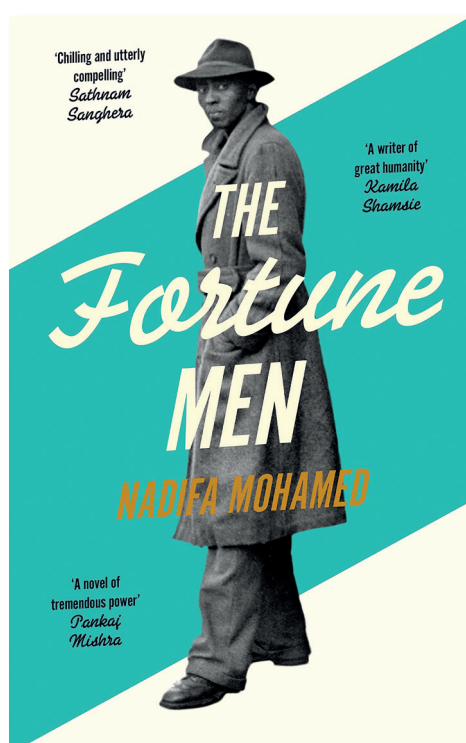


The  
2021  
Booker  
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## From Judging Room to Living Room A Discussion Guide for Readers

Featuring discussion prompts from this year's judging panel



# The Fortune Men

## Nadifa Mohamed

Viking

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

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## What the judges decided

'*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.'

- Maya Jasanoff

## What the judges discussed: ideas to explore

- How evocative did you find the portrayal of 1950s Cardiff?
- Explore the overall moral complexity of the book, and the miscarriage of justice at its heart
- Were the novel's many perspectives handled skilfully?
- The cast is made up almost entirely of minorities. Was this redressing of a balance essential, for you?
- Discuss the central character, Mahmood Mattan
- What were you left thinking about when the book ended?

## About the book

Nadifa Mohamed's *The Fortune Men* is a gripping novel about a petty criminal in Cardiff who becomes the last man to be hanged there, wrongfully convicted of murder in 1952.

Mahmood Mattan is a father, a chancer, a petty thief. Many things, in fact, but he is not a murderer. So when a shopkeeper is brutally killed and all eyes fall on him, Mahmood isn't too worried – secure in his innocence in a country where justice is served. But as the trial nears, it starts to dawn on him that he is in a fight for his life – against conspiracy, prejudice and the ultimate punishment. In the shadow of the hangman's noose, he realises that the truth may not be enough to save him.

## About the author

With her third novel *The Fortune Men*, Nadifa Mohamed becomes the first British Somali novelist to be shortlisted for the Booker Prize.

*The Fortune Men* follows two previous widely acclaimed novels, *Black Mamba Boy* and *The Orchard of Lost Souls*. Mohamed has received both The Betty Trask Award and the Somerset Maugham Award, as well as numerous other prize nominations, for her fiction. She says she first became aware of Mahmood Mattan – the Somali man whose fictionalised story features in her book and who knew her father – in 2004, and kept checking back over the next 11 years as more information became available.

## The author says...

'I first came to read about the (Mahmood Mattan) case in 2004 and for the next 11 years kept checking in as more information became available. It was only in 2015 that I started writing it as a novel and began conducting interviews in Cardiff, London and Hargeisa. I knew I wanted to make the line between fact and fiction imperceptible so immersed myself in the minute details of Mahmood's life so that I could almost think his thoughts.'

## Further reading

- Nadifa Mohamed, *Black Mamba Boy*
- Nadifa Mohamed, *The Orchard of Lost Souls*
- Nuruddin Farah, *From a Crooked Rib*
- Abdulrazak Gurnah, *Paradise*
- Trezza Azzopardi, *The Hiding Place*
- Peter Ho Davies, *The Welsh Girl*