



PRESS RELEASE

Tuesday 14 September 2021

The 2021 Booker Prize for Fiction Shortlist announced

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- Debut novelist Patricia Lockwood is shortlisted with *No One is Talking About This*
- Damon Galgut makes the list for the third time with *The Promise*, having previously been recognised for *The Good Doctor* (2006) and *In A Strange Room* (2010); Richard Powers makes his second shortlist appearance with *Bewilderment*, following *The Overstory* (2018)
- There is an equal split of men and women on the list

Anuk Arudpragasam, Damon Galgut, Patricia Lockwood, Nadifa Mohamed, Richard Powers and Maggie Shipstead are today, Tuesday 14 September, announced as the six authors shortlisted for the 2021 Booker Prize for Fiction.

The shortlist was revealed this afternoon by the 2021 Chair of Judges Maya Jasanoff in a live online celebration, chaired by BBC arts correspondent Rebecca Jones in a central London location overlooking the River Thames and streamed to readers around the world. The event can be watched on the new Booker Prizes website [here](#).

The list was chosen from 158 novels published in the UK or Ireland between 1 October 2020 and 30 September 2021. The Booker Prize for Fiction is open to works by writers of any nationality, written in English and published in the UK or Ireland.

Readers of the six shortlisted books will explore life, memory and trauma in the devastating wake of Sri Lanka's 30-year civil war; visit Pretoria during South Africa's transition out of apartheid to watch the undoing of a white South African family; unpick the absurdities of our relentless

exposure to social media when faced with the reality of human loss; witness a real-life battle against conspiracy, prejudice and a wrongful conviction for murder as a Somali seaman is hanged in Cardiff in the 1950s; experience the intense and moving love a father has for his troubled son as he pursues an experimental neurological therapy and searches for life on other planets; and travel through decades to learn of the enthralling, interwoven stories of two women: a mid-20th century aviator and a 21st century Hollywood star.

The 2021 shortlist is:

Author (Nationality)	Title (imprint)
Anuk Arudpragasam (Sri Lankan)	<i>A Passage North</i> (Granta Books, Granta Publications)
Damon Galgut (South African)	<i>The Promise</i> (Chatto & Windus, Vintage, PRH)
Patricia Lockwood (American)	<i>No One is Talking About This</i> (Bloomsbury Circus, Bloomsbury Publishing)
Nadifa Mohamed (British/Somali)	<i>The Fortune Men</i> (Viking, Penguin General, PRH)
Richard Powers (American)	<i>Bewilderment</i> (Heinemann Hutchinson, PRH)
Maggie Shipstead (American)	<i>Great Circle</i> (Doubleday, Transworld Publishers, PRH)

The six books were chosen by the 2021 judging panel: historian Maya Jasanoff (chair); writer and editor Horatia Harrod; actor Natascha McElhone; twice Booker-shortlisted novelist and professor Chigozie Obioma; and writer and former Archbishop Rowan Williams

Maya Jasanoff, chair of the 2021 judges, says:

‘With so many ambitious and intelligent books before us, the judges engaged in rich discussions not only about the qualities of any given title, but often about the purpose of fiction itself. We are pleased to present a shortlist that delivers as wide a range of original stories as it does voices and styles.

‘Perhaps appropriately for our times, these novels share an interest in how individuals are both animated and constrained by forces larger than themselves. Some are acutely introspective, taking us into the mind of a Tamil man tracing the scars of Sri Lanka’s civil war, and an American woman unplugging from the internet to cope with a family crisis. Some enter communities in the throes of historical transformation: the Cardiff docklands in the early years of British decolonisation, and the veld around Pretoria in the last years of apartheid. And some have global sweep, following a mid-century aviator in her attempt to circumnavigate the planet, and a present-day astrobiologist raising a son haunted by climate change. While each book is immersive in itself, together they are an expansive demonstration of what fiction is doing today.’

Gaby Wood, Director of the Booker Prize Foundation, adds:

‘This year, over the course of nine largely solitary months, five strangers of disparate backgrounds showed each other what they saw in stories—what dazzled them or challenged them, what touched them or left them unmoved. In the process they showed something of themselves, and came to trust each other as a result.

‘They also proved that the best literature is elastic: both because so many different things can be seen in it, and because—as one of the judges said—the best of fiction can make you feel as though your mind, or heart, are a little bit larger for having read it.

