



Recommended books from some of the best writers working in the UK today

Selected by Elif Shafak,
Val McDermid, Jackie Kay, Owen
Sheers and Kei Miller

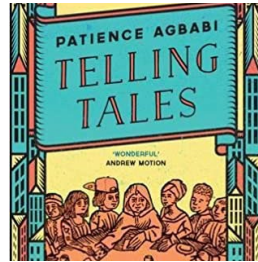


International
Literature
Showcase

Elif Shafak's selection of ten exceptional women writers working in the UK today



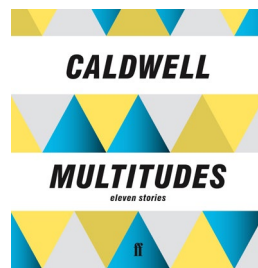
'I see these ten writers as the voice of our conscience. Together and on their own, they work, they write, they resist and they renew our faith in humanity.'



Patience Agbabi

Patience Agbabi is a poet and performer who tirelessly innovates a new relationship between the classics and the contemporary. In doing so she shows us the power of words, whether they are written on the page or spoken in performance.

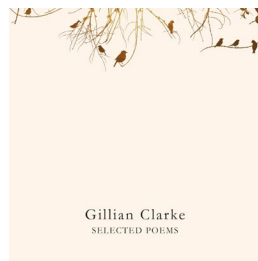
Read: *Telling Tales* (Canongate Books, 2014). [Buy now](#)



Lucy Caldwell

As with a number of women on this list, Lucy Caldwell is helping to support new communities of writers and give a platform to others. She is the Editor of *Being Various: New Irish Short Stories* (Faber, 2019). She writes across disciplines and has written three novels, a collection of short stories, and several plays and radio dramas. She writes with such sensitivity and humanity and always encourages us to rethink what we think we know.

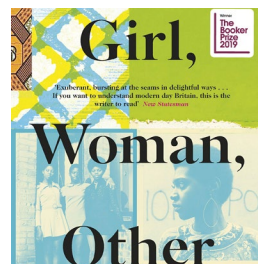
Read: *Multitudes* (Faber, 2016). [Buy now](#)



Gillian Clarke

As the former National Poet of Wales, Gillian Clarke is a towering figure in Welsh literature. She writes beautifully with a fierce music, exploring the local and the global. I urge you to seek out her work. Her tenth collection, *Zoology*, was published by Carcanet in 2017 and in 2020 Faber will publish her version of the book-long 7th-century Welsh poem, *Y Gododdin*.

Read: *Selected Poems* (Picador, 2016). [Buy now](#)



Bernardine Evaristo

Bernardine Evaristo is an Anglo-Nigerian award-winning author of eight books of fiction as well as reviews, essays and a BBC radio drama. She is a true literary activist who has pioneered several arts inclusion projects. Her work speaks to the UK today and should be read by everyone, everywhere!

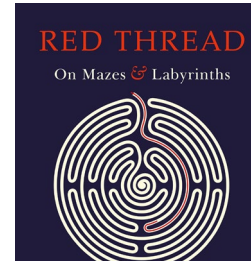
Read: *Girl, Woman, Other* (Hamish Hamilton, 2019). [Buy now](#)



Jessie Greengrass

Jessie Greengrass makes words dance and makes me want to dance with them! She is a brilliant emerging talent. Her first novel *Sight* was published in 2017 and was shortlisted for the Women's Prize and for the Wellcome Prize.

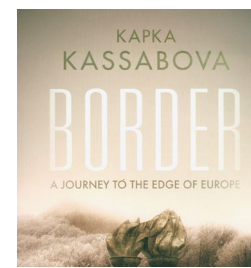
Read: *Sight* (John Murray, 2018). [Buy now](#)



Charlotte Higgins

Charlotte Higgins orchestrates vast conversations about who we are today and why the stories we tell really matter. Her book *Under Another Sky: Journeys in Roman Britain* delves into Britain's Roman past and examines its cultural significance across centuries of stories.

