



# CANDIDATES' ELECTION STATEMENTS

**Election to the Management Committee 2023**

Please read carefully before casting your vote.

## Nadine Matheson



Any author will tell you that the lack of transparency within publishing is a major obstacle. I initially was quite overwhelmed by the publishing industry when I signed my first deal. However, I've learnt to navigate the industry thanks to the support of fellow established writers and professional organisations such as the SoA.

I became a member of the SoA in 2019 shortly after signing with my agent and publishers (HQ – HarperCollins). Prior to membership I had practised as a solicitor where I specialised in criminal law for over 17 years. In addition to being a solicitor, I am also a law lecturer and a writing and communications coach. Prior to my legal career, I worked for the BBC and in film finance. My intention is to have a long and successful career as a writer.

Since 2020, I have been mentoring new and aspiring writers from underrepresented backgrounds. There has not been one session where the writers that I am mentoring have not expressed surprise about the existence of the SoA or have told me that they did not think that the SoA was for them. Underrepresented writers thrive best when they can see themselves in the organisations that are part of their chosen profession. These writers need to know that there is someone who not only understands where they're from, and the adversities that they face, but also that there is someone who is going to be their voice in the boardrooms across the industry. The writers' and actors' strike in the United States has reinforced in me the belief that there needs to be a strong voice in any union representing creatives and that voice must be just as strong in the boardroom as well as the outside world. The voices of the boardroom must also reflect its members. We are all attempting to navigate a fast-changing industry e.g. the impact of AI, changing laws, streaming services etc. It's important that the SoA has board members who are aware of those changes and how they impact every member of the SoA.

As a Black British woman writing crime fiction, it has been encouraging to see that I'm not the only one in the room when attending events, but that diversity and inclusivity needs to be seen internally in boardrooms in every area of publishing. Transparency and accessibility are key. I believe that I am someone who can provide a bridge between underrepresented writers and the SoA. I found, and continue to find, the support of the SoA and of other writers to be invaluable in my writing life and I've been honoured to take part in SoA online events. I recently became a board member of the Crime Writers' Association which shows how committed I am to ensuring that every writer is aware that a progressive and supportive network is accessible to them. I have always been an advocate, both in the courtroom and for people in other areas of life who need advice and support.

**Nominated by Dorothy Koomson and Patricia Marques**

## Rhianna Pratchett



The last 25 years of my professional writing career have been incredibly diverse. I've worked in journalism, comics, film, TV, games, tabletop role-playing games, and both fiction and nonfiction books. I have gained a broad appreciation for the trials and tribulations of being a writer in all its many forms. If elected to the SoA board, I would like to make it easier for us to collectively raise our voices on a number of pertinent issues. In particular,

the lack of transparency in publishing, the often-neglected mental health and wellbeing of authors, and the narrow approach currently being taken towards diversity.

### Transparency in publishing

I believe that we must collectively call for more transparency in publishing. Authors deserve to work within a system with transparent contractual agreements, clear and equitable royalty structures, and fairer marketing support for those who need it most. As a society, we need to lobby for the industry to agree to better reporting, more clarity, plain language and deeper detail of profit distribution and payments of foreign rights in both author contracts and statements, as well as improved marketing for authors who do not have the benefit of celebrity status.

### Diversity and inclusivity

Representation and inclusivity in the publishing industry remain pressing issues. Authors face challenges in getting stories with diverse casts published, recognized, and supported in an industry historically dominated by a narrow set of voices. Whilst there has been impressive action taken on black representation, particularly in children's books, wider minority ethnic representation is woefully inadequate. For example, despite being the UK's largest minority, South Asian representation in children's books has never even reached 1%. Encouraging true diversity and inclusivity within the industry is essential. Publishers should be lobbied to actively seek and promote works from authors of wider diverse backgrounds and ensure equitable support, marketing, and distribution.

Equal considerations should be afforded to all authors, irrespective of background, gender, race, celebrity, or socio-economic status. Implementing blind submission processes and affirmative action policies can help reduce the systemic biases which create barriers for authors and stories which are not seen as marketable by a predominantly white industry. Minority voices and characters are not just for minorities. When we share experiences which differ from our own, everyone benefits.