‘In congratulating the shortlistees, it’s worth remembering how true this remains of the 2021 longlist, all of which will continue to be celebrated at thebookerprizes.com, the new home of the prizes and the half-century-old Booker Library.’

Information about the 2021 shortlisted authors:

- **Anuk Arudpragasam** is a Sri Lankan Tamil novelist, shortlisted for his second novel. His first, *The Story of a Brief Marriage*, won the DSC Prize for South Asian Literature and was shortlisted for the Dylan Thomas Prize. He studied philosophy in the United States, receiving a doctorate at Columbia University and credits Descartes’ *Meditations*, which he discovered as a teenager in a bookshop near his home in Colombo, Sri Lanka, with setting him off on that path. He looked to writers Thomas Bernhard and Javier Marías for ‘their use of digression and rhythm’ when writing *A Passage North*. He is working on a new novel about mothers and daughters in the Tamil diaspora. Read his Booker Prize Q&A [here](#)
- **Damon Galgut** is a South African playwright and novelist, who wrote his first novel aged 17 and has now been shortlisted three times for the Booker Prize. He has won the Commonwealth Writers’ Prize. His eighth book, *Arctic Summer*, won the 2015 Sunday Times Fiction Prize, and two films were made of his book *The Quarry*. He grew up in Pretoria, where *The Promise* is set, and now lives in Cape Town. When asked about why he became a writer, he told *The Guardian* that he had lymphoma as a child, during which he ‘learned to associate books and stories with a certain kind of attention and comfort’. He is currently working on a collection of short stories. Read his Booker Prize Q&A [here](#)
- **Patricia Lockwood** is an American poet, novelist and essayist who was born in a trailer in Fort Wayne, Indiana. She is the only debut novelist on this year’s shortlist, having previously written two poetry collections, *Balloon Pop* *Outlaw Black* and *Motherland Fatherland Homelandsexuals*, and the memoir *Priestdaddy*, which was chosen 15 times by various publications as their book of the year. She is a contributing editor to the *London Review of Books*. *No One is Talking About This* was also shortlisted for the Women’s Prize for Fiction. She told *The New York Times* that the baby in her book — their medical issues and personality — is based on her late niece, Lena, and she wrote that part in ‘compulsive bursts’ after helping her sister care for her in NICU. She is currently working on a collection of short fiction based on notebooks she’s kept of the past 18 months, along with a new novel. Read her Booker Prize Q&A [here](#)

- **Nadifa Mohamed** is the first British Somali novelist to be shortlisted for the prize. She was born in Hargeisa, Somaliland and moved with her family to London at the age of four. *The Fortune Men* is her third novel, following *Black Mamba Boy* and *The Orchard of Lost Souls*. She has received both The Betty Trask Award and the Somerset Maugham Award, as well as numerous other prize nominations for her fiction. She was named as one of Granta's Best of Young British Novelists in 2013 and the editor of *Granta* at the time, John Freeman, is now US editor of *The Fortune Men*. She says she first became aware of Mahmood Mattan – the Somali man whose fictionalised story features in her book, and whom her father knew – in 2004, and kept checking back over the next 11 years as more information became available. Read her Booker Prize Q&A [here](#)
- **Richard Powers** is an American author of 13 novels who has now been shortlisted twice for the Booker Prize. *The Overstory*, which made the list in 2018, won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction and the 2020 American Academy of Arts and Letters' William Dean Howells Medal for the most distinguished American work of fiction published in the last five years. He is also the recipient of a MacArthur Fellowship and the National Book Award, among other accolades. He says he is indebted to Booker winner Margaret Atwood, among other writers, for *Bewilderment*, which is in part about the anxiety of family life on a damaged planet. He lives in the foothills of the Great Smoky Mountains and is currently exploring 'what social media, deep learning, hidden algorithms, and surprisingly intelligent marine creatures have to do with one another.' Read his Booker Prize Q&A [here](#)
- **Maggie Shipstead** is an American novelist who lives in LA and is shortlisted for her third novel. Her debut novel *Seating Arrangements*, published in 2012, was a *New York Times* bestseller and winner of the Dylan Thomas Prize and the *LA Times* Book Prize for First Fiction. Her work has appeared in *The New York Times*, *Guardian*, *Conde Nast Traveller*, and *The Best American Short Stories*. She is a graduate of the Iowa Writer's Workshop, a former Wallace Stegner Fellow at Stanford and a two-time National Magazine Award finalist for fiction. She told the *Independent* that her plan for *Great Circle* was to write a book about 'scale, travel and what it means to live a life that's truly free' and that it was inspired by a statue she saw of New Zealand's Jean Batten at Auckland airport. She has a collection of short stories coming out next summer. Read her Booker Prize Q&A [here](#)

