



PRESS RELEASE

Under embargo, 00.01am (GMT) Wednesday 16 December 2020

The 2021 Booker Prize for Fiction: Judges announced

www.thebookerprizes.com

@TheBookerPrizes | #FinestFiction | #2021BookerPrize

Hot on the heels of the award of the 2020 Booker Prize to debut novel *Shuggie Bain* by Douglas Stuart comes the announcement today (Wednesday 16 December) of the judges of the 2021 Booker Prize.

The panel will be chaired by historian Maya Jasanoff, and consists of: writer and editor Horatia Harrod; actor Natascha McElhone; twice Booker-shortlisted novelist and professor Chigozie Obioma; and writer and former Archbishop Rowan Williams.

Gaby Wood, Literary Director of the Booker Prize Foundation, says:

‘When Douglas Stuart won the 2020 Booker Prize, he told Bernardine Evaristo, from whom he took the baton, that she had ‘lifted all voices’ and that he hoped to do her proud in the year to come. Booker Prize judges never speculate about the spirit in which the winner will accept the prize – their remit is to choose the best book, nothing else. But the warmth with which recent winners have been received by readers is a heartening consequence: the more people believe The Booker Prize is for them, the better it will be for good writing and good reading overall.

‘If part of the Booker’s long-term effect is to encourage a range of excellence in new writing, it does so by showing that a welcoming group of readers exists for that work. The 2021 panel of judges is stellar in that respect: distinguished and exacting, open-minded and hopeful. They are led by an historian whose global view of literature and its context is eminently equal to this global prize. I can’t wait to hear them discuss the results of their reading together.’

Chair of judges, Maya Jasanoff adds:

‘In the pandemic more than ever, reading fiction has been a great source of stimulation and solace. It’s both a pleasure and an incredible honour to get to roam the pages of this year’s Anglophone novels and shine a light on extraordinary books and writers – and to do so in the company of such accomplished fellow judges feels like a gift.’

The judging panel will be looking for the best work of long-form fiction, selected from entries published in the UK between 1 October 2020 and 30 September 2021.

The 'Booker Dozen' of 12 or 13 books will be announced in July 2021 with the shortlist of six books to follow in the autumn. The winner of the £50,000 prize will be announced in November 2021.

The announcement of *Shuggie Bain* as the 2020 winner was warmly welcomed across the world by booksellers, media and the public. The morning after the ceremony the book had jumped to the top of Amazon's Best Sellers list. The UK publisher Picador, Pan Macmillan then revealed it was publishing an additional 150,000 copies. In the first full week after the announcement, the book sold more than 25,000 copies in the UK, a 1900% increase on the week preceding the announcement. *Shuggie Bain* has now sold more than 80,000 copies in the UK, an overall increase of 234% on its pre-announcement sales. It has been to Number 1 in *The Times* and the *LA Times* bestseller lists, Number 2 in *The Sunday Times* bestseller list, and Number 3 in *The New York Times* bestseller list. TV and film rights have been sold to Scott Rudin/A24 for a planned TV series, as well as translation rights to 30 territories, including an eight-way auction in China. This month, Pan Macmillan gave away 300 copies of *Shuggie Bain* to Streetreads, a homeless reading project, after it topped the book wishlist of its service users.

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

More information about the prize is available at:

www.thebookerprizes.com

@TheBookerPrizes | #2021BookerPrize | #FinestFiction | [The Booker Prize podcast](#)

For all press enquiries please contact the Four Culture team:

Hannah Davies Hannah.Davies@FourCommunications.com | +44 (0) 7891 423 421

Harriet Clarke Harriet.Clarke@FourCommunications.com | +44 (0)7384 917 947

The 2021 Booker Prize judges

Photos of the 2021 Booker Prize judges are available to download via this [link](#).

Judges' bios

Maya Jasanoff (chair) is a professor at Harvard, where she holds named chairs in History and in the Arts and Sciences. She is the author of three works of global history—most recently *The Dawn Watch* (2017), about the life and times of Joseph Conrad—which have won honours including the National Book Critics Circle Award, the Duff Cooper Prize, and the Cundill Prize, and been shortlisted for the Baillie Gifford and the James Tait Black Prizes. Maya frequently writes about history and literature for publications including *The Guardian*, *The New Yorker*, and *The New York Review of Books*, and in 2021 will deliver the Lawrence Stone Lectures at Princeton University comparing the ways in which novelists and historians tell stories. She is currently working on a wide-ranging book about ancestry and inheritance in human history, a topic she grew curious about partly as a consequence of her own mixed Indian and Jewish heritage. A 2013 Guggenheim fellow, in 2017 she was awarded the Windham-Campbell Prize for non-fiction literature.

