



**EMBARGO: Tuesday 29<sup>th</sup> June 2021 at 11am**

## **Michael Sheen leads the call for greater inclusivity in the media as support for 11 new writers is announced**

Actor Michael Sheen has called on the media industry to create options and opportunities for aspiring writers and journalists from lower income and under-represented backgrounds. Today he announces 11 new writers who will be supported by A Writing Chance, a positive intervention to a persistent industry issue that sees 75% of journalists come from the highest social groups.

A Writing Chance is co-funded by Michael Sheen and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation with support from the New Statesman and Daily Mirror. The UK-wide initiative is delivered by New Writing North with research from Northumbria University.

The project is designed to discover new talent, support new writers, and prise open an industry which remains difficult to access.

Through the project's research strand led by Northumbria University, it also seeks to better understand the barriers to success faced by aspiring writers from a broad range of backgrounds who are under-represented in the industry and to empower publishers and editors to make space for a greater range of experiences and perspectives on their pages.

Eleven writers were selected for A Writing Chance from 750 applicants. They will each receive one-to-one mentoring with an established writer or journalist, a £1500 bursary, insight days with media partners, and publication or broadcast of their work.

The project was instigated by Sheen inspired by the successful *Common People* anthology of working-class writers in 2019, which profiled and supported new writers alongside established names and which created debate within the publishing industry about representation.

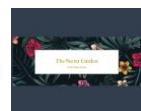
### **The writers selected for A Writing Chance are:**

- Mayo Agard-Olubo, based in London
- Tammie Ash, based in Bradford
- David Clancy, based in Ulverston
- Jacqueline Houston, based in Glasgow
- Maya Jordan, based in Newtown
- Anna Maxwell, based in Lancaster
- Tom Newlands, based in London

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- Grace Quantock, based in Pontypool
- Elias Suhail, based in Folkestone
- Stephen Tuffin, based in Swindon
- Becka White, based in London

**Michael Sheen said:** “The talent among our 11 writers is phenomenal. Combined with the diversity of their voices and at times revelatory points of view this is a real powerhouse of a group. They go way beyond the hopes I had for this project and make me so excited for not only what they themselves will go on to achieve but also the countless other yet to be discovered voices across all our communities.”

**Husna Mortuza, Deputy Director of Advocacy and Public Engagement, Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) said:** “The published conversation frames how we think and feel about the world around us. The best writing shows us who we are by reflecting our lives. Currently, those who get to write, edit and set the agenda, too often do so through a very narrow prism of experience. We know visibility matters, and when a diverse group of writers are able to be published and progress in their careers, we all benefit from a greater understanding of our collective experience. JRF are proud to co-fund this positive initiative, and are delighted to be supporting such a talented group from underrepresented and lower income backgrounds”.

**Claire Malcolm, Chief Executive, New Writing North said:** "The media and publishing industries are very competitive fields of work that require exceptional talent to succeed: but talent alone won't grant you access, especially if you lack confidence, role models, useful networks, a financial cushion, the right education and encouragement or the ability to persevere through knock backs and rejections.

For many new writers, progress does not correspond to their talent and is defined more by a structural lack of opportunities; they will just never get the opportunity to shine. That's why we're really excited about this intervention to empower a cohort of new writers and to prise open the doors to a persistently hard to crack industry, to encourage access for all. We all deserve to hear different perspectives and new stories that better reflect the experiences and concerns of most people in this country."

**Katy Shaw, Professor of Contemporary Writings and Faculty Director of Partnerships at Northumbria University, said:** “I am delighted to be working as researcher in residence for A Writing Chance. By explicitly embedding research into the design of the programme we aim to generate new evidence about what works and what is needed to address disparities of access, representation and perspective in UK media writing today. Partnership working is a stylistic trait of how we do teaching and research at Northumbria University. This ambitious new collaboration between the university, JRF, NWN, Daily Mirror and New Statesman shows what can be achieved when we work across sectors, leveraging our resources and expertise, to generate new solutions to recognised challenges.”

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**Full details of A Writing Chance are available at [AWritingChance.co.uk](http://AWritingChance.co.uk)**

For any enquiries regarding Michael Sheen, please get in touch with CLD Communications

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For enquiries regarding the new writers selected for A Writing Chance, please get in touch with New Writing North

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### **Ends**

A Writing Chance is co-funded by Michael Sheen and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation with support from the Daily Mirror and New Statesman.

The programme is produced by New Writing North with research from Northumbria University.