The 2021 winner announcement and shortlist events

The 2021 winner will be announced on Wednesday 3 November in an award ceremony held in partnership with the BBC at Broadcasting House's Radio Theatre. It will be broadcast live on BBC Radio 4's Front Row, BBC iPlayer, and BBC News Channel. The winner of the 2021 Booker Prize receives £50,000 and can expect international recognition.

In the meantime, BBC Radio 4's Front Row is running its successful Booker Prize Book Groups for a third year with each of the six shortlisted books and authors. There will also be two hybrid in-person and digital public events featuring interviews with and readings from the authors: at Coventry University, as part of the UK City of Culture 2021 celebrations, on Friday 29 October, 7.30pm, chaired by Lemn Sissay (booking details to follow); and at Southbank Centre on Sunday 31 October, 7.30pm chaired by Kit de Waal (in-person tickets available [here](#) and digital [here](#)).

The winner will be interviewed live online in their first public event on Tuesday 9 November in partnership with Guardian Live. They will also take part in a digital event for Hay Festival's Winter Weekend, which runs from 24-28 November at hayfestival.com.

Douglas Stuart won the 2020 Booker Prize for Fiction with his debut novel *Shuggie Bain*. 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 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. It was chosen as the 'Book of the Year' by *The Times* and the *Daily Telegraph* and won both 'Debut of the Year' and 'Book of the Year' at the 2021 British Book Awards. It is now published or forthcoming in 40 territories and has already sold over three-quarters of a million copies in its Picador editions. TV and film rights have been sold to Scott Rudin/A24 for a planned TV series.

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, V.S. Naipaul to Hilary Mantel.

The rules of the prize were changed at the end of 2013 to embrace the English language 'in all its vigour, its vitality, its versatility and its glory', opening it up to writers beyond the UK and Commonwealth, providing they were writing novels in English and published in the UK.

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

By the time of the winner announcement all shortlisted titles will be available in braille, giant print and audio editions, produced by RNIB and funded by the Booker Prize Foundation.

Shortlisted books: judges' comments

Horatia Harrod on Anuk Arudpragasam's *A Passage North*

'We had to find a place on the shortlist for *A Passage North*, in which Anuk Arudpragasam turns his poetic sensibility and profound, meticulous attentiveness to the business of living in the aftermath of trauma. The story unfurls like smoke as our narrator sifts through memories of a lost love affair while turning over in his mind the strange death of his grandmother's carer, a woman irrevocably damaged by the death of her young sons in the Sri Lankan civil war. In hypnotic, incantatory style, Arudpragasam considers how we can find our way in the present while also reckoning with the past.'

Chigozie Obioma on Damon Galgut's *The Promise*

'*The Promise* is an expansive family novel that explores the interconnected relationships between members of one family through the sequential lens of multiple funerals. Death assumes here both a closing but also an opening into lives lived. It is an unusual narrative style that balances Faulknerian exuberance with Nabokovian precision, pushes boundaries, and is a testament to the

flourishing of the novel in the 21st century. In *The Promise*, Damon Galgut makes a strong, unambiguous commentary on the history of South Africa and of humanity itself that can best be summed up in the question: does true justice exist in this world? The novel's way of tackling this question is what makes it an accomplishment and truly deserving of its place on the shortlist.'

Rowan Williams on Patricia Lockwood's *No One is Talking About This*

'This is a first novel from a writer already outstanding as a poet and memoirist, and her gifts in both roles are much in evidence in this extremely funny, poignant and challenging book. Patricia Lockwood manages to tell her story in the glancing, mayfly-attention-span idiom of contemporary social media, but she uses this apparently depth-free dialect with precision and even beauty. The drastic shift of gear in the middle of the story, the introduction of real suffering, love and loss, doesn't break the seamless flow of wit; but the book's triumph is in evoking so full a range of emotional discovery and maturing within the unpromising medium of online prattle. We're left wondering about the processes by which language expands to cope with the expansiveness of changing human relations and perceptions at the edge of extremity.'