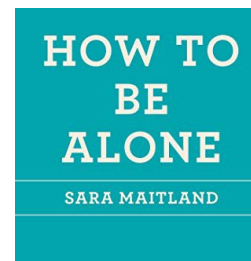
Read: *Red Thread: On Mazes & Labyrinths* (Jonathan Cape, 2018). [Buy now](#)



Kapka Kassabova

Kapka Kassabova grew up in Bulgaria, emigrated to New Zealand and since 2005 has lived in Scotland. I like to say she writes with a scalpel – she is unflinching in excavating the deepest truths about the human soul. She looks at humanity in all its tragic and mysterious beauty.

Read: *Border: A Journey to the Edge of Europe* (Granta, 2017 / Greywolf, 2017). [Buy now](#)



Sara Maitland

Writer, thinker and seeker Sara Maitland is one of our most articulate and probing intellects. She has the ability to make her reader want to look more closely at things. She moved back to Galloway in 2004 where she lives alone on a high moor, exploring the richness of silence and solitude.

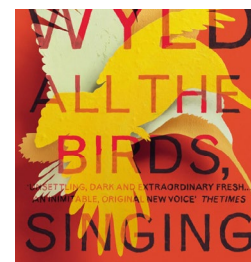
Read: *How to Be Alone* (Picador, 2014). [Buy now](#)



Denise Mina

Denise Mina is a true *tour de force*. She takes crime writing to places it hasn't been before. Her work is largely feminist crime fiction but she's also written sci-fi and a performance poem about nationalism. She's compassionate, outspoken and witty. Do seek out her work.

Read: *The Long Drop* (Harvill Secker, 2017). [Buy now](#)



Evie Wyld

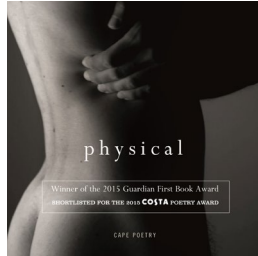
Evie Wyld lives in Peckham and part owns a small independent bookshop called Review. I love writers who play an active part in the literary ecology. She was included on Granta's once-a-decade 'Best of Young British Novelist' list in 2013. She is a bold and spectacular wordsmith.

Read: *All The Birds, Singing* (Vintage, 2014). [Buy now](#)

Val McDermid's selection of ten of the most compelling LGBTQI+ writers working in the UK today



‘These are the works of writers who have something to say that can be — and should be — heard by as many people as possible.’



Andrew McMillan

Andrew McMillan's multi-award winning first collection *physical* was the first poetry collection to win the Guardian First Book Award. He explores marginal lives and masculinity as well as his own lived experience as a gay man from the North of England. He was a candidate in the 2019 election for Oxford Professor of Poetry.

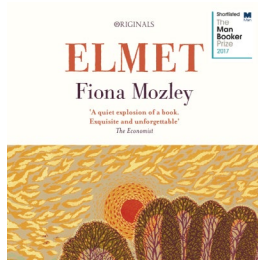
Read: *physical* (Jonathan Cape, 2015). [Buy now](#)



Colette Bryce

Northern Irish writer Colette Bryce's poetry is deeply rooted in place, in culture and in politics. The deceptive simplicity of her language disguises a profound engagement with identity. Among her many awards is the Ewart-Biggs Award in memory of Seamus Heaney.

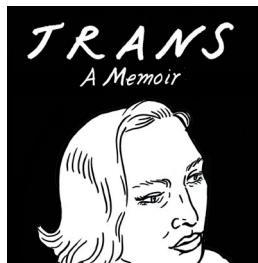
Read: *Selected Poems* (Picador, 2017). [Buy now](#)



Fiona Mozley

Fiona Mozley's first novel, *Elmet*, was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize in 2017 and won the Polari Prize. Lyrical, ethereal and sometimes brutal, it's an intense exploration of what it means to be different. We discover the truths of one family's life within a meditation on the Yorkshire landscape where it unfolds.

