and living off the land when he could." (94)

"Growing ever more unloosed from what seemed to sustain the rest of us, more stubborn with every arrest and stranger and more elliptical in his thinking, Jack became, with the passing of decades, less like a modern man and more like **the fugitive spirit of English rural rebellion.**" (103)

"he'd talked a lot about **land ownership and private property and the Inclosures**, and about The Man who kept the English proletariat—by which he mostly meant Jack—down." (358)

# SARAH HALL, WOLF BORDER

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- ▶ « The drive from London has taken eight hours: congestion around the airport and the north orbital, an accident south of Kendal, all lanes halted until the air ambulance could set down on the carriageway to collect the shattered motorcyclist. As ever, the county's interior routes move sluggishly: compact dry-stone lanes and dawdling sightseers. A landslide on one of the mountain passes has resulted in road closure, so she must turn back at the barrier and take the longer lakeside road into the western valleys. The fells rise, carrying dead bracken on their slopes the colour of rust. Granite juts through, below gathering cloud. » (6)
- ▶ « News from the northern partners is that the pack has reunited and is coming south. » (31)
- ▶ « If she was in danger of forgetting the practicalities of a rural Cumbrian childhood, the Pacific Northwest continued her education - and seriously. » (114)

## SARAH HALL ON 06/05/2013, BEST OF YOUNG BRITISH NOVELISTS 4 INTERVIEW

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"There is very London-centric literature in the UK and regional literature doesn't necessarily have the pedigree and the status it has in America, where it's a noble enterprise. People like John McGregor, writing about that kind of flatlands, Fens, Cambridgeshire, there a lovely writers out there, you know, perhaps not talked about in the media but me, I've been writing for six or seven years and I did spend time in the Pacific Northwest, as you said, and the wildernesses here are very different from the wildernesses [sic] in Britain, where it's a tiny, cultivated wilderness. Not just being interested only in the flora and fauna there, I mean, the politics are very interesting to me as well."

# A WATERSHED MOMENT: THE COVID-19 CRISIS AND PUBLISHING

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## ▶ September 2020, taking stock at the Frankfurt Book Fair

“The trend for memoir paired with another genre is not going away. [...] In the vein of *The Salt Path* and *H is for Hawk*, there is still plenty of inspiring, other subject-led memoir. People have been going outside and enjoying nature and I think it’s no coincidence there is a lot of nature writing right now. Agents are trying to bring new voices into those established genres, like nature writing and science to a certain extent.” (Kirty Topiwala, publisher at Hodder, interviewed in *The Bookseller*, September 2020)



# COMING TITLES

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- ▶ *Hucklebrook*, James Aldred « The Wainwright Prize winner's lyrical, remarkable tale of Hucklebrook, a piece of woodland in the New Forest, told over the course of a year. » (rights bought by Transworld in Oct. 2023)
- ▶ *Myths of Geography*, Paul Richardson « From continents to borders to nations, Richardson breaks down mythical and imagined geographies and explains how they influence our perception of the world. » (rights bought by Bridge Street in Oct. 2023)
- ▶ *The Accidental Garden*, Richard Mabey (rights bought by Profile in Oct. 2023)
- ▶ N.B.: a wave of country mystery novels (notably set in the Cotswolds, Kent and Cumbria)

# Nature writing and literary prizes: a growing field

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- ▶ General fiction: 26,6% of the book market (Dec. 2022, Nielsen)
- ▶ Nature writing: record sales in 2019 (up 485% in volume/2018. Nielsen)
- ▶ The bestsellers:



# THE NAN SHEPHERD PRIZE

From the Prize webpage

## About Nan Shepherd

The Nan Shepherd Prize is named in honour of the great nature writer, novelist and poet, whose works include the masterpiece *The Living Mountain*, about her journeys into the Cairngorm mountains of Scotland.

“Considering the world through nature, of which we are an integral part, feels like the most natural thing.”