Maya Jasanoff on Nadifa Mohamed's *The Fortune Men*

'*The Fortune Men* takes us to a place we haven't encountered on the page before: the docklands of 1950s Cardiff, jostling with Somali, Welsh, Jewish, Jamaican, and Indian communities, thrown together by the tides of empire and war. In the story of Mahmood Mattan, a Somali sailor accused of murder, Nadifa Mohamed creates a story as local as it is exhilaratingly global. Grippingly-paced and full of complex, richly-drawn characters, the novel combines pointed social observation with a deeply empathetic sensibility. *The Fortune Men* demonstrates what historical fiction can achieve at its best—to get inside the head of the past—while implicitly yet urgently underscoring the present-day persistence of racism and injustice.'

Natascha McElhone on Richard Powers' *Bewilderment*

'Theo is a widowed astrobiologist raising a troubled nine-year-old son tagged with a 'special needs' label. On his mission to help the boy, Robin, he is prepared to engage with experimental treatments. He dares to decode his son's mind in order to save him, thereby drawing us into the claustrophobic relationship of a grieving man playing solo parent to a vulnerable child. Theo's determination to protect Robin from becoming a prisoner of bureaucracy, something of a high wire act of its own, is beautiful and truly inspiring. That, and his willingness to venture beyond the known world into the cosmos make this book a clarion call for us to wake up and realise what our minds might be truly capable of if we were less obedient to the status quo.'

Maya Jasanoff on Maggie Shipstead's *Great Circle*

'A book of tremendous narrative ambition and scale, *Great Circle* pulled us into its vividly-created worlds—from prohibition-era Montana to wartime Britain to present-day Hollywood—and made us want to dwell in them indefinitely. Maggie Shipstead has an extraordinary ability to conjure characters and settings so fully-realised one feels one knows them—and spills her story out in one gorgeously-crafted sentence after another. Absorbing in the manner of the immersive realist novels of the 19th century, the book speaks to ever-present questions about freedom and constraint in womens' lives.'

– Ends –

More information about the prize is available at:

www.thebookerprizes.com

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Notes to Editors

- Shortlist author, jacket and book stack images are available to download [here](#)
- Shortlisted and longlisted author biographies and synopses can be found at <https://thebookerprizes.com/the-booker-prize>
- Readers who are interested in applying to join the Front Row's Booker Prize Book Groups should email frontrow@bbc.co.uk
- The 2021 shortlist consists of six books. UK and Irish publishers may submit works of long form fiction written in the English language and published in the UK or Ireland between 1 October 2020 and 30 September 2021. The number of works a publisher can submit will depend on that publisher's inclusion in longlists over the previous five years, as follows:
 - Publishers with no longlistings - 1 submission
 - Publishers with 1 or 2 longlisting(s) - 2 submissions
 - Publishers with 3 or 4 longlistings - 3 submissions
 - Publishers with 5 or more longlistings - 4 submissions

This means that the number of submissions for each publisher may change from year to year. A new work by any author who has previously been shortlisted for The Booker Prize (pre-2002 or post-2018) or Man Booker Prize (2002-2018) is automatically eligible.

The judges also 'call-in' a number of works each year. In addition to their main submission(s), a publisher may provide a list of up to five titles for consideration, accompanied by a justification from the editor. The judges are required to call-in no fewer than eight and no more than 12 of these titles. The judges are also permitted to call-in other works published within the requisite dates, even if the work has not been submitted through any other route.

Novels published in Ireland have been eligible since 2018.

- 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 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 author and the translator. Each shortlisted author and translator receives £1,000. The 2021 winner was *At Night All Blood is Black* written by David Diop and translated by Anna Moschovakis. The 2022 judging panel is chaired by translator Frank Wynne and consists of: author and academic Merve Emre; lawyer and writer Petina Gappah; writer, critic, broadcaster and stand-up comedian Viv Groskop; and translator and author Jeremy Tiang.
- For 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; Tony Damer (treasurer) - member of the Institute of Chartered Accountants; Nick Barley - director, Edinburgh International Book Festival; Bidisha SK Mamata - writer, critic and broadcaster; Carol Lake - managing director, Philanthropy Executive at JPMorgan Chase; 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; Lamia Dabboussy - interim 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 - chief 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 - Director, Booker Prize Foundation.
- Crankstart, a charitable foundation, is the exclusive funder of The Booker Prize and The International Booker Prize.
- The 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.