

The British Academy Book Prize for Global Cultural Understanding is awarded annually for a non-fiction book that promotes (*supports, helps*) global cultural understanding.

Now in its 12th year,

it rewards and celebrates

5 ground-breaking works of non-fiction

that have made an outstanding contribution

to the public understanding of world cultures and their interactions,

and

are grounded in rigorous and high-quality research.

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This year's judges have chosen a shortlist of six exceptional books from a

record-breaking number of submissions (*Einreichung-en*), highlighting a wide range of topics:

the secret world of raw materials;

15 race and the healthcare system;

endangered languages;

a global history of the opium trade;

the origins of mathematics and its unsung trailblazers;

and relationships between humans and animals in the context of colonisation.

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The winner of this year's prize will be revealed on Tuesday 22 October. The list:

### **Material World by Ed Conway £10.99**

From the publisher: A bold new story of human progress, told through six materials that  
25 built our world and will transform our future. For fans of Tim Marshall, Lewis Dartnell, Jared Diamond and Yuval Harari. THE SUNDAY TIMES BESTSELLER THE TIMES...

Goodreads: Sand, salt, iron, copper, oil, and lithium. These fundamental materials have created empires, razed civilizations, and fed our ingenuity and greed for thousands of years. Without them, our modern world would not exist, and the battle to control them  
30 will determine our future.

The fiber-optic cables that weave the World Wide Web, the copper veins of our electric grids, the silicon chips and lithium batteries that power our phones and though it can feel like we now live in a weightless world of information—what Ed Conway calls “the ethereal world”—our twenty-first-century lives are still very much rooted in the  
35 material.

In fact, we dug more stuff out of the earth in 2017 than in all of human history before 1950. For every ton of fossil fuels, we extract six tons of other materials, from sand to stone to wood to metal. And in *Material World*, Conway embarks on an epic journey across continents, cultures, and epochs to reveal the underpinnings of modern life on  
40 Earth—traveling from the sweltering depths of the deepest mine in Europe to spotless silicon chip factories in Taiwan to the eerie green pools where lithium originates.

*Material World* is a celebration of the humans and the human networks, the miraculous processes and the little-known companies, that combine to turn raw materials into things of wonder. This is the story of human civilization from an entirely new the ground

45 up. 512 pages, Hardcover

**Smoke And Ashes Amitav Ghosh £22.00**

From the publisher: 'The writing is sublime, the research thorough, the eye for story superb. When Amitav Ghosh began the research for his monumental cycle of novels the Ibis Trilogy, he was startled to find how the lives of the 19th century...

50 Goodreads: When Amitav Ghosh began his research for the Ibis Trilogy some twenty years ago, he was startled to find how the lives of the nineteenth-century sailors and soldiers he wrote of were dictated not only by the currents of the Indian Ocean, but also by a precious commodity carried in enormous quantities on those: opium. Most surprising of all was the discovery that his own identity and family history were swept up in the story. *Smoke and Ashes* is at once a travelogue, a memoir and an excursion into history, both economic and cultural. Ghosh traces the transformative effect the opium trade had on Britain, India and China, as well as on the world at large. Engineered by the British Empire, which exported opium from India to sell in China, the trade and its revenues  
55 were essential to the Empire's survival. Upon deeper exploration, Ghosh finds opium at the origins of some of the world's biggest corporations, several of America's most powerful families and institutions, and contemporary globalism itself. In India the long-term consequences were even more profound.

Moving deftly between horticultural histories, the mythologies of capitalism and the social and cultural repercussions of colonialism, *Smoke and Ashes* reveals the pivotal role one small plant has played in the making of the world as we know it - a world that is now teetering on the edge of catastrophe.

'In thinking about the opium poppy's role in history it is hard to ignore the feeling of an intelligence at work. The single most important indication of this is the poppy's ability to create cycles of repetition, which manifest themselves in similar phenomena over time. What the opium poppy does is clearly not random; it builds symmetries that rhyme with each other.