THE  
NAN  
SHEPHERD  
PRIZE



Anna (Nan) Shepherd was born in 1893 and died in 1981. Closely attached to Aberdeen and her native Deeside, she graduated from her home university in 1915 and for the next forty-one years worked as a lecturer in English. An enthusiastic gardener and hill-walker, she made many visits to the Cairngorms with students and friends. She also travelled further afield – to Norway, France, Italy, Greece and South Africa –

but always returned to the house where she was raised and where she lived almost all of her adult life, in the village of West Cults, three miles from Aberdeen on North Deeside. To honour her legacy, in 2016, Nan Shepherd’s face was added to the Royal Bank of Scotland five-pound note.



**THE NAN SHEPHERD PRIZE FOR NATURE WRITING**  
Open for submissions until 10 September

If you feel that today's nature writing doesn't represent your experiences,  
then we want to hear from you!

Win a £10,000 book deal & agent representation



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- ▶ 2019: Prize launched by Caroline Clarke (Rights Manager) and Megan Reid (Assistant Editor), for Canongate.
  - ▶ The prize: a book deal with Canongate, editorial mentoring, agent representation and a £10,000 advance.
  - ▶ The conditions: self-identification as 'underrepresented in nature writing'
  - ▶ A partnership with the Nan Shepherd Estate and Aberdeen University

# THE 2023 LONGLIST

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*The Night Run*

**Louis Bailey**

*This Is Not A  
Wasteland*

**Caroline Beck**

*Lang: The City Many  
Times Before and After*

**Meg Bertera-Berwick**

*Tube Forest*

**Fiona Brewis**

*Earth Diving*

**Daniel Connaghan**

*A History of  
Abandonment*

**Linda France**

*Potatoes and Other  
Hobbies*

**Viktoriiia Grivina**

*Fragmented*

**Stephanie Hirtenstein**

*Morphoses: On  
Nature's Processes and  
Processed Nature*

**Annie Lord**

*The Dye Path*

**Toni Lötter**

*Making A Living*

**Zoe Grace Marquedant**

*Diviner*

**Kirsteen McNish**

*Source Material*

**JLM Morton**

*Wild Swimming*

**Isabel Palmer**

*A Beautiful and Vital  
Place*

**Alycia Pirmohamed**

*threading rak flowers*

**Ruth L. Satsi**

*Land Beneath the  
Waves*

**Nic Wilson**

## The judges

- Jason Allen-Paisant
- Caro Clarke
- Helena Gonda
- Peggy Hughes
- Claire Ratinon

# A CLOSER LOOK: MARCHELLE FARRELL, WINNER OF THE 2021 NSP

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- ▶ *Uprooting*, August 2023





“It very much feels like a co-creation with my garden, as so much of the book has been shaped by the plants that make their home here.”

*Photo credit: Sandra Freij*



I, **the foreign invasive**, like so much else that begins to wake for the spring in my English garden. Brought here, like the invasive weeds, by the actions of humans who plundered other lands, who ravaged this earth from which they stripped the natives, from which they would now exclude me. Of course, plants have always come, and people too. **This is the delusion of the mythic rural idyll, static in collective imagination. Our minds trapped in this common lie, bodies imprisoned away from land over which we can no longer freely roam.**

« I am no interloper here, no lethal virus, no foreign invasive. I am nature. » (*Uprooting* 220)

Marchelle Farrell, « I Am This Place », July 22, 2022 (emphasis mine)

# MULTIPLE ANCHORS AND CARDINAL POINTS

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- ▶ « The village lay in a Conservation Area, in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and contained several Sites of Special Scientific Interest; it was as picture-perfect-rolling-hills-chocolate-box beautiful as all those titles suggest. » (11)
- ▶ « We live near the city of Sulis, named for the Roman life-giving mother goddess of water and healing » (89)
- ▶ I was only just born in the same country as my parents, my father having followed his siblings, nearly all eight of whom flocked from Trinidad to the bright lights of New York City like neotropical migratory birds. (28)

# HOMING IN: HOME AS THE « TRUE NORTH »?

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- ▶ Orientation in the garden/the enclosed space

- boundaries and borders

- Landmarks

- ▶ The cardinal point of the familiar: thematising the home

« I cannot simply fabricate my childhood home, I must grow something new. I look around this unfamiliar space and feel daunted at the prospect. » (*Uprooting* 22)

