



Press release  
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## *Shuggie Bain* wins 2020 Booker Prize

- Douglas Stuart is the second Scot to win the prize, following James Kelman in 1994
- ‘A first novel of rare and lasting beauty’, (*The Guardian*) – which was ten years in the writing
- Based on Stuart’s own experience of a Glasgow childhood marked by poverty and addiction

[www.thebookerprize.com](http://www.thebookerprize.com)  
#2020BookerPrize #FinestFiction

Douglas Stuart’s *Shuggie Bain* is tonight named winner of the 2020 Booker Prize for Fiction as the culmination of a star-studded ‘ceremony without walls’ from London’s Roundhouse.

The ceremony was broadcast on BBC Radio 4’s Front Row, BBC iPlayer and [BBC Arts Digital](#). It was hosted by BBC Radio 4’s John Wilson and included contributions from HRH The Duchess of Cornwall, President Obama, and three former Booker Prize winners: Kazuo Ishiguro, Margaret Atwood and Bernardine Evaristo.

*Shuggie Bain* is Stuart’s first novel. Based on his own childhood, it is a searing account of a young boy growing up in Thatcher’s Glasgow of the 1980s, with a mother who is battling addiction. Stuart, 44, dedicated the book to his own mother, who died of alcoholism when he was 16. After graduating from the Royal College of Art, he moved to New York to start a career in fashion design, working for brands including Calvin Klein, Ralph Lauren and Gap. He started writing in his spare time a decade ago. His work has since appeared in *LitHub* and in *The New Yorker*, which has published two of his short stories this year.

Stuart said in an interview for [The Booker Prize website](#) that the 1994 Booker winner *How Late It Was, How Late* by James Kelman changed his life because it was one of the first times he had seen his people and dialect on the page. He is currently finishing his second novel, *Loch Awe*, also set in Glasgow.

Margaret Busby, 2020 chair of judges, editor, literary critic and former publisher, comments:

*'Shuggie Bain'* is destined to be a classic – a moving, immersive and nuanced portrait of a tight-knit social world, its people and its values. The heart-wrenching story tells of the unconditional love between Agnes Bain – set on a descent into alcoholism by the tough circumstances life has dealt her – and her youngest son. Shuggie struggles with responsibilities beyond his years to save his mother from herself, at the same time as dealing with burgeoning feelings and questions about his own otherness. Gracefully and powerfully written, this is a novel that has impact because of its many emotional registers and its compassionately realised characters. The poetry in Douglas Stuart's descriptions and the precision of his observations stand out: nothing is wasted.

'*Shuggie Bain* can make you cry and make you laugh – a daring, frightening and life-changing novel.'

*The Times* said that Stuart had 'taken the trauma and turmoil of his early years and turned it into a heart-breaking novel, a book both beautiful and brutal'. *The Telegraph* described it as a 'transcendent portrait of alcoholism, poverty and desperate filial love in 1980s Glasgow' and that 'in a just world, it would win [The Booker Prize].'

In an interview with *The New York Times*, which has described *Shuggie Bain* as 'this year's breakout debut', Stuart said that 30 editors passed on the book before it was published. It is published in the UK by Picador, Pan Macmillan. This week, *The Bookseller* reported it to be the bestselling title of the six shortlisted books, and it was chosen as Waterstones Scottish Book of the Year before winning The Booker Prize.

Margaret Busby was joined on the 2020 judging panel by [Lee Child](#), author; [Sameer Rahim](#), author and critic; [Lemn Sissay](#), writer and broadcaster; and [Emily Wilson](#), classicist and translator.

Margaret Busby announced Douglas Stuart's win at the innovative ceremony, which was broadcast globally from the Roundhouse. Stuart appeared via a screen to be awarded the £50,000 prize and deliver his acceptance speech. He receives a trophy, a designer-bound edition of his book and a further £2,500 for being shortlisted.

**HRH The Duchess of Cornwall said in her speech:**

'While Covid deprived us of so many cultural pleasures – live music, theatre, cinema, art galleries, even being together in the flesh this evening – we have, at least, been able to read. And as long as we can read, we can travel, we can escape, we can explore, we can laugh, we can cry and we can grapple with life's mysteries ... For all these reasons, this year's Booker Prize is even more important than usual ... it celebrates wonderful writers who share their gifts to strengthen, provoke, move and comfort their readers.'

**President Obama reflected in his speech:**



'I've always turned to writing to make sense of our world ... And at their best Booker Prize-listed books remind me of fiction's power to put ourselves in someone else's shoes, understand their struggles, and imagine new ways to tackle complex problems and effect change. I want to salute the work of the Booker Prize Foundation to encourage people to read more fiction and promote the art of reading for the public benefit.'