It is important to recognize that these cycles will go on repeating, because the opium poppy is not going away anytime soon. In Mexico, for instance, despite intensive eradication efforts the acreage under poppy cultivation has continued to increase. Indeed, there is more opium being produced in the world today than at any time in the past. Only by recognizing the power and intelligence of the opium poppy can we even begin to make peace with it.' 417 pages,

**The Secret Lives of Numbers Kate Kitagawa, Timothy Revell £12.99**

80 From the publisher: A revisionist, completely accessible and radically inclusive history of maths'Lively, satisfying, good at explaining difficult concepts' (The Sunday Times) Mathematics shapes almost everything we do. But despite its reputation as the... Goodreads : A new history of mathematics focusing on the marginalized voices who propelled the discipline, spanning six continents and thousands of years of untold stories.  
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Mathematics shapes almost everything we do. But despite its reputation as the study of fundamental truths, the stories we have been told about it are wrong--warped like the sixteenth-century map that enlarged Europe at the expense of Africa, Asia and the Americas. In *The Secret Lives of Numbers*, renowned math historian Kate Kitagawa and journalist Timothy Revell make the case that the history of math is infinitely deeper, broader, and richer than the narrative we think we know.

Our story takes us from Hypatia, the first great female mathematician, whose ideas

revolutionized geometry and who was killed for them--to Karen Uhlenbeck, the first woman to win the Abel Prize, "math's Nobel." Along the way we travel the globe to meet the brilliant Arabic scholars of the "House of Wisdom," a math temple whose destruction in the Siege of Baghdad in the thirteenth century was a loss arguably on par with that of the Library of Alexandria; Madhava of Sangamagrama, the fourteenth-century Indian genius who uncovered the central tenets of calculus 300 years before Isaac Newton was born; and the Black mathematicians of the Civil Rights era, who played a significant role in dismantling early data-based methods of racial discrimination. Covering thousands of years, six continents, and just about every mathematical discipline, *The Secret Lives of Numbers* is an immensely compelling narrative history.320

**The Tame and the Wild Marcy Norton** £31.95 From the publisher: A dramatic new interpretation of the encounter between Europe and the Americas that reveals the crucial role of animals in the shaping of the modern world. When the men and women of the island of Guanahani first made contact with Christopher...

Goodreads: A dramatic new interpretation of the encounter between Europe and the Americas that reveals the crucial role of animals in the shaping of the modern world. When the men and women of the island of Guanahani first made contact with Christopher Columbus and his crew on October 12, 1492, the cultural differences between the two groups were vaster than the oceans that had separated them. There is perhaps no better demonstration than the divide in their respective ways of relating to animals. In *The Tame and the Wild*, Marcy Norton tells a new history of the colonization of the Americas, one that places wildlife and livestock at the center of the story. She reveals that the encounters between European and Native American beliefs about animal life transformed societies on both sides of the Atlantic.

Europeans' strategies and motives for conquest were inseparable from the horses that carried them in military campaigns and the dogs they deployed to terrorize Native peoples. Even more crucial were the sheep, cattle, pigs, and chickens whose flesh became food and whose skins became valuable commodities. Yet as central as the domestication of animals was to European plans in the Americas, Native peoples' own practices around animals proved just as crucial in shaping the world after 1492. Cultures throughout the Caribbean, Amazonia, and Mexico were deeply invested in the practice of capturing wild animals—not only parrots and monkeys but even tapir, deer, and manatee—and turning some of them into "companion species." These taming practices not only influenced the way Indigenous people responded to human and nonhuman intruders but also transformed European culture itself, paving the way for both zoological science and the modern pet.448 pages

**Language City Ross Perlin** £12.99

From the publisher:Half of all 7,000-plus human languages may disappear over the next century and - because many have never been recorded - when they're gone, it will be forever.

Goodreads: From the co-director of the Endangered Language Alliance, a captivating portrait of contemporary New York City through six speakers of little-known and overlooked languages, diving into the incredible history of the most linguistically diverse place ever to have existed on the planet.