### **Project partners:**

#### **Daily Mirror**

Since 1903 the Mirror has informed millions of readers, combining entertainment with must-read political news. Politically the Mirror sits left of centre, and has backed the Labour Party in every election since 1945.

The Mirror has a long history as a campaigning newspaper - following the sinking of the Titanic it led the charge calling for more lifeboats on ships. More recently, the Mirror has focused on child poverty, climate change, homelessness, and successfully campaigned to change the law on organ donation (Max and Keira's Law).

The Mirror also launched the Pride of Britain awards 20 years ago, celebrating ordinary people who have achieved extraordinary things. For more info visit [Mirror.co.uk](http://Mirror.co.uk).

#### **Joseph Rowntree Foundation**

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation is an independent social change organisation working to solve UK poverty. We work with private, public and voluntary sectors, and people with lived experience of poverty, to find solutions to end the injustice of poverty. For more information visit [jrf.org.uk](http://jrf.org.uk).

#### **New Statesman**

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The New Statesman is an award-winning weekly politics and culture magazine. Founded in 1913, the print magazine has subsequently been joined by a thriving website and other digital platforms.

Past contributors to the New Statesman include H G Wells, John Maynard Keynes, Virginia Woolf, Christopher Hitchens and Arundhati Roy – and today writers such as Stephen Bush, John Gray, Megan Nolan, Gary Younge, Rowan Williams and Deborah Levy fulfil its promise of “enlightened thinking in dark times”. The magazine has been guest-edited by Ai Wei Wei, Grayson Perry, Jemima Khan and Neil Gaiman and Amanda Palmer, among others.

In 2021, the NS won two prestigious British Society of Magazine Editors awards: the editor-in-chief Jason Cowley was named, for the fourth time, current affairs and politics editor of the year, and the 5 June 2020 issue, “We Can’t Breathe”, was named consumer cover of the year.

## **New Writing North**

New Writing North is the development agency for creative writing and reading in the North of England, and an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation. The organisation works in partnership with regional and national partners to produce a range of literary and performance activities including flagship projects such as the Northern Writers’ Awards, the Gordon Burn Prize, Read Regional, Young Writers and Durham Book Festival. New Writing North specialises in developing and investing in writers of all ages and acts as a dynamic broker between writers, producers, publishers and broadcasters across the creative industries. Partners include BBC Radio 3, Channel 4 Drama, Faber & Faber, Sky Studios and higher education partners including Durham University, Northumbria University and University of York. As a producer of new work, New Writing North commissions a wide range of writing from topical essays and publications to award-winning dance theatre productions, short films, live literature and broadcast projects.

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

**Northumbria University** Northumbria University is based in the heart of Newcastle upon Tyne and plays a key role in the cultural life of the city. Staff and students regularly work in partnership with outstanding cultural and creative organisations, including BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art, Live Theatre, Tyneside Cinema, and Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums. The University also has a decade-long partnership with New Writing North, acting as headline sponsor of the Northern Writers’ Awards and working together on a number of cultural research projects during that time.

The University offers a variety of creative and cultural academic programmes at undergraduate and postgraduate level, including in English, Creative Writing and Creative and Cultural Industries Management. In addition to teaching, Northumbria academics are engaged in research projects aimed at diversifying the creative industries and decentralising the UK publishing industry. These include the Common People project, which explored the

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barriers working class writers face and the changes needed to make the publishing industry more accessible; and the Northern Culture All Party Parliamentary Group, which is currently exploring what Northern Culture needs to rebuild, rebalance and recover in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Northumbria is ranked 27th in the UK (The Guardian University Guide 2021). Find out more at [www.northumbria.ac.uk](http://www.northumbria.ac.uk)

## Writer bios

### **Mayo Agard-Olubo**

Mayo Agard-Olubo is a writer and poet based in London. His first public performance was when he was invited to read his Olympics inspired poem 'Why did you?' at the opening of the Glass Mill leisure centre in Lewisham in 2013. He has been published in numerous anthologies including the *National Poetry* anthology (2015) and the *Men of Words* anthology (2015) by United Press as well as *Black Lives Matter: Poems for a New World* (2021) by Civic Leicester. He was a featured poet on medium.com for World Poetry Day 2016 and his poem 'Love Learning' was published in the online magazine *The Synapse*.

### **Tammie Ash**

Tammie hails from Bradford and studied Civil & Structural Engineering at the University of Leeds, graduating in 2017. She worked as a civil engineer before changing career to work as a freelancer in the TV industry, gaining experience in development and documentary production. She gained her first writing commission with A Writing Chance and hopes to continue writing.