Read: *Elmet* (JM Originals, 2017). [Buy now](#)



Juliet Jacques

Juliet Jacques is a filmmaker and journalist, writing on literature, film, art, music, politics, gender, sexuality and football for a variety of publications in the UK and abroad. *Trans: A Memoir* combines critiques of trans theory, literature and film with a personal story of transition.

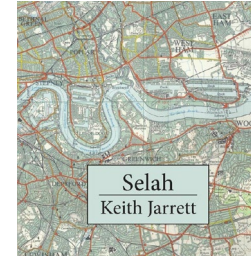
Read: *Trans: A Memoir* (Verso, 2015). [Buy now](#)



Juno Dawson

Juno Dawson is the prolific and popular author of YA fiction, as well as journalism and non-fiction. She is a School Role Model for LGBTQ charity Stonewall and runs writing and story-telling workshops in underprivileged schools.

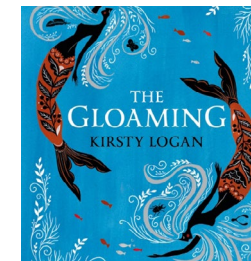
Read: *Meat Market* (Quercus, 2019). [Buy now](#)



Keith Jarrett

Keith Jarrett is a poet, fiction writer and playwright, currently completing a novel exploring the migration of religion from the Caribbean to London. *Safest Spot in Town* was performed at the Old Vic and on BBC Four as part of the Queers series. He's a poetry slam champion.

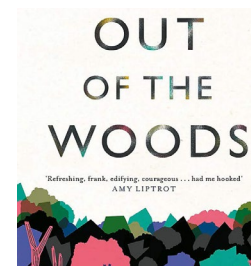
Read: *Selah* (Burning Eye, 2017). [Buy now](#)



Kirsty Logan

Kirsty Logan's work reworks folk tales, fairy stories, myth and magic to explore desire, identity and our hidden queer lives. Her first short story collection *The Rental Heart and Other Fairytales* won the Polari First Book Prize, the Scott Prize for Short Stories and the Saboteur Award for Best Short Story Collection.

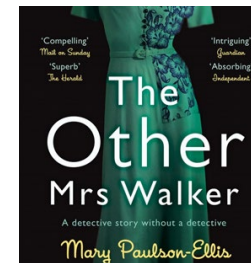
Read: *The Gloaming* (Harvill Secker, 2018). [Buy now](#)



Luke Turner

Luke Turner is a writer, editor, film-maker and founder of the music website *The Quietist*, where he also presents a podcast. His queer memoir *Out of the Woods* marries nature writing with his struggle to reject the binary and accept his internal contradictions.

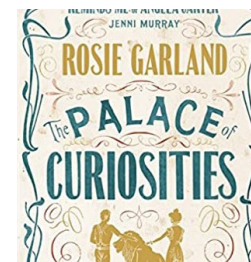
Read: *Out of the Woods* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2019). [Buy now](#)



Mary Paulson-Ellis

Mary Paulson-Ellis's fiction is firmly rooted both in the secret lives of Edinburgh and what she calls 'the murderous side of family life'. Her debut novel, *The Other Mrs Walker*, was Waterstone's Scottish Book of the Year. *The Inheritance of Solomon Farthing* deals with a web of relationships that spans the century from the First World War.

Read: *The Other Mrs Walker* (Mantle, 2016). [Buy now](#)



Rosie Garland

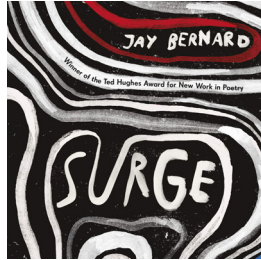
Rosie Garland is a poet, short story writer and novelist whose work also incorporates a wide range of performance. Her debut novel *The Palace of Curiosities* was described by Sarah Waters as 'a jewel-box of a novel.'

