



PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release, Wednesday 3 November 2021

The Promise wins the 2021 Booker Prize for Fiction

- It's third time lucky for Damon Galgut after shortlistings in 2003 and 2010
- He follows in the footsteps of fellow South Africans, 1974 joint winner Nadine Gordimer and double winner J. M. Coetzee (1983 and 1999)
- Set in Pretoria where Galgut grew up, *The Promise* is 'a magisterial, heart-stopping novel ... tracing the forsaken promises of the post-apartheid era' (TLS)

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Damon Galgut's *The Promise* is tonight, Wednesday 3 November, named winner of the 2021 Booker Prize for Fiction.

The announcement made by Maya Jasanoff, chair of the 2021 judges, was the culmination of a 45-minute ceremony held in partnership with the BBC at Broadcasting House's Radio Theatre. It was broadcast live to a global audience of millions as an audio programme on BBC Radio 4's Front Row, and a visual experience on BBC iPlayer, the BBC News Channel and [BBC Arts Digital](#)

Hosted by the BBC's Samira Ahmed, the ceremony featured high-profile names from the prize's past and present. All six of this year's shortlisted authors attended from all over the world. Ben Okri, 30 years on from his historic Booker win, shared his reflections on how that moment changed his career. The 2020 winner Douglas Stuart spoke with HRH The Duchess of Cornwall at Clarence House about his literary inspirations and life-changing win, before presenting Damon Galgut with his prize.

The Promise (Chatto & Windus, PRH), set in South Africa during the country's transition out of apartheid, explores the interconnected relationships between the members of a diminishing white family through the sequential lens of four funerals. Galgut told BBC *Radio 4's Front Row* during his Booker Book Club interview last week that the idea for the novel's structure came to him over a semi-drunken afternoon during which a friend described a series of funerals.

He said: 'It occurred to me that it would be a novel and interesting way of approaching a family saga. If the only thing you had was a small window that opened on to these four funerals and you didn't get the full trajectory of the family story, as a reader you'd have to fill in those gaps yourself. I'm fascinated as a writer by the edge of the map; by things that are not said'.

It is Galgut's ninth novel and first in seven years; his debut was published when he was just 17. When asked why he became a writer, he told *the Guardian* he had lymphoma as a child, during which time he 'learned to associate books and stories with a certain kind of attention and comfort'. The author, who lives in Cape Town, was previously shortlisted for the Booker Prize in 2003 for *The Good Doctor* and in 2010 with *In a Strange Room*. His 2005 novel *The Quarry* has been adapted into two films.

Maya Jasanoff, chair of the 2021 judges, says:

'*The Promise* astonished us from the outset as a penetrating and incredibly well-constructed account of a white South African family navigating the end of apartheid and its aftermath. On each reading we felt that the book grew. With an almost deceptive narrative economy, it offers moving insights into generational divides; meditates on what makes a fulfilling life—and how to process death; and explores the capacious metaphorical implications of "promise" in relation to modern South Africa.

'Galgut's searching examination of family, place, and the dysfunctions that connect them reminded us of William Faulkner. His deft inhabiting of different characters' consciousnesses evokes Virginia Woolf. All this he does with a sensibility, artistry, and scope that are entirely his own. As a spectacular demonstration of how the novel can make us see and think afresh, *The Promise* delivers. This is a book about legacies, those we inherit and those we leave, and in awarding it this year's Booker Prize we hope it will resonate with readers in decades to come.'

Jasanoff was joined on the 2021 judging panel by writer and editor Horatia Harrod; actor Natascha McElhone; twice Booker-shortlisted novelist and professor Chigozie Obioma; and writer and former Archbishop Rowan Williams.

The Promise was described by John Self in *The Times* as 'so obviously one of the best novels of the year... a book that answers the question "what is a novel for?" With a simple: "This!"' William Skidelsky wrote in the *Financial Times* that it was 'a complex, ambitious, brilliant work' and 'rarely have I had such a strong sense while reading a novel that I myself was there, in the room with the characters.'

The Bookseller reported this week that the book has sold 8,884 hardback copies, with a 241% leap (1,036 copies sold) in the week after its Booker shortlist announcement in September. It was the bookies' favourite to win.

Damon Galgut, as winner of the 2021 Booker Prize, receives £50,000, a designer-bound edition of his book, and the £2,500 given to each shortlisted author. As the winner, he can expect instant international recognition.

The Booker Prize collaborated with the BBC to commission six films that were shown during the

ceremony. Each film features an extract from a shortlisted book and is the work of a talented graduate of the BBC Arts-supported New Creatives scheme, mentored by Rural Media. The film of *The Promise* was directed by Christine Ubochi and starred David Jonsson. The films can be watched at thebookerprizes.com

Forthcoming events

Damon Galgut will take part in his first official public event as winner of the 2021 Booker Prize on Tuesday 9 November. The online event held in partnership with [Guardian Live](https://www.guardianlive.com) will see him talk to *The Guardian's* Lisa Allardice about his experience of winning the prize.