An extract from *Shuggie Bain* was read by Scottish actor Stuart Campbell in a performance directed by The Old Vic Baylis director Katy Rudd. There were also readings from Anne-Marie Duff, Thandie Newton, Ayesha Dharker, Nina Sosanya, and Paapa Essiedu, and a live performance from the Chineke! Chamber Ensemble.

### Forthcoming events

Stuart will take part in his first official public event as winner for [Southbank Centre](#) on Monday 23 November (7.30pm GMT, £5, online) as part of its 'Inside Out' series, interviewed by Bernardine Evaristo.

He will also be interviewed by author and former prize judge Natalie Haynes for the [Hay Festival Digital Winter Weekend](#) on Friday 27 November (5.30pm GMT, free, online). Guardian Live will host a Book Club for *Shuggie Bain* in 2021.

As part of The Booker Prize's continuing partnership with Doncaster Creates, there will be a virtual [Open Mic night](#) on Thursday 26 November hosted by 2020 Booker judge, writer and broadcaster Lemn Sissay MBE, and 2017 shortlisted author Fiona Mozley; both will read passages from their work alongside Doncaster writers. As both the finale and legacy of the partnership, Fiona Mozley will lead the search for a Doncaster New Writer whom she will mentor. The writer will be announced in January 2021.

The Booker Prizes podcast series will be releasing a winner podcast, featuring an interview with Douglas Stuart, available from Wednesday 25 November.

### The leading prize for quality fiction in English

First awarded in 1969, The Booker Prize is recognised as the leading prize for literary fiction written in English. The list of former winners features many of the literary giants of the last five decades: from Iris Murdoch to Salman Rushdie, Kazuo Ishiguro to Hilary Mantel.

The winner can expect instant international recognition. The 2019 Booker Prize for Fiction was won jointly by *The Testaments* by Margaret Atwood and *Girl, Woman, Other* by Bernardine Evaristo. In the week following the announcement, sales of *The Testaments* rose from 11,955 to 13,400 copies while *Girl, Woman, Other* sold 5,980 copies, more than double its lifetime sales up to that point and a 1,340% increase week on week. The UK edition alone of *The Testaments* has now sold more than 850,000 copies. *Girl, Woman, Other* has now spent 25 weeks in *The Sunday Times* Top Ten in hardback and paperback, several at number one and its combined sales in all editions and formats are heading



towards half a million. It will be published in 32 territories internationally and TV rights have been optioned by Potboiler. After its Booker Prize win it was shortlisted for the 2020 Women's Prize for Fiction and won the best fiction book at the 2020 British Book Awards, while Evaristo was named Author of the Year.

The Booker Prize is supported by Crankstart, a charitable foundation.

More information about the prize is available at:

[www.thebookerprizes.com](http://www.thebookerprizes.com)

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### About the winning book and author

***Shuggie Bain***

Douglas Stuart

Published by Picador, Pan Macmillan

#### **Judges' comment:**

'Douglas Stuart's debut creates an amazingly intimate, gripping portrait of addiction, courage and love. *Shuggie Bain* is a heart-breaking, heart-warming yet unsentimental novel which gives a vivid glimpse of a marginalised, impoverished community in a bygone era of British history. Set in working class Glasgow in the Thatcher years, the book evokes the relationship of a mother and son, both of whom reach for sparkle, glamour and adventure that are hard to find in their economic and social circumstances. Stuart manages to treat his characters with an impressive level of dignity, humour and compassion, as well as an unsparing clarity of vision.'

We admired the book's immersive, nuanced portrait of a tight-knit social world, its people and its values, and we were deeply moved by the portrait of the mother, Agnes, in her only-partly-futile battle against alcoholism, poverty and the rigid gender norms of her culture. *Shuggie Bain* is a desperately sad, but almost-hopeful examination of family and the destructive powers of desire.'

#### **Synopsis**

Glasgow, 1981. The city is dying. Poverty is on the rise. People watch the lives they had hoped for disappear from view. Agnes Bain had always expected more. She dreamed of greater things: a house with its own front door, a life bought and paid for outright (like her perfect – but false – teeth). When her philandering husband leaves, she and her three children find themselves trapped in a mining town decimated by Thatcherism. As Agnes

increasingly turns to alcohol for comfort, her children try their best to save her. Yet one by one they have to abandon her in order to save themselves.

Her son Shuggie holds out hope the longest. But Shuggie has problems of his own: despite all his efforts to pass as a ‘normal boy’, everyone has decided that Shuggie is ‘no right’. Agnes wants to support and protect her son, but her addiction has the power to eclipse everyone close to her, including her beloved Shuggie.

Laying bare the ruthlessness of poverty, the limits of love, and the hollowness of pride, *Shuggie Bain* is a blistering and heart-breaking debut, and an exploration of the unsinkable love that only children can have for their damaged parents.