Natascha McElhone established herself as a leading actor when she left drama school to play the lead in her first film, *Merchant Ivory's Surviving Picasso*, opposite Anthony Hopkins. She quickly followed this with Peter Weir's film, *The Truman Show*; Alan J. Pakula's *The Devil's Own*, with Brad Pitt and Harrison Ford; and John Frankenheimer's action epic *Ronin*, in which she co-starred with Robert De Niro. She also played Rosalind to Kenneth Branagh's Berowne in his musical version of William Shakespeare's *Love's Labour's Lost*. Her theatre credits include *Richard III*, *The Count of Monte Cristo*, *The Cherry Orchard*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Honour* and most recently *Queen Anne* for the RSC. She also starred in the Golden Globe-winning Showtime series *Californication* and the Netflix show *Designated Survivor*, playing the First Lady, Alex Kirkman. She most recently appeared in *The First* co-starring Sean Penn, a Hulu/Ch 4 co-production, created by Beau Willimon. McElhone is currently shooting *Halo*, based on the video game franchise for Showtime (due for release 2021/22). Her independent films include *Ladies in Lavender* with Dame Maggie Smith and Dame Judi Dench, and the adaptation of John Banville's Booker Prize-winning novel *The Sea*, co-starring with Rufus Sewell and Ciaran Hinds. She has three sons and lives in London.

Horatia Harrod is an editor at the *Financial Times Weekend*. She has written widely on arts and books, interviewing (among others) Margaret Atwood, Rachel Cusk, Carmen Callil, Marlon James, Martin Scorsese, Sir Peter Blake, Ralph Fiennes and the Coen Brothers. As an editor, she has worked with writers from Jan Morris to David Mitchell and Simon Schama. She previously worked at the *Telegraph*, where she edited the *Sunday Telegraph* books pages.

Chigozie Obioma was born in Akure, Nigeria. His two novels, *The Fishermen* (2015) and *An Orchestra of Minorities* (2019) were shortlisted for The Booker Prize making him one of only two novelists to be shortlisted for all of their work. His novels have been translated into more than 32 languages. They have won awards including the inaugural FT/Oppenheimer Award for Fiction, the NAACP Image Award and the LA Times Book Prize, and been nominated for many others. *The Fishermen* was adapted into an award-winning stage play by Gbolahan Obisesan that played in the UK and South Africa between 2018-2019 with runs at London West end's Trafalgar studios, Edinburgh Fringe, HOME theatre in Manchester and Market Theatre in South Africa. It is being broadcast as a newly recorded play for the BBC as part of its Lights Up season. He was named one of Foreign Policy's 100 Leading Global Thinkers of 2015. He is an associate professor of Creative Writing at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and divides his time between the US and Nigeria.

Dr Rowan Williams was born in Wales and is a theological writer, scholar and teacher. He was ordained in Ely Cathedral, elected a Fellow and Dean of Clare College, University of Oxford, and later Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity. In 1991 he became Bishop of Monmouth, followed by Archbishop of Wales, and from 2002-2012 he was the 104th Archbishop of Canterbury. He became the 35th Master of Magdalene College, University of Cambridge in 2013 and is an Honorary Professor of Contemporary Christian Thought. Williams is a noted poet and translator of poetry, and, apart from Welsh, speaks or reads nine other languages. He learned Russian in order to read the works of Dostoevsky in the original. This led to the book *Dostoevsky: Language, Faith and Fiction*; he has also published studies of Arius, Teresa of Avila, and Sergei Bulgakov, together with writings on a wide range of theological, historical and political themes. He is a Fellow of the British Academy, the Royal Society of Literature and the Learned Society of Wales. In 2013, he was made a life peer, becoming The Rt Rev. and the Rt Hon. the Lord Williams of Oystermouth. He retired from the House of Lords in August 2020.

Notes to Editors

- The Booker Prize for Fiction was first awarded in 1969. The winner receives £50,000. The 2020 Booker Prize winner was *Shuggie Bain* by Douglas Stuart. The 2021 judging panel is chaired by historian Maya Jasanoff and consists of: writer and editor Horatia Harrod;

actor Natascha McElhone; twice Booker-shortlisted writer and Professor Chigozie Obioma; and writer and former Archbishop Rowan Williams.

- The International Booker Prize is awarded annually for the best single work of fiction translated into English and published in the UK. 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 2020 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
- 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

- 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/
- The Booker Prize Archive was given on loan in 2003 to Oxford Brookes University, where it now resides.

Four Culture,
December 2020