Read: *The Palace of Curiosities* (Harper Collins, 2013). [Buy now](#)

Jackie Kay's selection of ten of the most exciting Black, Asian and ethnically diverse writers working in the UK today



‘These are writers who make the reader ask questions of themselves and their place in the world, and they are all writers that give us back the world in all its complex glory.’



Jay Bernard

Jay Bernard's poems sing with outrage and indignation, with fury and passion. They tell the story, amongst other things, of two of the terrible fires of our times – the New Cross Fire and Grenfell – and shockingly show how the past holds up an uncomfortable mirror to the present. Bernard finds a delicate way of returning the lost to the world.

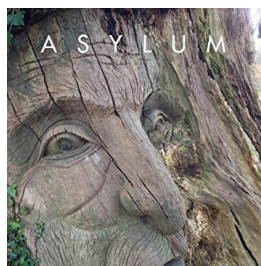
Read: *Surge* (Chatto & Windus, 2019)



Mary Jean Chan

Mary Jean Chan's work opens the window, and the door. Her work has an astounding urgency to it. A poet of our time – she captures the newness of everything, stepping into a gay bar for the first time. Her poetry is psychologically astute and culturally complex.

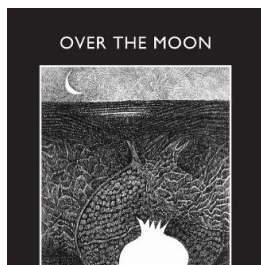
Read: *Flèche* (Faber & Faber, 2019)



Eric Ngalle Charles

Eric Ngalle Charles is a versatile writer who excels in various forms. Ngalle Charles's voice reaches out across the divides, across the lands, from Cameroon, to Russia to the UK, taking it all in. His work examines the horrifying experience of detention, of being the victim of human trafficking with extraordinary grace and lightness of touch.

Read: *Asylum* (Hafan Books, 2016)



Imtiaz Dharker

Imtiaz Dharker's poetry shines a light in the dark. She is interested in how things work, in art, in history, in politics. There's little that does not catch her attention. You cannot hear her perform without being somehow transformed by the experience. Witty, wise, profound and moving, her work crosses continents.

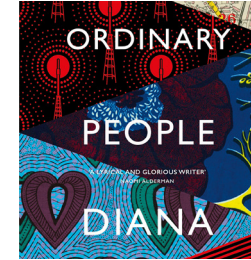
Read: *Over the Moon* (Bloodaxe Books, 2014)



Michael Donkor

Michael Donkor's brilliance is in the way he captures voices; his work has an immediacy and a warmth to it and his is a world you want to enter, whose characters spring vividly to life. You read *Hold* and you say to yourself 'hold on, I want to read more from this writer'.

Read: *Hold* (Fourth Estate, 2018)



Diana Evans

Diana Evans's fiction is emotionally intelligent, dark, funny, moving. Diana's novels build and build. The sheer energy of them is enthralling. A brilliant craftswoman, a master of the form, she makes the reader ask important questions of themselves and makes them laugh at the same time.

Read: *Ordinary People* (Vintage, 2019)



Nadine Aisha Jassat

Nadine Aisha Jassat is a fearless poet, who boldly takes on difficult themes, like gender-based violence, reasserting her right to speak out about those things that are often hidden from view. Hers is a powerful, unforgettable new voice.

Read: *Let Me Tell You This* (404 Ink, 2019)



Zaffar Kunial

Zaffar Kunial's poems are precise, startling in their originality, full of grace. Kunial traces the roots in language to then track the roots in his mixed-race identity, effortlessly transporting the reader from one place to another.

Read: *Us* (Faber & Faber, 2018)



Jennifer Nansubuga Makumbi

Jennifer Nansubuga Makumbi's stories illuminate not just the experiences of Ugandans in Manchester, but of all immigrants who face the unfamiliar, the unfriendly, the strange habits and customs of a new land. Witty as well as deeply affecting, Makumbi is as comfortable in the grand sweep of the epic novel as she is in the powerful shot of the short story.