## Biography

Douglas Stuart was born and raised in Glasgow. After graduating from the Royal College of Art in London, he moved to New York City, where he began a career in fashion design. His work has appeared in the *New Yorker* and on *LitHub*. *Shuggie Bain* is his first novel.

## Notes to Editors

- Douglas Stuart is available for interview. To arrange please contact Camilla Elworthy at Picador. Tel: 07801043423; Email: [c.elworthy@macmillan.co.uk](mailto:c.elworthy@macmillan.co.uk)
- The winner of the 2020 Booker Prize was chosen from 162 submissions. The 2020 shortlisted titles were:

Author (country/territory)	Title (imprint)
Diane Cook (USA)	<i>The New Wilderness</i> (Oneworld Publications)
Tsitsi Dangarembga (Zimbabwe)	<i>This Mournable Body</i> (Faber & Faber)
Avni Doshi (USA) Random House)	<i>Burnt Sugar</i> (Hamish Hamilton, Penguin)
Maaza Mengiste (Ethiopia/USA)	<i>The Shadow King</i> (Canongate Books)
Brandon Taylor (USA)	<i>Real Life</i> (Originals, Daunt Books Publishing)

- Images of the winning author and book, as well as the actors and special guests, are available to download [here](#). This Dropbox will be updated shortly with images from the ceremony at the Roundhouse.
- The special designer bound edition of the book was created by Derek Hood and Kate Holland. It can be viewed on The Booker Prize website, along with the finished designs for the five other shortlisted books.

- BBC Arts Digital for The 2020 Booker Prize can be found [here](#)
- Front Row, BBC Radio 4, is produced by Sarah Johnson and Dymphna Flynn. The editor is Alice Feinstein.
- HRH The Duchess of Cornwall has supported The Booker Prize every year since 2013 and last presented the prize to Anna Burns in 2018. In 2019 The Duchess invited the joint winners, Margaret Atwood and Bernardine Evaristo, for tea at Clarence House.
- Sir Kazuo Ishiguro won The Booker Prize in 1989 for *The Remains of the Day*, was made an OBE in 1995 and was awarded The Nobel Prize in Literature in 2017. Margaret Atwood has won The Booker Prize twice, first in 2000 for *The Blind Assassin* and again in 2019 with *The Testaments*. She was awarded the Companion of Honour in 2019. Bernardine Evaristo won The Booker Prize in 2019 for *Girl, Woman, Other* and was made an OBE in 2020.
- The Chineke! Chamber Ensemble musicians will be Elodie Chousmer-Howelles (violin), Betania Johnny (violin), Jesse Francis (viola) and Elliot Bailey (cello).
- The Booker Prize for Fiction was first awarded in 1969 and was called The Man Booker Prize for Fiction when sponsored by Man Group from 2002 - 2018. The winner receives £50,000. The 2019 winners were *The Testaments* by Margaret Atwood and *Girl, Woman, Other* by Bernardine Evaristo. The 2020 Booker Prize panel is chaired by Margaret Busby, editor, literary critic and former publisher and consists of: author Lee Child; author and critic Sameer Rahim; writer and broadcaster Lemn Sissay; and classicist and translator Emily Wilson.
- The International Booker Prize is awarded annually for the best single work of fiction translated into English and published in the UK. It was known as the Man Booker International Prize when sponsored by Man Group. The £50,000 prize is divided equally between the winning author and translator. The 2020 winner was *The Discomfort of Evening* written by Marieke Lucas Rijneveld and translated by Michele Hutchison. The 2021 judging panel is chaired by Lucy Hughes-Hallett, cultural historian and novelist, and consists of: journalist and writer, Aida Edemariam; Man Booker shortlisted novelist, Neel Mukherjee; Professor of the History of Slavery, Olivette Otele; and poet, translator and biographer George Szirtes.
- For the current Booker Prize shortlist, as well as a full history of the prize including previous winners, shortlisted authors and judges visit the website:  
[www.thebookerprizes.com](http://www.thebookerprizes.com)
- The Booker Prize Foundation is a registered charity (no 1090049) established in 2002. It is responsible for the award of The Booker Prize for Fiction and for The International Booker Prize. The trustees of the Booker Prize Foundation are: Mark Damazer (chair) - freelance journalist and former broadcast executive; Nick Barley

- director, Edinburgh International Book Festival; Bidisha SK Mamata - writer, critic and broadcaster; Carol Lake - managing director, Philanthropy Executive at JPMorgan Chase; James Naughtie - broadcaster; Ben Okri - poet and author; MT Rainey - strategist, agency founder and social entrepreneur; Professor Louise Richardson - vice chancellor of the University of Oxford; Nicki Sheard - digital and social media executive; The Rt Hon. Lord David Willetts - writer, ex-minister and advocate of fairness between the generations.

