

GORDON BURN PRIZE

Press release: Embargoed until Friday 5 March 2021

Mina, Okojie, Owusu and Cain to judge Gordon Burn Prize 2021

Prize opens for entries until Wednesday 7 April

Denise Mina has been appointed as the new chair of the judges of the Gordon Burn Prize. Along with literary journalist and editor **Sian Cain**, novelist and short story writer **Irenosen Okojie**, and writer and poet **Derek Owusu**, she will judge the Gordon Burn Prize 2021. The prize is run in partnership by the Gordon Burn Trust, New Writing North, Faber & Faber and Durham Book Festival, a Durham County Council festival. It is now open for entry until Wednesday 7 April 2021.

The Gordon Burn Prize, founded in 2012, remembers the late author of novels including *Fullalove* and *Born Yesterday: The News as a Novel*, and non-fiction including *Happy Like Murderers: The Story of Fred and Rosemary West* and *Best and Edwards: Football, Fame and Oblivion*.

The prize seeks to celebrate the writing of those whose work follows in Burn's footsteps. It recognises literature that is forward-thinking and fearless in its ambition and execution, often playing with style, pushing boundaries, crossing genres or challenging readers' expectations.

Like Gordon's own work, the Gordon Burn Prize is open to a diverse range of themes and perspectives drawn from the breadth of today's cultural and social concerns. It welcomes books by writers emerging from backgrounds underrepresented in the mainstream literary culture.

The judges seek work that shows an affinity with the spirit and sensibility of Gordon's literary methods: novels which dare to enter history and interrogate the past; writers of non-fiction brave enough to recast characters and historical events to create a new and vivid reality.

Chair of the judges Denise Mina won the prize in 2017, for her true crime novel *The Long Drop*. **Mina said:** "I am deeply honoured to have been asked to be Chair of the Gordon Burn Prize. The breadth, profundity and audacity of Burn's work is evident in the work of so many of the exciting writers that came after him and it is a delight to be part of that celebration."

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Irenosen Okojie said: "I'm thrilled to be a judge for this brilliant prize celebrating daring writing across genres. Books are a lifeblood in these tumultuous times. I'm excited to read dynamic works encapsulating the metamorphic power of storytelling."

Sian Cain said: "Gordon Burn was a very rare writer: someone who was irresistibly drawn to darkness and trauma, but also understood the importance of compassion. As a reader I have long admired Burn's work, and as a journalist I am very honoured to judge a prize in his name. I look forward to reading the submitted books."

Derek Owusu said: "It is an honour to judge any literary prize, but I'm super excited to be judging the Gordon Burn Prize. Innovative fiction is always pushing literature forward so to be able to have the opportunity to deep dive into some of the most recent is something I really look forward to."

The Gordon Burn Prize is open to published fiction and non-fiction books written in the English language. The winner will be announced on Thursday 14 October 2021 at Durham Book Festival, a Durham County Council festival produced by New Writing North. The winning writer will receive a cheque for £5,000 and the opportunity to undertake a writing retreat of up to three months at Gordon Burn's cottage in the Scottish borders.

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For all media enquiries, please contact Laura Fraine at New Writing North laurafraine@newwritingnorth.com 07411 164 837/ 0191 204 8850

Notes to Editors:

About Gordon Burn

Gordon Burn was born in Newcastle upon Tyne in 1948 and brought up in a working-class household. He began his career as a journalist, writing for publications including the *Guardian*, *Rolling Stone* and *Esquire*, and becoming renowned as an interviewer and feature writer.

Gordon was the author of four novels: *Alma Cogan* (winner of the Whitbread First Novel Prize), *Fullalove*, *The North of England Home Service* and *Born Yesterday: The News as a Novel*. He was also the author of the non-fiction titles *Somebody's Husband*, *Somebody's Son*, *Pocket Money*, *Happy Like Murderers*, *On the Way to*

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Work (with Damien Hirst) and *Best and Edwards*. His last book, *Sex & Violence, Death & Silence*, was a collection of his essays on art.

Gordon Burn belonged, and felt himself to belong, to an American tradition born in the High Sixties. A lover of Capote, Mailer and New Journalism, in his career as a writer, Gordon applied the rigour and tenacity of a reporter and journalist to what was often a fictional template.

A literary polymath, Gordon Burn wrote about subjects as seemingly disparate as serial killers, celebrity, sport and art, often blurring the line between fact and fiction. He carved out a unique place for himself in contemporary British writing, often responding to real, spectacular, sometimes appalling events.

An art expert, Gordon counted many writers and artists amongst his friends, while remaining deeply suspicious of the establishment which made access difficult to those from backgrounds like his own. The prize founded in Gordon's name aims to recognise brilliant writing that often finds its readers outside the mainstream and acknowledge the extent of his influence on subsequent generations of writers.