The following week, as part of five free “Winter Warmer” online events released ahead of [Hay Festival Winter Weekend](https://www.hayfestival.com), Galgut will be interviewed by Ellah P. Wakatama in a session available to stream from 15 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, V.S. Naipaul to Hilary Mantel.

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* reached 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. Rights have been sold for a planned TV series.

Thebookerprizes.com, the home of the Booker Prizes past and present, was relaunched this year and will become a hub for year-round editorial content designed to engage readers with both prizes and to foster a lifelong love of reading.

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

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More information about the prize is available at:
www.thebookerprizes.com

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About the winning book and author

Judges' comment

'*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.'

Publisher synopsis

There is nothing unusual or remarkable about the Swart family, oh no, they resemble the family from the next farm and the one beyond that, just an ordinary bunch of white South Africans, and if you don't believe it then listen to us speak ...

The many voices of *The Promise* tell a story in four snapshots, each one centered on a family funeral, each one happening in a different decade. In the background, a different president is in power, and a different spirit hangs over the country, while in the foreground the family fights over what they call their farm, on a worthless piece of land outside Pretoria.

Over large jumps in time, people get older, faces and laws and lives all change, while a brother and sister circle around a promise made long ago, and never kept ...

Author biography

Damon Galgut is an award-winning South African novelist, short story writer and playwright, who wrote his first novel aged 17. He has won the 2021 Booker Prize for *The Promise*, the 2015 Barry Ronge Fiction Prize for *Arctic Summer* and the 2003 Commonwealth Writers Prize with *The Good Doctor*, among others. Two films were made of his book *The Quarry*. In 2013, Galgut was inducted into the American Academy of Arts and Letters. He grew up in Pretoria, and now lives in Cape Town. He is currently working on a collection of short stories. Read his Booker Prize Q&A [here](#)

Notes to Editors

- Damon Galgut is available for interview. To arrange please contact Alison Davies at Penguin Random House: ADavies1@penguinrandomhouse.co.uk

- Images of the winning author and book, as well as the actors and special guests, are available to download in the link below. This folder will be updated shortly with images from the ceremony: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/themanbookerprizes/sets/>
- The special designer bound edition of the book was made by Kate Holland. It can be viewed on thebookerprizes.com, along with the finished designs for the five other shortlisted books.
- The winner was chosen from 158 novels published in the UK or Ireland between 1 October 2020 and 30 September 2021. The five 2021 Booker Prize shortlisted titles were:

Author (Nationality)	Title (imprint)
Anuk Arudpragasam (Sri Lankan)	<i>A Passage North</i> (Granta Books, Granta Publications)
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)

- Live coverage of the Booker Prize Ceremony is commissioned by BBC Arts as part of an autumn of awards ceremonies across BBC TV, Radio and digital platforms. The Commissioning Editor is Stephen James-Yeoman. Details [here](#)
- BBC Arts Digital for The 2021 Booker Prize can be found [here](#)
- Front Row, BBC Radio 4, is produced by Simon Richardson. The editor is Alice Feinstein.
- New Creatives was a national talent development scheme that encouraged artists aged 16-30 to push creative boundaries and reflect their experiences of living in Britain today in short form for film and audio. Funded by Arts Council England and BBC Arts, over two years, New Creatives has given 500 artists the chance to develop their technical and creative skills and the opportunity to have their New Creatives' commissions broadcast on BBC platforms.
- Rural Media is a Hereford-based production company and charity producing award-winning films, audio and immersive media. Founded over 25 years ago it has a reputation, locally and nationally, for telling powerful stories from unheard voices and nurturing emerging creative talent from diverse backgrounds. It creates issue-driven films and audio, heritage and immersive arts projects that raise awareness, influence social change and celebrate rural life. In 2018 Rural Media was chosen to be the New Creatives production hub for the Midlands finding and supporting young creatives living or studying in the area.
- HRH The Duchess of Cornwall has supported The Booker Prize every year since 2013. She presented the prize to Anna Burns in 2018 and in 2019 The Duchess invited the joint winners, Margaret Atwood and Bernardine Evaristo, for tea at Clarence House.

- 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 2021 winner was *At Night All Blood is Black* written by David Diop and translated by Anna Moschovakis. The £50,000 prize is divided equally between the author and the translator. From 2022, each shortlisted author and translator will receive £2,500. 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.
- [Thebookerprizes.com](https://www.thebookerprizes.com), the home of the Booker Prizes past and present, was relaunched in 2021. It has a full history of the prize including previous winners, shortlisted authors and judges. It will become a hub for year-round editorial content designed to engage readers with both prizes and to foster a lifelong love of reading.
- 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; 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 and audio. 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,
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