

GORDON BURN PRIZE

Strictly embargoed until 00.01hrs on Thursday 25 January 2024

Shortlist announced for the Gordon Burn Prize 2023–24

The shortlist for the Gordon Burn Prize 2023–24, which recognises and celebrates fiction and non-fiction books that are fearless in their ambition and execution, is announced today (Thursday 25 January).

The seven books on the Gordon Burn Prize 2023-24 shortlist are:

- *Killing Thatcher* by Rory Carroll (Mudlark)
- *If I Survive You* by Jonathan Escoffery (4th Estate)
- *Wifedom: Mrs Orwell's Invisible Life* by Anna Funder (Viking)
- *O Brother* by John Niven (Canongate Books)
- *Ordinary Human Failings* by Megan Nolan (Jonathan Cape)
- *Kick the Latch* by Kathryn Scanlan (Daunt Originals)
- *Split Tooth* by Tanya Tagaq (And Other Stories)

Founded in 2012 by New Writing North, Faber & Faber and the Gordon Burn Trust, the Gordon Burn Prize has built a reputation for identifying and celebrating brilliant books that often find their readers outside the mainstream. With new sponsorship from Newcastle University and NCLA, the Newcastle Centre for the Literary Arts, the prize fund for 2023–24 has doubled to £10,000.

The prize remembers the writer Gordon Burn, who died in 2009, and seeks to celebrate those who follow in his footsteps. A journalist and author of ten books, his work includes the novels *Alma Cogan* and *Fullalove* and non-fiction titles *Pocket Money* and *Happy Like Murderers*. Like Burn's own work, the books recognised by the Gordon Burn Prize often push boundaries, cross genres or otherwise challenge readers' expectations.

The shortlist was selected by the Gordon Burn Prize 2023-24 judges Terri White (chair), Charlie Brinkhurst-Cuff, Andrew Hankinson and Sheena Patel.

Terri White, chair of judges, said:

'Seven books on the shortlist? Yes, yes, we were greedy this year. But after hours of discussion and debate, it was clear we'd need to take through all seven brilliant, blazing, eclectic books to fully represent the prize, and the legacy of Gordon's writing, today.

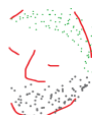
We often found ourselves struggling for the word to define them - novel, memoir, true crime, biography, all shown up as wildly insufficient for books that wrangled, blended, mashed, incinerated and reinvented. That made us ask, *what the bloody hell are we reading*.

Whether it's the story of a horse trainer in the American midwest; of the IRA's efforts to kill Thatcher in Brighton; or of an Inuk girl growing up in the Arctic, these books all summon Gordon's spirit.

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Collectively, they interrogate history, perspective, form, genre and the line between fact and fiction. They take insane risks. And they do so with fresh voice and fascinations rooted in today.'

Andrew Hankinson said: 'We've ended up with a shortlist of books which, as a writer, make you want to raise your game. They provide a broad range of stories, as well as of voices and approaches to writing. Every book on there is exceptional.'

Sheena Patel said: 'These books reflect Gordon Burn's ethos of form-pushing, well-told stories with strong writing at their core.'

Professor Jo Robinson, Head of the School of English Literature, Language and Linguistics, Newcastle University, said: "The shortlisted titles evidence challenging and innovative approaches to important, vital stories. Newcastle University, and NCLA, are delighted to be working with New Writing North to support the Gordon Burn Prize in 2023-24 and beyond."

The Gordon Burn Prize 2023–24 winner will be announced on 7 March 2024 at an event at Northern Stage in Gordon Burn's home city of Newcastle upon Tyne. The event will include readings from the shortlisted books and will be hosted by the BBC's Nick Ahad. The winning writer will receive £10,000 and the chance to undertake a writing retreat at Gordon Burn's cottage in Berwickshire.