Read: *Kintu* (Transit Books, 2017)



Olumide Popoola

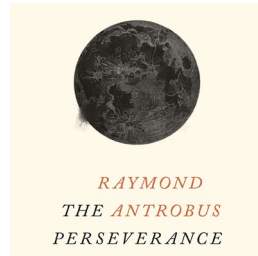
Olumide Popoola's elegant and lyrical prose is instantly engaging. Her complex work captures the atmosphere and the tempo of the racial tension in Kings Cross. She is fascinated with the spaces in-between culture and form, and she is adept at moving between Nigeria, Germany and the UK.

Read: *When We Speak of Nothing* (Cassava Republic Press, 2017)

Owen Sheers' selection of ten extraordinary writers asking the questions that will shape our future



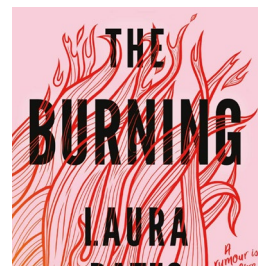
‘These ten writers offer us glimpses of how we might reposition ourselves in relation to each other and the natural world; they invite us to imagine other ways to be.’



Raymond Antrobus

Raymond Antrobus is the author of *The Perseverance*. In 2019 he was a recipient of the Ted Hughes Award and won the Sunday Times/University of Warwick Young Writer of the Year Award. He was also the first poet to be awarded the Rathbone Folio Prize.

Read: *The Perseverance* (Penned in the Margins, 2018). [Buy here](#)



Laura Bates

Laura Bates is the founder of the Everyday Sexism Project. She works closely with governments, police forces and schools to tackle gender inequality. She is the bestselling author of *Everyday Sexism*, *Girl Up* and *The Burning* and her new book, *Men Who Hate Women*, will be published in 2020.

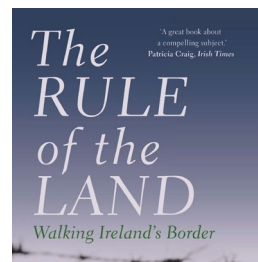
Read: *The Burning* (Simon & Schuster, 2019). [Buy here](#)



Elizabeth-Jane Burnett

Elizabeth-Jane Burnett is an author and academic. Publications include the poetry collections *Swims* (Penned in the Margins) and *Of Sea* (Penned in the Margins), and nature writing memoir *The Grassling* (Penguin). She is Associate Professor in Creative Writing at Northumbria University.

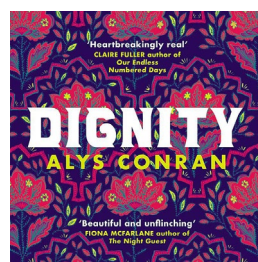
Read: *The Grassling* (Penguin, 2020). [Buy here](#)



Garrett Carr

Garrett Carr is a writer and map-maker. For *The Map of Connections* he charted unofficial and previously unmapped paths and bridges crossing the border. *The Rule of the Land: Walking Ireland's border* (Faber & Faber) was a BBC Radio 4 Book of the Week. Garrett is a regular contributor to radio, TV and the press.

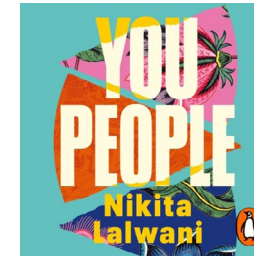
Read: *The Rule of the Land: Walking Ireland's Border* (Faber & Faber, 2017). [Buy here](#)



Alys Conran

Alys Conran's first novel *Pigeon* won the Wales Book of the Year Award 2017 and was shortlisted for the International Dylan Thomas Prize. Her second novel *Dignity* was published in 2019 to critical acclaim. She is the Hay Festival International Fellow for 2019 – 20.