Half of all 7,000-plus human languages may disappear over the next century and—because many have never been recorded—when they're gone, it will be forever. Ross Perlin, a linguist and co-director of the Manhattan-based non-profit Endangered Language Alliance, is racing against time to map little-known languages across the most linguistically diverse city in contemporary New York. In *Language City*, Perlin recounts

the unique history of immigration that shaped the city, and follows six remarkable yet ordinary speakers of endangered languages deep into their communities to learn how they are maintaining and reviving their languages against overwhelming odds.

145 Perlin also dives deep into their languages, taking us on a fascinating tour of unusual grammars, rare sounds, and powerful cultural histories from all around the world. Seke is spoken by 700 people from five ancestral villages in Nepal, a hundred of whom have lived in a single Brooklyn apartment building. N'ko is a radical new West African writing system now going global in Harlem and the Bronx. After centuries of colonization and displacement, Lenape, the city's original Indigenous language and the source of the name Manhattan ("the place where we get bows"), has just one fluent native speaker, bolstered by a small band of revivalists. Also profiled in the book are speakers of the Indigenous Mexican language Nahuatl, the Central Asian minority language Wakhi, and the former lingua franca of the Lower East Side, Yiddish.

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155 A century after the anti-immigration Johnson-Reed Act closed America's doors for decades and on the 400th anniversary of New York's colonial founding, Perlin raises the alarm about growing political threats and the onslaught of "killer languages" like English and Spanish. Both remarkable social history and testament to the importance of linguistic diversity, *Language City* is a joyful and illuminating exploration of a city and the world that made it. 432 page

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**Divided Annabel Sowemimo £10.99**

From the publisher:

A vital, eye-opening exploration of race and health  
A FINALIST FOR THE ORWELL PRIZE FOR POLITICAL WRITING 2023  
SHORTLISTED FOR THE 2024 BREAD AND ROSES AWARD FOR RADICAL PUBLISHING  
SHORTLISTED FOR THE 2023 INDIE CHAMPIONS AWARDS FOR...

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Goodreads: A FINALIST FOR THE ORWELL PRIZE FOR POLITICAL WRITING 2023

'Important and ambitious' Observer, Book of the Day

'An illuminating and powerful intersectional analysis of health inequalities and racism'

'A vital call to action' Leah Hazard, author of Womb

170 'Prepare to be blown away' Chikwe Ihekweazu, Assistant Director General at WHO

In the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, we are all too aware of the urgent health inequalities that plague our world. But these inequalities have always been urgent: modern medicine has a colonial and racist history.

Here, in an essential and searingly truthful account, Annabel Sowemimo unravels the colonial roots of modern medicine. Tackling systemic racism, hidden histories and healthcare myths, Sowemimo recounts her own experiences as a doctor, patient and activist. *Divided* exposes the racial biases of medicine that affect our everyday lives and provides an illuminating - and incredibly necessary - insight into how our world works, and who it works for. This book will reshape how we see health and medicine - forever.

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'Urgent examination of how modern medicine is intertwined with colonial histories and racist ideas ... compelling story-telling' Joanna Wolfarth, author of Milk

'Outstanding ... beautifully written and erudite, yet highly accessible ... should be

mandatory reading for all medical practitioners' Jacqueline Roy, author of The Fat Lady Sings

'Necessary. In the right hands, this book will save lives' Nova Reid, author of

185 *The Good Ally* 416 pages, [https://www.londonreviewbookshop.co.uk/booklists/the-british-academy-book-prize-for-global-cultural-understanding-shortlist-2024?utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=20240912%20Bookshop%20Newsletter&utm\\_content=20240912%20Bookshop%20Newsletter+CID\\_7d8ca12e3bb34fe7de6c4b7f3ee06f76&utm\\_source=Bookshop%20email&utm\\_term=See%20Collection](https://www.londonreviewbookshop.co.uk/booklists/the-british-academy-book-prize-for-global-cultural-understanding-shortlist-2024?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=20240912%20Bookshop%20Newsletter&utm_content=20240912%20Bookshop%20Newsletter+CID_7d8ca12e3bb34fe7de6c4b7f3ee06f76&utm_source=Bookshop%20email&utm_term=See%20Collection) and goodreads