# The Wainwright Prize

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- ▶ Creation in 2014 by Frances Lincoln Publishers, the Wainwright Society and the National Trust.
- ▶ Alfred Wainwright (1907-1991)
- ▶ The sponsors: Thwaites Brewery, then Marston's Brewery, now James Cropper



NATURE WRITING

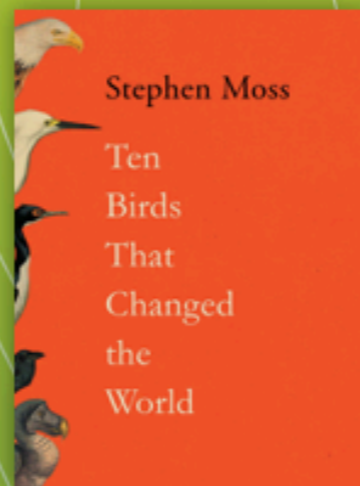
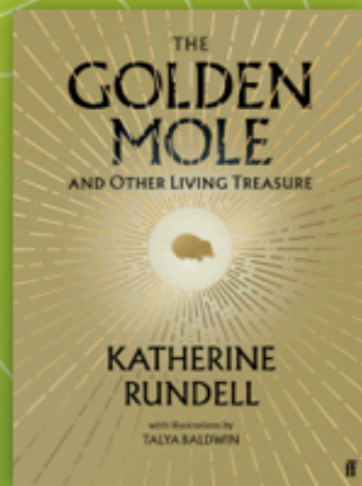
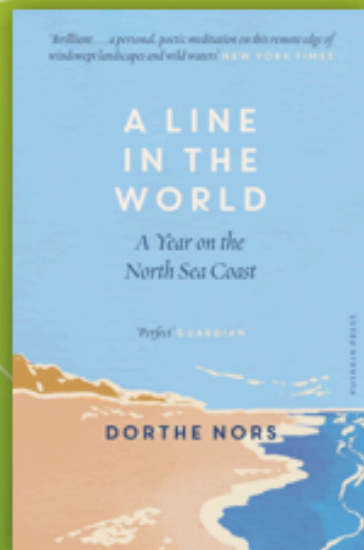


CONSERVATION  
WRITING



CHILDREN'S  
WRITING

# THE 2023 SHORTLIST ('NATURE WRITING' CATEGORY)



## Nature Writing SHORTLIST 2023

# JAMES REBANKS, ENGLISH PASTORAL: AN INHERITANCE

'Eloquent, persuasive and electric with  
the urgency that comes out of love'  
*Sunday Times*



## English Pastoral An Inheritance

James Rebanks



Pastoral

The Plough and the Gulls

Nostalgia

Progress

Utopia

Epigraph

## **Places: local anchoring and the end of unified pastoral discourse (“beauty doesn't pay the bills” Rebanks 276 )**

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In these pages is the nearest thing to a written history of our land that exists. The waxy sheets are spider-scrawled with almost illegible copperplate handwriting and pastel-shaded sketches of fields. Giant antique letters open each crammed page.

*English Pastoral (11)*

Our land is like a poem, in a patchwork landscape of other poems, written by hundreds of people, both those here now and the many hundreds that came before us, with each generation adding new layers of meaning and experience. And the poem, if you can read it, tells a complex truth. It has both moments of great beauty and of heartbreak. It tells of human triumph and failings, of what is good in people and what is flawed; and what we need, and how in our greed we can destroy precious things.

*English Pastoral (197)*

# BEARINGS

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At the top of the little woodland corridor, I pass by the 'cloven stone', a giant boulder deposited here thousands of years ago by a glacier, and through the wooden gate to our house. The valley is now carved in half by the sun. Behind the farmstead the south-facing fellside shimmers in the new day. A hare leaps through the meadow beyond the beck. It rises and falls, like a carousel horse seen above the crowd at a fair, its top half appearing and disappearing with each grass-bound leap. And then it stops to watch me pass, ears flicked backwards like a capital K poking out from the grass. (*English Pastoral 220*)



# UN-TETHERED EXPERIENCES AND DISLOCATION

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- ▶ Turning points
- ▶ Lost bearings
- ▶ Newfound cardinal points

# SCALES

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- ▶ Literary prizes as cardinal points
- ▶ Re-evaluating the validity of bearings: crises
- ▶ Access and multi-polarity