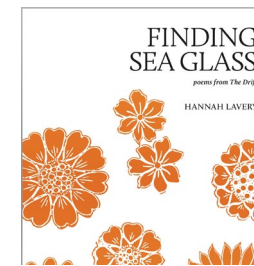
Read: *Dignity* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2019). [Buy here](#)



Nikita Lalwani

Nikita Lalwani written three novels, *You People* (2020), *The Village* (2012) and *Gifted* (2007), which was longlisted for the Man Booker Prize, shortlisted for the Costa First Novel Award and won the Desmond Elliott Prize. She was Sunday Times Young Writer of the Year nominee.

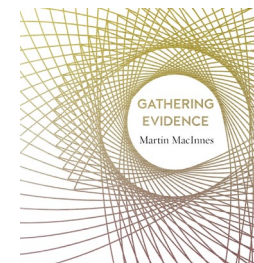
Read: *You People* (Viking, 2020). [Buy now](#)



Hannah Lavery

Hannah Lavery is a Scottish writer, poet and playwright. *The Drift* was produced by the National Theatre of Scotland for a nationwide tour in 2019. *The Lament for Sheku Bayoh* was commissioned by the Royal Lyceum Theatre for the Edinburgh International Festival. She was named as one on BBC Writers Room Scottish Voices of 2020.

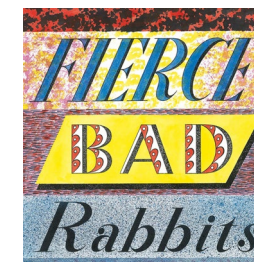
Read: *Finding Sea Glass: Poems from The Drift* (Stewed Rhubarb Press, 2019). [Buy now](#)



Martin MacInnes

Martin MacInnes was born in 1983. His short story, *Our Disorder*, won the Manchester Fiction Prize. His debut novel, *Infinite Ground*, won the Somerset Maugham Award. *Gathering Evidence*, his second novel, was published in 2020.

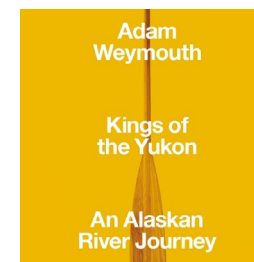
Read: *Gathering Evidence* (Atlantic Books, 2020). [Buy now](#)



Clare Pollard

Clare Pollard has published five collections of poetry, most recently *Incarnation* (Bloodaxe) and a pamphlet, *The Lives of the Female Poets* (Bad Betty Press). She is the editor of *Modern Poetry in Translation*, and poetry editor for *The Idler*.

Read: *Fierce Bad Rabbits: The Tales Behind Children's Picture Books* (Fig Tree, 2019). [Buy now](#)



Adam Weymouth

Adam Weymouth is a writer and journalist, whose work has appeared in the BBC, the *Atlantic*, the *Guardian* and *Lacuna*. His first book, *Kings of the Yukon*, won both the Sunday Times Young Writer of the Year and the Lonely Planet Adventure Travel Book of the Year.

Read: *Kings of Yukon* (Penguin, 2019). [Buy now](#)

Kei Miller's selection of ten unmissable emerging writers working in the UK today



‘These are not just new and promising talents. More importantly, they are the writers of an emerging world — or, at least, the best that we might imagine that world to be.’



Caleb Azumah Nelson

Nelson has written a short novel [...] but that still packs a big punch. It is the intelligence that infuses almost every keenly observed sentence that strikes you, and not an intelligence that is showy or bragging, but the kind of intelligence that holds within it a quality of vulnerability.