### Author mental health and wellbeing

Working in an isolating profession where many struggle with financial hardship, whilst measuring self-worth against the success of others, is emotionally bruising. We are required to promote ourselves on social media and remain positive despite rankings, reviews, and a daily drip-feed of negativity on twitter.

We need to destigmatize mental health in the writing community and provide a safe space to drop the mask and share open conversations about mental health, promoting awareness, understanding, and acceptance. I would like the SoA to provide resources, such as workshops, and peer support networks, specifically tailored to authors – dealing

with self-care, social media, perception of success, and promoting a healthy balance between writing commitments and personal life.

Thank you for reading.

**Nominated by Joanne Harris and Antony Johnston**

### Claire Seeber



I've been a member of the SoA on and off since being first published in 2007.

Having used SoA services and advice, the support's always been helpful. However, I feel the industry's heading into murkier waters: I partially supported my kids as a single parent for years on publishing income, but it's getting harder to sustain a living when many authors don't even earn the minimum wage.

When asking what authors want help with, income came up, and literary agents. In an unregulated industry, I want to help effect change, providing more protections for authors. Often, we labour under conspiracies of silence: speaking up about bad agent behaviour entails fears of being blacklisted. Having experienced past issues myself, the SoA offered compassion; but without an agenting code of practice, little can be done, contracted or not. I'd like both agents and publishers to be held more accountable for their actions.

I'm also a therapist, witnessing daily how badly the rampant Wild West of social media affects mental health – and in authors' cases, also sales. The implications of social media need proper recognition from the whole industry.

Over sixteen years I've seen massive change, particularly with Amazon. A monopoly is always dangerous; Amazon is never held to account, e.g. vitriol on Goodreads goes unpunished. What's possible in terms of actually 'standing up' for authors? Few other industries allow members to be so viciously attacked, whilst also encouraging authors to be pitted against each other. Mental health must be taken seriously, again too often ignored by both publishers and agents. Forays this year, i.e. in *The Bookseller*; SoA's own workshops, are still inadequate. Recent talk is about debut authors: what about thousands of mid-list authors going unseen?

I want to represent authors whose careers have fluctuated. Digital-first authors aren't paid advances so effectively work for nothing, mostly without hefty second incomes! Again, this is deemed acceptable, meaning a reliance on publishers selling books to earn authors' any income, i.e. decent royalties. But in a flooded marketplace, this seems ever harder.

Publishing is as far from a meritocracy as is possible, I think, with the wild range of advances and marketing budgets (or none at all) being unhelpful, along with books 'picked' for success. These are unpalatable truths to swallow – I'm staunchly up for authors making an actual living from writing (!), and want to encourage solidarity, rather than a hierarchy, and the constant feeling of being in competition with each other. There's also little recognition of talent if you're a commercial writer (rather than academic, literary or prize-winning etc). It's time to move on from the snobbery around digital publishing and be included in festivals, prizes etc.

Authors are too often isolated and undervalued, treated as expendable by our own industry: hugely unfair, given our work is crucial to it.

The feeling that, if we walk away from writing, someone more shiny is waiting, is detrimental to us all.

Other issues: online piracy of ebooks; AI.

**Nominated by Lisa Cutts and Emma Robinson**

**Jim Fraser**

I joined the SoA in 2018 on the advice of a friend who was a long-term member.

I am a forensic scientist and expert witness and have worked in the UK and abroad. From 1996 - 2004, I was responsible for a large police forensic department with over 100 staff and a multi-million-pound budget. From 2004 - 2015 I ran an academic centre at the University of Strathclyde and was

a member of the strategic and governing body, the Senate. From 2003 - 2005 I was president of the professional body for forensic scientists, now the Chartered Society of Forensic Sciences, a registered charity. Between 2015 and 2023, I was a lay member of the Scottish Criminal Cases Review Commission (SCCRC) and trained as a magistrate. The SCCRC reviews potential miscarriages of justice and has the power to refer cases to the Court of Appeal for reconsideration. I was also a member of the SCCRC Audit Sub-Committee, responsible for finance and risk management and chaired this for a time. I have worked with government committees in Westminster and the Scottish parliament as an advisor and representing my industry.

I have published three nonfiction works; an academic text, a popular science book and a memoir about my work as a forensic scientist. Since 2015 I have worked as a writer and broadcaster.