### **David Clancy**

Born in 1971, David is a hairdresser in the festival town of Ulverston. After years of hearing and telling stories orally David began to write them down; like all good hairdressers' tales they are a balanced mix of fact and fiction. Concentrating mainly on LGBTQI+ lives, interests and issues David's work has been published in local newspapers and heard on BBC Radio Cumbria. David is currently working on his first novel.

### **Jacqueline Houston**

Jacqueline Houston was born in Galloway, Scotland in 1970. A factual television freelancer for two decades, she has powdered Giorgio Armani's nose, pursued alien life-forms in India and been laughed at by a remote tribe in Tanzania for having ginger hair. Despite all this, she is entirely new to writing. She lives in Glasgow and likes having her knees punctured by old moggies.

### **Maya Jordan**

Maya Jordan is originally from England but is now happily nestled in the land of her ancestors in rural Mid Wales. She's always written but assorted cats, dogs, pet snakes,

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hamsters as well as six children took up most of her spare time. Now with no snakes in sight, in 2021 she completed an MA in Creative Writing with the Open University and is working on a novel. When not writing she is obsessed with all things textile and sews her own clothes, knits socks, and makes fabulous quilts. Trying to learn Welsh, her perfect afternoon is sitting in the garden with a good book and a cup of tea, practising her Welsh pronunciation on the dog. As well as fiction she writes children's stories and has had creative nonfiction published in *Lumpen*.

## **Anna Maxwell**

Anna writes dramatic monologues, flash fiction and micro fiction. Her enthusiasm for dramatic monologues began in her late 20's when she was a member of a women's drama group in Lancaster and she wrote and performed her own piece to an audience. Anna also writes semi-autobiographically often using the stream-of-consciousness style. She loves hard-hitting drama and writes short stories and plays incorporating her own experiences, weaving in the stories people tell her in conversation. Anna attends a creative writing class which is her forum for writing and presenting her work to her peers.

## **Tom Newlands**

Tom Newlands is a Scottish writer, living in London. He studied poetry at the Faber Academy and the Poetry School, before starting a novel in March 2020. In his writing Tom is interested in exploring disability, class consciousness and material culture and he is passionate about bringing warmth and humour to difficult subject matter. He is a sucker for any story that features fly-tipped consumer electronics, or grit bins. Tom is also a visual artist and when not writing he works for an art gallery in central London.

## **Grace Quantock**

Grace Quantock is a writer and psychotherapeutic counsellor. She writes narrative non-fiction at the intersection of creative arts, social justice and marginalised bodies. She has been awarded the Francis Reckett Award and was long listed for The London Library Emerging Writers and Jerwood Arts awards. She lives in Wales and is passionate about emerging essay forms, therapeutic writing and journaling.

## **Elias Suhail**

Elias is an emerging British-Moroccan writer and director. He spent a number of years freelancing behind the scenes on TV dramas and independent features for filmmakers such as Joanna Hogg and Ken Loach, before he eventually turned his hand to writing at the start of the pandemic in 2020.

Elias was selected to take part in the 2020 SAFAR Arab Film Development Programme in association with the Arab British Centre, the French Institute and the ICA; he was also part of the 2021 BFI Network Film Development Programme cohort, during which time he developed and wrote a short screenplay.

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Elias hopes to use his confluence of experiences to tell stories that offer a deeper understanding of the multiplicity of Arab identity.

## **Stephen Tuffin**

Steve was born in 1958 on a council estate on the south-east coast of England. A former butcher's boy, cook, cab driver, door-to-door salesman, care home assistant, road worker and builder, he now teaches creative writing. Aged 40, his world was flipped arse-upwards when he was diagnosed with an arthritic condition that meant he could no longer earn his keep as a carpenter. By the time he was 50 he had two degrees and a part-time job teaching. He is a working-class writer writing working-class stories inspired by the remarkable and raw world he has lived and worked in for most of his life. He loves his family, his mates, his cats Claude and Noah, the blues, beer, books, writing and the occasional roll-up.

## **Becka White**

Becka White works in the human rights sector. Before that, she spent many years subtitling live news on TV. Becka is a loud, proud feminist, and mum to two young critical thinkers. Language is her first true (non-human) love. In her free time, she can be found cooking, reading, and leaving 40 minute voice-notes to her friends. Becka lives in south-east London, down the road from where she grew up. She wishes she had a cat, for bio purposes.

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