- The Booker Prize Foundation Advisory Committee, which advises on any changes to the rules and on the selection of the judges, represents all aspects of the book world. Its members are: Nic Bottomley - co-founder, Mr B's Emporium of Reading Delights; Jamie Byng - publisher, Canongate Books; Jonty Claypole - head of arts, BBC; James Daunt - managing director of Waterstones; Jonathan Douglas CBE - director of the National Literacy Trust; Adam Freudenheim - publisher, Pushkin Press; Daniel Hahn OBE - writer and translator; Peter Kemp - chief fiction reviewer, *The Sunday Times*; Sharmaine Lovegrove - publisher, Dialogue Books; Emma Paterson - agent, Aitken Alexander Associates; Fiammetta Rocco - senior editor and culture correspondent, *The Economist* and *1843* and The International Booker Prize Administrator; Eve Smith - Secretary, Booker Prize Foundation; Boyd Tonkin - writer and critic; Helen Williams - Legal Counsel of Booker Group plc. It is chaired by Gaby Wood - Literary Director, Booker Prize Foundation.
- Crankstart, a charitable foundation, is the exclusive funder of The Booker Prize and The International Booker Prize.
- The Literary Director of the Booker Prize Foundation is Gaby Wood. The Administrator of The International Booker Prize is Fiammetta Rocco, senior editor and culture correspondent of *The Economist* and *1843*.
- Four Culture handles PR, comms and event management for the prizes and provides all events and administrative back-up.
- Booker Group is the UK's leading food & drink wholesaler with branches nationwide and a delivery network. It serves over 400,000 catering customers and 100,000 independent retailers.
- The Booker Prize Foundation has a longstanding partnership with RNIB (Royal National Institute of Blind People). The Foundation funds the production of the shortlisted titles in braille, giant print and audio, which the RNIB produces by the date the winner is announced. The accessible versions are then made available to the tens of thousands of blind and partially sighted members of the RNIB Library. People with sight loss have a limited choice of books in accessible formats and often have to wait much longer than their sighted peers for titles to be made available to them - and there are many more books that they will never have the chance to read. The Foundation is working with RNIB to change this story. For further information contact the RNIB PR Team on 020 7391 2223 or [pressoffice@rnib.org.uk](mailto:pressoffice@rnib.org.uk)

- The Booker Prize Foundation has partnered with the National Literacy Trust since 2012 to deliver Books Unlocked. The Foundation funds the programme, which has transformed the lives of prisoners and young offenders in the UK by helping them develop a love of reading. Prisoners are able to engage with high-quality writing as copies of Booker Prize shortlisted titles are sent out to prison reading groups. These same titles are also serialised as audiobooks on National Prison Radio, which is broadcast into c.80,000 cells, enabling still more prisoners to experience these exceptional stories. Authors go into prisons to discuss their writing directly with reading groups and many also record interviews on National Prison Radio. The shared vision for Books Unlocked is to bring about positive change in prisoners' life chances. Since 1993, the National Literacy Trust has led the campaign to transform the future of the UK's most disadvantaged young people by improving their literacy levels: [literacytrust.org.uk/programmes/books-unlocked/](https://literacytrust.org.uk/programmes/books-unlocked/)
- The Booker Prize Archive was given on loan in 2003 to Oxford Brookes University, where it now resides.
- **The Old Vic** is an independent charity in receipt of no regular public subsidy. An artistic powerhouse with a strong social mission, for over two centuries it has remained at the centre of its civic, creative and cultural community. During this time the theatre has taken on many identities (an opera house, a temperance tavern and a college to name a few) and has been no stranger to adversity as it has battled fires, bankruptcies and bombing. But throughout this time one element has endured; an unwavering determination to remain a beacon of hope, entertainment, education, solace and inspiration with a social mission to be a force for good. And now, during this period of closure, the theatre is once again working to stay meaningfully connected with all its audiences: theatre-goers, creative, schools, young people, the local community and supporters.
- **The Chineke! Chamber Ensemble** comprises the principal players of the Chineke! Orchestra, which was founded in 2015 by the double bass player, Chi-chi Nwanoku OBE to provide career opportunities for established and up-and-coming Black, Asian and ethnically diverse classical musicians in the UK and Europe. Chineke!'s mission is: 'Championing change and celebrating diversity in classical music'. Alongside traditional orchestral repertoire, the Chineke! Orchestra enables audiences to discover lesser known works by Black, Asian and ethnically diverse composers. The Chineke! Orchestra works closely with its sister ensemble, the Chineke! Junior Orchestra, with senior players acting as mentors, teachers and role models to the young musicians. In its brief and pioneering existence, Chineke! has performed at the Proms, premiered new works by Black, Asian and ethnically diverse composers, helped to launch stellar careers, including that of Sheku Kanneh-Mason and won the Royal Philharmonic Society's first ever 'Game Changer' Award.