The written and spoken word are central to my work as a writer and forensic scientist. In the complex and politically charged cases I have reviewed, such as the murders of Damilola Taylor and Rachel Nickell and the Lockerbie bombing, conveying meaning with clarity and precision was crucial. In the witness box at the Old Bailey, words are my only tool.

I have benefited enormously from my membership of SoA; from virtual meetings about the industry (agents, marketing, social media), advice on contracts for print, ebooks and audio books, and discounted products such as the London Review of Books subscription. The SoA has also enabled me to make direct connection with other writers and equipped me for a more active part in the writing world. I convened the Society of Authors in Scotland Nonfiction group for a time during 2021. More recently, I was Scottish Ambassador for National Crime Reading Month, organised by the Crime Writers' Association.

I am eager to repay and support the SoA. There are many issues to address, such as closing libraries, unfair contracts and oppressive multinationals. There are also huge and complex topics, such as AI and climate change, that will impact on our industry in ways that we are yet to understand, that will demand our attention and sound judgement.

If elected, I will do my utmost to represent the views of members and maximise support to our many communities. I would also hope to contribute as best I can, to the development of policies and strategies that are in the best interests of the industry, that nurture innovation and creativity and provide a decent livelihood for members.

**Nominated by Vanessa Fox O'Loughlin and Hugh Roberts**

**Anne Rooney**

I asked ChatGPT to write this statement for me. It was boring and full of meaningless buzz words. It was also pompous, self-congratulatory and sounded very corporate. It didn't contain a single reference to dinosaurs. Needless to say, this isn't it.

Our livelihoods as authors, illustrators, and translators are about to be turned upside down by AI. It's the most pressing and interesting issue facing us

all today. Before becoming a writer of (mostly) children's non-fiction about science and technology, I worked on the interface between people and IT. It's not the existence of AI that imperils us, but how people choose to use it. AI learns patterns of expression from existing texts and pictures and then reproduces those patterns with new words/pixels.

The first problem is that it's trained by stealing our previous work. The second is what it does with the patterns it's extracted. We need to approach both of these with absolute clarity. The Society is working alongside other creative bodies and publishers to challenge 'big tech' on the first issue. The second threat comes not from 'big tech' but from publishers and others who buy our work and that's trickier to negotiate. Creators will need to stand together and try to nibble the hand that feeds without biting it.

I believe that AI shouldn't be used to replace human creatives in work they want to do and might otherwise be employed to do. We bring skills, expertise and a depth of human insight, imagination and empathy that a machine can't replicate. We're entitled to earn a living from our skills. AI is already threatening many members who write non-fiction, school materials, or tests; who work as translators, illustrators and journalists; and many of those we work alongside, including copy editors, indexers, and designers. There's a space between demonizing technology and using it thoughtfully. That's the patch of land we need to occupy and where we need to dig our trenches. I'd like to take my spade on your behalf, please.

The usual bit: I write about dinosaurs, space, technology, the history of science, and a bit of fiction and have published around 300 books with different publishers over 25 years. I live near the eel-slathered fens of East Anglia. I was Chair of the Educational Writers Group before first becoming a member of the Management Committee three years ago. (My favourite dinosaur is Kentrosaurus.)

**Nominated by Abie Longstaff and Daniel Hahn**

**Laurel Lindström**

I am a fiction author supported by nonfiction writing. For my nonfiction work I write under the name of Laurel Brunner as a consultant and journalist, specialising in printing and publishing technology and my work is published around the world. I have been a member of the Society of Authors for several years and actively participate in local SoA groups: Tunbridge Wells and Sevenoaks; Eastbourne and Lewes; Brighton and Hove. Unbound published

*The Draftsman*, my first novel under the name of Laurel Lindström, in 2021.

**Professional background**

I have a degree in Linguistics and English Literature from the University of California in Los Angeles. A background in business development and technology is the foundation of a successful nonfiction career, writing about digital prepress, production and printing systems. Recent nonfiction is dedicated to raising awareness of printing and publishing's environmental sustainability. Sometime in the 2000s the British Standards Institute (BSI) co-opted me to contribute to BSI standards for print production and to share my digital systems knowledge.

