

# GORDON BURN PRIZE

Strictly embargoed until 22.00hrs, Thursday 7 March 2024

## Kathryn Scanlan wins the Gordon Burn Prize 2023-24 with **Kick the Latch**

The winner of the £10,000 Gordon Burn Prize is Kathryn Scanlan for **Kick the Latch**, published by Daunt Books. Kathryn was announced as the Gordon Burn Prize winner by chair of judges Terri White at an event at Northern Stage in Newcastle this evening (Thursday 7 March). **Kick the Latch** is a bravura investigation of authenticity and form centred on the world of horse training. Kathryn wins £10,000 and the chance to take up a writing retreat at Gordon Burn's cottage in Berwickshire.

The Gordon Burn Prize recognises and celebrates fiction and non-fiction books that are fearless in their ambition and execution which push boundaries, cross genres and challenge readers' expectations. The winner was selected by the Gordon Burn Prize 2023-24 judges Terri White (chair), Charlie Brinkhurst-Cuff, Andrew Hankinson and Sheena Patel.

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.

**Kick the Latch**, published in January 2023 by independent publisher Daunt Books, is based on transcribed interviews with Sonia, a horse trainer. 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 *Fence*, and is forthcoming in *The Paris Review*. Her story 'The Old Mill' was selected by Michael Cunningham for the 2010 Iowa Review Fiction Prize. 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.

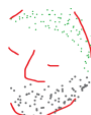
On winning the Gordon Burn Prize, Kathryn Scanlan said: "It's a thrill and an honor to receive this prize, which is unique in its recognition of work that plays with form, style and genre. I'm grateful to the judges and to Gordon Burn, to my publisher Daunt Books, and to Sonia, the book's subject, narrator, and inspiration."

Chair of judges Terri White said: "Kathryn Scanlan's **Kick the Latch** is a thundering achievement, liberated from hard lines of genre and form by a laser-focus on not just excavation, but building of voice. From transcriptions of interviews with a real-life horse trainer, Scanlan carves this uncompromising book of restraint and authenticity. One that scuffs the line between the 'she' and the 'I'. That drags us along, breathless, between the hooves.

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It's the novel in a state of metempsychosis. Scanlan hammering it into submission, bending it under heat, skill, and force. **Kick the Latch** is of now, yet sharing much that made Gordon's work remarkable in his lifetime and beyond. Worlds made of fact high on fiction's supply; the sheer weirdness of reality; ability to burrow in a belly and emerge with the truth of a person's life (and their humanity); a pin-sharp summoning of place; dominance of the first-person; recognition of the complexity of lives in the margins. It seems oddly-fitting that Gordon's spirit lives on today in the work of LA-based Scanlan and her account of the small world of horseracing in small American towns. I'd call it both a continuing dialogue with a country that brought about Gordon's own reckoning with the novel, and testament to the long-arm of his influence, endurance of his fascinations. Today, Gordon Burn's voice is still heard where this conversation echoes, his touch felt wherever fearlessness and great writing lives."

Charlie Brinkhurst-Cuff said: "**Kick the Latch** is a rare beast, setting out with a premise that feels neatly bordered but revealing itself almost immediately to be a desperately consumable piece of literature, pushing boundaries in terms of form and structure but never becoming inaccessible. Scanlan knows how to pierce your heart; I didn't think I would ever fall in love with a horse trainer, but now I can proudly say that I have. This is a book that will make you appreciate the diversity of human experience, and I'd urge even the most uncertain readers to take a ride."

Andrew Hankinson said; "The choice of subject, the method, the execution - it was all perfect in a book that deserves to be on record as an award-winner."

Sheena Patel said: "Scanlan has written a remarkable novel, in prose that is tender, sparse and muscular. A worthy winner for this prize, you all need to read it."

Claire Malcolm, Chief Executive of New Writing North, said: "Gordon Burn was a hugely influential writer, and he was a son of Newcastle. It has been so meaningful to us this evening to bring the Gordon Burn Prize home to Newcastle, uniting as it does this great city of literature with a prize that is now established as part of the fabric of UK literary culture. We remain one of the few high profile literary prizes that takes place outside of London. I think Gordon would have got why that was important. Thank you to our sponsors Newcastle University and NCLA for helping us to realise this vision. Our many congratulations to Kathryn for her superlative novel."

Professor Jo Robinson, Head of the School of English Literature, Language and Linguistics, Newcastle University, said: "The words '*We win, we win, we win*' close Scanlan's perfect, searing novel. Hers is an exceptional win - and NCLA, and Newcastle University, are delighted to be able to work with New Writing North and the Gordon Burn Prize - in 2023-24 and beyond - to support such innovative and exciting work."

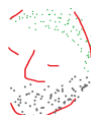
Kathryn Scanlan was announced as the winner of the Gordon Burn Prize at an event at Northern Stage in Gordon Burn's home city of Newcastle. Nick Ahad hosted an in-conversation with the shortlisted authors and there was live music from Me Lost Me. This was followed by an after party with White Rabbit books with a DJ set from David Keenan. The event is available as a livestream [here](#).

The Gordon Burn 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 Gordon Burn's own work, the prize is open to a diverse range of themes and perspectives drawn from the breadth of today's cultural and social concerns. The judges seek work that shows an affinity with the

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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.

-- ENDS --

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

## NOTES TO EDITORS

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.

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

- *Killing Thatcher* by Rory Carroll (Mudlark)
- *If I Survive You* by Jonathan Escoffery (4<sup>th</sup> 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)

Previous winners of the Gordon Burn Prize:

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

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## 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. We are proud to be a charity and an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation.  
[newwritingnorth.com](http://newwritingnorth.com) @NewWritingNorth

## 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](http://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 24<sup>th</sup> in the world for sustainable development in the Times Higher Education Impact Rankings 2023.