Previous winners of the Gordon Burn Prize are:

Peter Pomerantsev, *This Is Not Propaganda* (2020)

David Keenan, *For The Good Times* (2019)

Jesse Ball, *Census* (2018)

Denise Mina, *The Long Drop* (2017)

David Szalay, *All That Man Is* (2016)

Dan Davies, *In Plain Sight: The Life and Lies of Jimmy Savile* (2015)

Paul Kingsnorth, *The Wake* (2014)

Benjamin Myers, *Pig Iron* (2013)

Prize eligibility

The Gordon Burn Prize seeks to reward a published title (fiction or non-fiction) written in the English language, which in the opinion of the judges most successfully represents the spirit and sensibility of Gordon's literary methods: novels which dare to enter history and interrogate the past; writers of non-fiction brave enough to recast characters and historical events to create a new and vivid reality. Literature that challenges perceived notions of genre and makes us think again about just what it is that we are reading.

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The prize is open to work written in World English by writers of any nationality. The prize is open to books published between 1 July 2020 and 1 July 2021. Publishers are permitted to submit up to eight titles per imprint. Works of translation, books for children and poetry are not eligible for the prize.

Full entry guidelines are available on the Gordon Burn Prize website
<http://gordonburnprize.com>

Judges' biographies

Denise Mina (Chair of the judges)

Denise Mina is the author of the Garnethill Trilogy (1998) Paddy Meehan novels and the Alex Morrow Series. Stand-alones include *Sanctum* (*Deception* in the US), *Conviction*, *The Less Dead* and *The Long Drop*. Plays include *Ida Tamson*, *A Drunk Woman Looks at the Thistle* (hour long performance poem), *Meet Me* and an adaptation of Brecht's *Mr Puntilla and His Man Matti* for a co-production between the Traverse, Citizens and Dot Theatre company of Istanbul. An improvised comedy series *Group* pilot premiered on BBC Scotland 2020.

Comics include a year-long run on *Hellblazer*, an original graphic novel *A Sickness in the Family* and an adaptation of Stieg Larsson's Millenium Trilogy.

Literary prizes include the CWA Dagger for best first novel, CWA Dagger for short story of the year which she won twice, the Theakston's Old Peculiar Award in two consecutive years and the 2017 Gordon Burn and MacIvanney Prizes for *The Long Drop* and *the Less Dead*. *Conviction* was a joint winner of the MacIvanney Prize 2019, a New York Times best seller and a Reese Witherspoon Book Club pick. She has been shortlisted for The Edgar, The CWA historical Dagger and short story dagger. In 2020 *The Less Dead* was shortlisted for the Costa Novel of the Year

She has served as a judge for the CWA, The Womens' Prize for Fiction and the David Cohen Prize.

She has written for The New York Times, La Liberation, The Guardian and the Herald and is a regular contributor on radio and television.

Irenosen Okojie is a Nigerian British writer. Her debut novel *Butterfly Fish* won a Betty Trask award and was shortlisted for an Edinburgh International First Book Award. Her work has been featured in the *New York Times*, the *Observer*, the *Guardian*, the BBC and the *Huffington Post* amongst other publications. Her short stories have been published internationally including Salt's

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Best British Short Stories 2017 and 2020, *Kwani?* and *The Year's Best Weird Fiction*. She was presented at the London Short Story Festival by Booker Prize-winning author Ben Okri as a dynamic talent and featured in the *Evening Standard* Magazine as one of London's exciting new authors. Her short story collection, *Speak Gigantular*, published by Jacaranda Books was shortlisted for the Edge Hill Prize, the Jhalak Prize, the Saboteur Awards and nominated for a Shirley Jackson Award. Her new collection of stories, *Nudibranch*, published by Little Brown's Dialogue Books was longlisted for the Jhalak Prize. She is the winner of the 2020 AKO Caine Prize for Fiction for her story, *Grace Jones*. She is a fellow and Vice Chair of the Royal Society of Literature.

Derek Owusu is an award-winning writer and poet from North London. In 2019, Owusu collated, edited and contributed to *SAFE: On Black British Men Reclaiming Space*, an anthology exploring the experiences of Black men in Britain. His first novel, *That Reminds Me*, and the first work of fiction to be published by Stormzy's Merky Books imprint, won the Desmond Elliot Prize for debut fiction. In 2020, Owusu was one of the founding members of the Black Writers Guild, whose formation was due to the lack of representation and inequalities that exist within mainstream publishing in the UK.

Sian Cain is a literary journalist and editor at the *Guardian*. Born in Australia, she worked at the ABC before moving to London, where she has worked at CNN and the *Guardian*. Specialising in books and publishing, she has interviewed authors including George Saunders, Helen Garner and Neil Gaiman. Previously a host on the *Guardian's* Books Podcast, she regularly chairs live events with authors, including Sally Rooney, Bernardine Evaristo and Armitstead Maupin. She is a judge on the 2021 Encore Award.