I have represented the UK at international standards meetings for the last fifteen years. As the convenor of a working group within the International Standards Organisation (ISO), I work to build consensus through mutual respect and appreciation of diverse perspectives and expectations. My working group includes 124 individuals representing 16 countries across multiple continents. Although meetings are conducted in English, most contributors are not native English speakers. Together we develop standards relating to the environmental sustainability of printing and publishing. We have produced five standards, which ISO has published.

I am the Honorary Secretary of the Authors' Club, working closely with the Executive Committee on behalf of members. I am a keen horse rider and with my husband help manage five bee colonies, five chickens and two rescued horses. I believe strongly in equality of opportunity, the value of the individual and most of all in listening. I once could speak French and German, and now have a smattering of Swedish and Greek.

The Society of Authors relies on robust management and leadership to engage with members' interests and values. My experience with the ISO working group and as a long-standing consultant have taught me to value listening, keeping ego and personal values in check, and to always consider the perspectives of others. Technology plays an increasingly urgent role throughout industries, but especially in communications, what we are all about. It's easily abused, leading to distortions of messages and perceptions, but it can provide constructive and supportive environments for dialogue and debate. Matters surrounding technology and its platforms should be resolved with balanced, informed judgement and objective thinking, and respect for motivations, purpose and objectives. The SoA's policies should help harness technology to provide guidance, protection and a platform for impartial debate for all members. Policy and digital technology are the foundation for open and constructive engagement to the benefit of members and ultimately of their readers.

I would like the opportunity to leverage my experience and sympathies to the benefit of both.

**Nominated by Hugh Roberts and Philip Womack**

**Nikesh Shukla**

I am standing for the Management Committee of the Society of Authors because I truly believe that we, as authors, as writers, as creatives, as thinkers, as the people who originate the stories that get told, deserve a working union that is agile and iterative and flexible and emergent and responsive to what is going on in the publishing world and how it affects authors. Having recently spent a bunch of time screenwriting in America, in the

run up to the WGA strike and hearing about how the union worked out there, I was inspired to see such solidarity. A good union requires organisational strength, and in order to achieve that, ensuring that we have a stronger, wider membership and we are consolidating that collective power to speak out about the issues that face us.

The life of an author can be precarious. It is not well paid, your rights and your intellectual property can be exploited, the threat of artificial intelligence as a cheap labour alternative to our intellect, our rigour, our thoughtfulness, our interrogation and our creativity is an active threat. There is barely any provision for mental health care for authors. Especially when so much of the job of writing seems to be speaking about writing, doing podcasts and panels and articles and interviews about the work, about the issues of the day, and the further you get from your desk, the more exposed you feel. We need to think about what protections are in place.

In this cost of living crisis, where authors were already struggling to make ends meet, I want to push for us to have the industry have a long, hard think about how authors are paid, especially delving into the inequality of pay facing writers from minoritized backgrounds.

Mainly, though, and I don't need a full five hundred words to tell you this: I believe in the power of words to change the world, in books and stories to move, even by a fraction, the way we see the world. The only way forward for authors is collectivising, coalition, solidarity and thinking about what lies ahead, and how we can support each other. My promise to you, members of the Society of Authors, is I will help this union to be a union that thinks about the labour force and what we can achieve.

**Nominated by Joanne Harris and Sunny Singh**

**Dorothy Koomson**

I am standing for re-election as a member of the SoA Management Committee because I believe in the SoA and what it can do to help improve the lives and circumstances of its over 12,000 members.

This year marks my 20th year as a published author and also my 20th year as a member of the SoA. I believed in the work of the SoA when I joined back then and I believe in its work now. There are many issues affecting authors, illustrators, translators and others in our industry today, not least of which is the encroaching threat from AI – I would like to be able to continue to work to protect and advance the rights of everyone effected by these issues as a board member.

Thank you for your time.

**Nominated by Abie Longstaff and Vanessa Fox O'Loughlin**

## Julia Williams



I am both an editor and an author and have worked in publishing for thirty-five years. I started my publishing career in academic books in 1988, before moving to Scholastic Children's books in 1990 where I was in charge of the teen fiction list and published the successful *Point Horror* series. Following the birth of my second child I took a career break and went freelance. During this period, I began to write and have had ten novels published by Avon. I returned to the

workplace in 2014 and spent seven years at Mills & Boon before going freelance again to enable me to focus more on my writing.