-- ENDS --

For all media enquiries, including high-res images and interview requests, please contact Laura Creyke at MHM on laura@markhutchinsonmanagement.co.uk / 07951 777 407

NOTES TO EDITORS

About the Gordon Burn Prize 2023–24 shortlist

***Killing Thatcher* by Rory Carroll (Mudlark)**

The gripping account of how the IRA came astonishingly close to killing Margaret Thatcher and to wiping out the British Cabinet – an extraordinary assassination attempt linked to the Northern Ireland Troubles and the most daring conspiracy against the Crown since the Gunpowder Plot. An exciting narrative that blends true crime with political history, this is the first major book to investigate the Brighton attack.

Rory Carroll has had a long and highly successful career as a foreign correspondent and is currently the *Guardian's* chief Ireland correspondent. He was a twelve-year-old living in Dublin at the time and remembers the scenes in the aftermath of the Brighton bombing and remembers the scenes in the aftermath. In 2018 he returned to Dublin and found himself spellbound by the memoirs, biographies, police reports, court records, testimonies and eyewitness accounts of a story which he had assumed was familiar but was anything but. *Killing Thatcher* is born from that fascination.

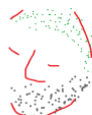
***If I Survive You* by Jonathan Escoffery (4th Estate)**

If I Survive You pulses with inimitable style, heart and barbed humour while unravelling what it means to carve out an existence between cultures, homes and pay checks. It announces Jonathan Escoffery as a chronicler of life at its most gruesome and hopeful.

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He is the recipient of the 2020 Plimpton Prize for Fiction, the 2020 ASME Award for Fiction and a 2020 National Endowment for the Arts Literature fellowship. *If I Survive You* was shortlisted for the Booker Prize in 2023. His writing has appeared in the *Paris Review*, *American Short Fiction*, *Electric Literature*, *Zyzzyyva* and *AGNI*, and has been anthologized in *The Best American Magazine Writing 2020* and elsewhere. Jonathan is a Stegner Fellow at Stanford University and resides in Oakland, CA.

***Wifedom: Mrs Orwell's Invisible Life* by Anna Funder** (Viking)

A blazing feminist text uncovering the life of Eileen O'Shaughnessy, a woman forgotten by history, and the hidden creative genius of women everywhere.

Anna Funder is the author of prize-winning books *Stasiland* and *All That I Am*, both international bestsellers and published in over twenty-four countries, and the novella *The Girl with the Dogs*. She lives in Sydney.

***O Brother* by John Niven** (Canongate Books)

A memoir that is by turns heart-breaking and hilarious, *O Brother* evokes a working-class childhood of the 1970s and 80s and tries to answer the questions of guilt, culpability and regret that often haunt the survivors of suicide.

John Niven is the author of eleven books including *Kill Your Friends*, *The Second Coming* and *Straight White Male*. As a screenwriter his credits include *The Trip*, *Kill Your Friends* and *How to Build a Girl*. *O Brother* is his first non-fiction book. John lives in the UK.

***Ordinary Human Failings* by Megan Nolan** (Jonathan Cape)

It's 1990 in London and, after the death of a young girl on an estate, the finger of suspicion is pointing at one reclusive Irish family: the Greens. At their heart sits Carmel: beautiful, other-worldly, and once destined for a future beyond her circumstances until life – and love – got in her way. Now, as the scandal unfolds and the tabloids hunt their monster, she must confront the secrets and silences that have trapped her family for so many generations.

Megan Nolan was born in 1990 in Waterford, Ireland and is currently based in London. Her essays and reviews have been published by the *New York Times*, the *White Review*, the *Guardian* and *Frieze* amongst others. Her debut novel, *Acts of Desperation*, was the recipient of a Betty Trask Award, shortlisted for the *Sunday Times* Young Writer of the Year Award and longlisted for the Dylan Thomas Prize.

***Kick the Latch* by Kathryn Scanlan** (Daunt Originals)

Based on transcribed interviews with Sonia, a horse trainer, this novel investigates form and authenticity. It vividly captures the arc of one woman's life at the racetrack – the flat land and ramshackle backstretch; the bad feelings and friction; the winner's circle and the racetrack bar; the fancy suits and fancy boots; and the 'particular language' of 'grooms, jockeys, trainers, racing secretaries, stewards, pony people, hotwalkers, everybody' – with economy and integrity.