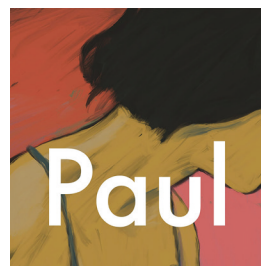
Read: *Open Water* (Viking, 2021)



Sairish Hussain

What Sairish Hussain accomplishes in her debut novel *The Family Tree* is no easy feat – to tell a story that is unapologetically domestic – a story about a very ordinary family living a very ordinary life, and to pack it with so much tension that we can hardly breathe as we read, biting our nails, to see what happens to them all.

Read: *The Family Tree* (HarperCollins UK, 2020)



Daisy Lafarge

These aren't so much hymns to the beauty of nature as they are dirges to what is fragile, a keening against literal toxicities that we live with and have grown dependent on. To explore a topic so heavy, with so much grace, so much subtlety and so much insight, marks her as a remarkable and much needed poet.

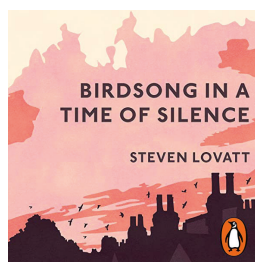
Read: *Paul* (Granta Books, 2021)



Rachel Long

In a time when so many of our best poets still hold the reader a bit at arm's length, the open embrace of Rachel Long's poetry is refreshing. Her poems insist that all the things that make her – her black woman's sass and her political insights – can be bent into careful craft rather than hidden in ellipses.

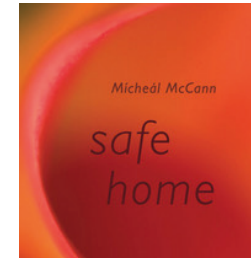
Read: *My Darling from the Lions* (Picador, 2020)



Steven Lovatt

2020 plunged the world into one of the strangest and sometimes brutal experiences we would have. What was particular about this world-wide catastrophe is that it was, itself, so silent and that it also imposed silence. Lovatt's beautiful meditation on birdsong is the first account I have read to take up residence in that silence and to make sense of it.

Read: *Birdsong in a Time of Silence* (Particular, 2021)



Micheál McCann

One of the remarkable things about McCann's poetry is how it treats male same-sex desire as almost unremarkable. Queerness is just one part of McCann's identity and it is folded into an intellect, a curiosity, a slight mischievousness that looks out to the world and notices its oddities and its disruptions.

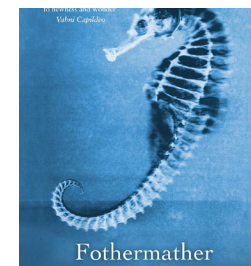
Read: *Safe Home* (Green Bottle Press, 2020)



Helen McClory

Her practice is endlessly playful, formally inventive, and always stretching itself into new territories. We are always in need writers to show us new forms, and McClory is establishing herself as a writer able to do just that.

Read: *Bitterhall* (Polygon, 2021)



Gail McConnell

McConnell's brilliant and wonderfully experimental collection on parenthood is the kind of work that teaches us how to ask questions we might never have thought to ask. These poems are formally playful as they try to invent a new language and a new possibility for people who resist the limiting construct of gender.

Read: *Fothermather* (Ink Sweat & Tears, 2019)



Jarred McGinnis

From the opening epigraph, McGinnis tells us that the line between memoir and fiction is about to be blurred. The blurred line is this novel's real accomplishment. The reader is never quite let off the hook, and the story is weirdly charming, darkly funny and deeply human.

Read: *The Coward* (Canongate, July 2021)



Ingrid Persaud

Ingrid Persaud's prose is near flawless, her story-telling is compelling, but what really stands out in her novel is something more than its outstanding literary merits, and it's her compassion.

Read: *Love After Love* (Faber, 2020)

The International Literature Showcase is a partnership between the National Centre for Writing and British Council. It aims to showcase amazing writers based in the UK to programmers, publishers and teachers of literature in English around the world. To do so, we have invited five leading writers to each curate a showcase of themed writing coming out of the UK today.

To find out more and to explore each showcase in depth, visit nationalcentreforwriting.org.uk/ils