I believe my experience in publishing makes me perfectly placed to stand for the Management Committee as I understand both the needs of authors and that of the business. As an editor I have always been a passionate advocate of all the authors I have worked with, and as an author I count many writers as friends. If I were elected, I would do my utmost to represent them all.

I began my career in 1988, the year that *The Satanic Verses* was published, and I am a firm believer in freedom of speech. I think it is the duty of the industry to represent all voices, even those that are challenging or controversial. Today this does not always happen. Although some decry it, cancel culture is a very real issue for many authors – particularly those at the lower paid end of the spectrum – and in the words of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, too many authors today 'self-censor' for fear of causing offence.

We have seen an increasing trend in recent years of authors losing contracts via bad reviews on Goodreads, Twitter pile-ons, and even bloggers condemning authors with whose views they disagree. In too many instances, publishers have capitulated to the mob or not supported their authors. This is unacceptable, and also potentially disastrous for the industry. As Hanif Kureishi recently stated, within legal limits, authors *should* have the power to offend. Without that ability, too much that is creative, different and vibrant will be lost. It is my passionate belief that we should stand up against the creeping tide of censorship in our industry and challenge publishers to support their authors better, especially at a time when authors are increasingly forced to use sensitivity readers and obliged to write through the prism of presentism.

I have spoken to many authors about these issues in the last few years, and I know many feel they have to hide in the shadows, afraid of saying the wrong thing. It is my view that we need to change the culture so that we can have open and honest debate – even on contentious issues – and if I am elected to the Committee it would be my aim to help bring about such change.

**Nominated by Virginia Moffatt and Michelle Smart**

## Helen Fields



Dear Society of Authors members,

I'm Helen Fields, a crime writer who has published ten books with Harper Collins, one with Trapeze, and self-published three others. I was first traditionally published in 2017, so although relatively new to the industry compared to some of you, I've been busy. My background is as a family and criminal law barrister. After that, whilst growing my family, I worked in

my husband's media company as a producer and writer. I remain a company director on the board of two companies.

Publishing is changing at an almost unrecognisable pace. There's the equivalent of a real economic class divide at the moment, with the marketplace being dominated by a few big names (no judgments here, I wouldn't turn down those sorts of advances) but it's making it hard for many authors to survive. The bestseller lists in the UK and abroad have been decimated by those same few names. There's also a huge amount of disillusionment with the day-to-day for writers, including the way publishing houses communicate, how upfront they are with the marketing and publicity package each book will get, how much blame an author gets for poor sales rather than the publishers looking inwards to see where they failed. And that's just the tip of the iceberg.

There are issues with celebrities getting enormous advances and soaking up too much marketing percentage, balanced against how much income they generate that keeps the industry afloat. Supermarkets are reducing shelf space, and the big chains have become even more powerful, making and breaking careers. We're getting squeezed at every turn. The diversity, in all its forms, that the writing community needs to thrive is still only just pushing off the starting blocks, and more work is needed.

So what can I bring to the table? Years of negotiating and advocacy skills, to start with, and an absolute refusal to be silenced when we need representation. Plus a legal and analytical brain that is good at formulating arguments, putting forward a strong case, and considering all options. I'm active on social media, which is terrible for deadlines, but great for keeping in touch with how writers are feeling, what readers want, and what's going on in the wider world. My experience in the media company was of client handling, working with government agencies and multinational corporations, delivering under pressure and to budget, and partnering with other arts sectors.

Above all, it's time to dig in and make sure we look after each other. There are some even bigger challenges coming. Of particular interest to me is artificial intelligence, and ensuring that - across the board in the publishing business - we're guarding against replacement. That's not just the big publishing houses but the other bread-and-butter jobs, including writing short stories for magazines, articles for newspapers, and providing content for writing workshops.

I'm approachable, keen, dedicated, and unafraid. I believe those qualities are what the writing community needs right now.

**Nominated by Caro Ramsay and Marion Todd**

### Naomi Alderman



I never used to understand what the Society of Authors was for, or why I should join or take an interest. Then I got sued.