Kathryn Scanlan is the author of *The Dominant Animal* and lives in Los Angeles. Her work has appeared in *NOON*, *Granta* and the *Paris Review*. She has degrees in painting, writing and English from the University of Iowa and the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Her debut novel, *AUG 9—FOG*, a literary adaptation of a found diary, was published by FSG in 2019.

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Split Tooth by Tanya Tagaq (And Other Stories)

An Inuk girl grows up in the Arctic in the 1970s. In this acclaimed debut novel – haunting, exhilarating, and tender all at once – Tagaq explores a gritty small town and the electrifying proximity of the worlds of animals and of myth.

From Ikaluktutiak (Cambridge Bay, Nunavut, Canada), internationally celebrated artist Tanya Tagaq is an improvisational throat singer, avant-garde composer and bestselling author. A member of the Order of Canada, winner of the Polaris Music Prize (a Canadian equivalent to the Mercury Music Prize), Tagaq is an original disruptor, a world-changing figure at the forefront of seismic social, political and environmental change.

Gordon Burn Prize 2023–24 judges:

- Terri White (chair), journalist, screenwriter and author of the memoir *Coming Undone*.
- Charlie Brinkhurst-Cuff, journalist, columnist and editor of books including *Black Joy* and *Mother Country: Real Stories of the Windrush Children*.
- Andrew Hankinson, journalist and author of *Don't applaud. Either laugh or don't. (At the Comedy Cellar.)* and *You Could Do Something Amazing with Your Life [You are Raoul Moat]*.
- Sheena Patel, author of *I'm a Fan*, member of the 4 BROWN GIRLS WHO WRITE writing collective, and assistant director for film and TV.

Previous winners of the Gordon Burn Prize:

- 2022 *Aftermath*, Preti Taneja
- 2021 *A Little Devil in America: Notes in Praise of Black Performance*, Hanif Abdurraqib
- 2020 *This Is Not Propaganda*, Peter Pomerantsev
- 2019 *For the Good Times*, David Keenan
- 2018 *Census*, Jesse Ball
- 2017 *The Long Drop*, Denise Mina
- 2016 *All That Man Is*, David Szalay
- 2015 *In Plain Sight: The Life and Lies of Jimmy Savile*, Dan Davies
- 2014 *The Wake*, Paul Kingsnorth
- 2013 *Pig Iron*, Benjamin Myers

The Gordon Burn Prize 2023–24 was open to works in English published between 1 July 2022 and 30 November 2023 by writers of any nationality.

About New Writing North

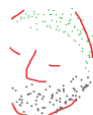
New Writing North leads the development of creative writing and reading in the North of England. We believe that writing talent is everywhere, but that opportunities are not. We work hard to both identify talent and create fantastic career-changing opportunities for people from across society. We develop programmes and activities that inspire people to engage with creative writing and reading, whether this is to develop their skills and professional ambitions or for pleasure and

wellbeing. We help excellent writing find local, regional, national and international audiences. We are based in Newcastle upon Tyne, where we have produced nationally significant work since 1996.

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About NCLA

Newcastle Centre for the Literary Arts, based in the School of English Literature, Language and Linguistics at Newcastle University, is a world-class centre of excellence in the field of creative writing, contributing to the cultural life of the North East via readings, projects, teaching and research.

About Newcastle University

Newcastle University, UK, is a thriving international community of more than 28,000 students from over 130 countries worldwide.

As a member of the Russell Group of research-intensive universities in the UK, Newcastle has a world-class reputation for research excellence in the fields of medicine, science and engineering, social sciences and the humanities.

Its academics are sharply focused on responding to the major challenges facing society today. Research and teaching are world-leading in areas as diverse as health, culture, technology and the environment.

Newcastle University is committed to providing students with excellent, research-led teaching delivered by dedicated and passionate teachers.

Newcastle University is ranked 110th in the QS World Ranking 2024 and joint 168th in the Times Higher Education World University Ranking 2024.

Newcastle University is ranked fourth in the UK and joint 24th in the world for sustainable development in the Times Higher Education Impact Rankings 2023.