The case had no evidence: a person suffering with mental illness had the delusion that he had written my novel, *The Power*, and that I'd stolen it from him. But although I had multiple drafts, emails about the book going back years, the case still had to be fought. My

publishers were wary; they needed assurances that I hadn't, in fact, nicked my feminist novel from a man. My friends had never gone through anything like this. But the Society of Authors: I joined and on the same day I received support, help and guidance. The SoA found me a good, experienced lawyer. They advised me on the case and talked me through how to prepare my evidence. They listened to my fears and worries. They were by my side all the way through until the case was dismissed and the person who'd sued me got the mental health support he needed.

I understood then what the Society of Authors – the union for professional writers in the UK – is for and why we need it. And I want to give back to this organisation that gave me so much when I needed it.

I bring an expertise that I think might be particularly helpful to writers right now. I write literary fiction successfully and I have also for two decades managed to make a good living as a writer in the field of technology. I want to encourage writers to think about technology as a growing industry where there is room for new kinds of writing to flourish. And I want to protect our interests. The big tech companies that own and develop artificial intelligence writing programmes are going to try to present their products as replacements for writers. In some sectors, this is already happening. I want to work together to learn how writers can use and benefit from these new tools and to champion the importance of humanity in this most human of all fields. Although it might sound ridiculous to even need to do this, we do need it. I have the expertise, experience and enthusiasm for the sector to defend writers in technology without becoming overly defensive.

It's been a turbulent and difficult year for the Society of Authors; as someone who loves and is grateful to the organisation it's been immensely saddening. So: I believe in inclusivity and diversity, I believe we are better writers and create better organisations when we open ourselves to the widest variety of human experience. I come from an Orthodox Jewish background and although I don't follow that way of life any longer I continue to have deep respect for it. Which is to say: I think of myself as a bridge-builder. Including diverse viewpoints is no easy route. I think I can do some good in the tough work of seeking common ground.

**Nominated by Adrian Hon and Sarah Perry**

### Jane MacKenzie



I was a latecomer to the world of fiction writing, and when I joined the SoA ten years ago I knew nothing about this challenging industry. I felt like the least qualified author in the world.

In my twenties I fled life as a tax inspector and went from teaching in Africa, the Middle East and Papua New Guinea, to developing overseas government education projects in the UK. I finished my career as Head of

the UK Liaison Office at the European Council for Nuclear Research (CERN) in Geneva, overseeing UK budgets and looking after our 200 research scientists. It was while in Geneva that I finished my first novel and began another adventure.

Ten years on, I've found incredible support from the SoA community. I've served for four years on the Committee of the SoA in Scotland, three of those as Treasurer, managing our finances, liaising with external bodies and SoA staff, and organising events.

One panel event I organised in the SoA@Home programme was called Writers on the Edge. We were aiming it at writers in isolated circumstances, whether through geography, disability, discrimination, life as a carer – there are so many. We learned at that event that many authors in Central London feel as isolated as those in rural Wales or Northern Ireland. We writers work alone much of the time, we chase a shrinking income, we struggle with publishers, many of us self-publish, and yet, when we come together in the SoA, we are strong, vibrant, creative and empowered.

Three years ago, our Scottish Committee began working closely with the national SoA team to win external funding for a Senior Policy and Liaison Manager for Scotland. Heather Parry has brought incredible energy to defending authors' interests all over Scotland. Her success has signposted a way forward for all our four nations to develop membership, and to be fully supported by the SoA. It has been a privilege for our Committee to work so closely with Heather on all her initiatives. Writers' rights are always placed high on our agenda, and this is something I want to pursue for all our members.

I believe I can bring both commitment and skills to the Management Committee. I have attended Management Committee meetings. I have experience in governance, financial management and promoting inclusivity that I feel could be of service to the SoA. And I've been a campaigner all my life. One of my proudest achievements was being the only non-African ever appointed to the Board of the University of the Gambia, working with passionately committed Gambian academics to build the newest, smallest University in Africa.

Now I write historical fiction, I support literacy charities and I give a good deal of my time to the SoA. As my tenure on the Scottish Committee comes to an end, I hope I can give the same commitment to the SoA board, to the amazing SoA staff, and to members across the UK.

**Nominated by Ceitidh Hutton and Claire Watts**