



## Introducing ten unmissable emerging writers

Kei Miller offers you a guide to contemporary British writing

*Ideas for your next festival, reading programme,  
or inspiration for your students*

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# Your guide to contemporary British writing...

Looking to book inspiring writers for your next festival?

Want to introduce your students to exciting new writing from the UK?

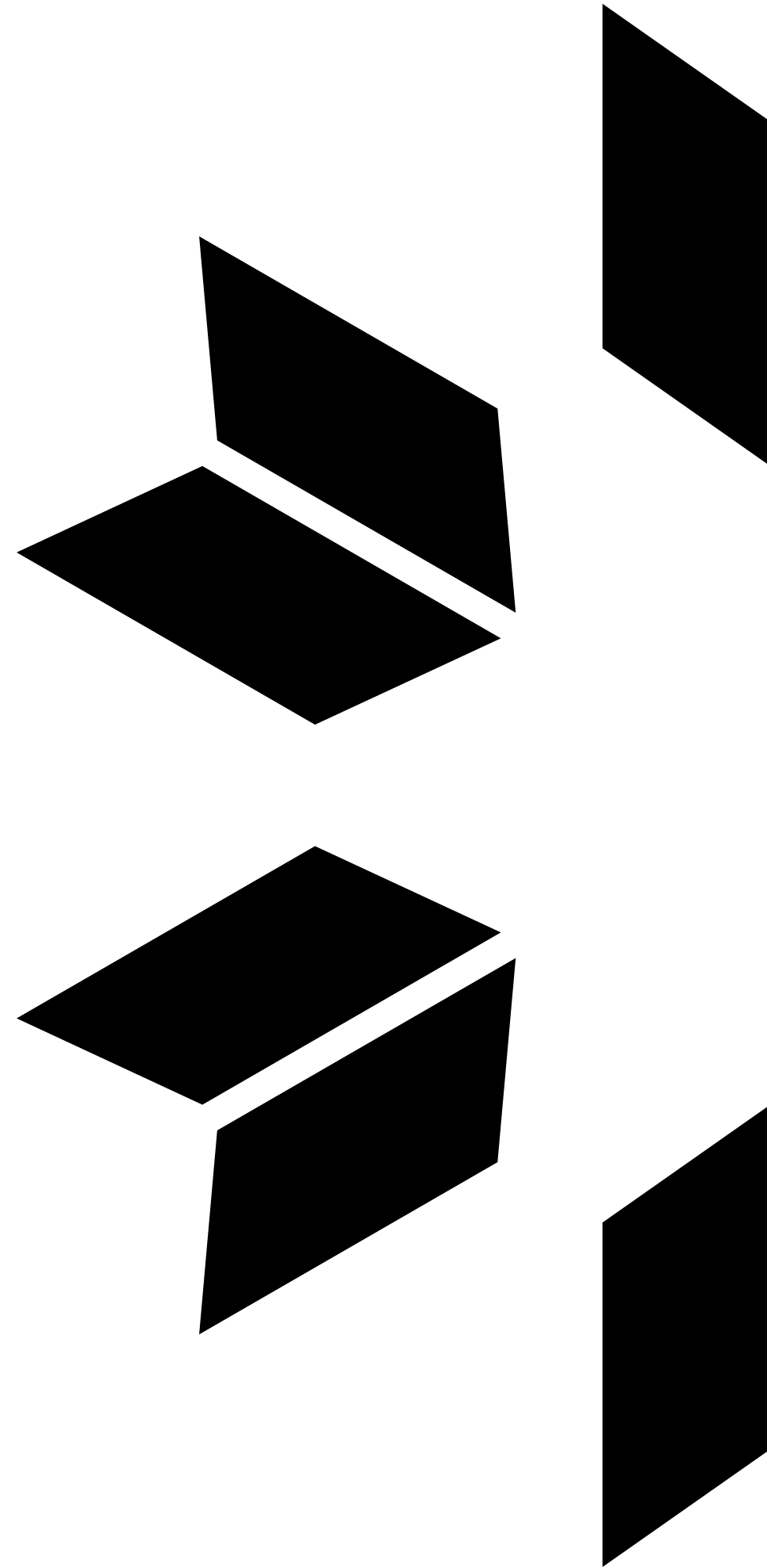
The International Literature Showcase is a partnership between the National Centre for Writing and British Council. It aims to showcase amazing writers based in the UK to programmers, publishers and teachers of literature in English around the world. To do so, we have invited five leading writers to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

Following the high-profile launch of Elif Shafak's showcase of women writers at London Book Fair, Val McDermid's LGBTQI+ writers at the National Library of Scotland, Jackie Kay's Black, Asian and ethnically diverse (BAED) writers at Manchester Literature Festival, and Owen Sheers' writers asking questions that will shape our future at Norfolk & Norwich Festival, we have now revealed our final showcase: Kei Miller's selection of ten unmissable emerging writers working in the UK today.

Use this guide to find out more about these writers, read their work, understand how they relate to contemporary UK literature and consider working with them in the months ahead.

All contact details are included in this guide and if you have any questions please drop us a message at [info@nationalcentreforwriting.org.uk](mailto:info@nationalcentreforwriting.org.uk)

*The International Literature Showcase is a partnership between the National Centre for Writing and British Council, with support from Arts Council England and Creative Scotland.*





# ‘Their books have the potential to buoy up a new and better world’

## Kei Miller introduces his selection of ten unmissable emerging writers working in the UK today

The brief from the National Centre for Writing was a straight-forward one – to select ten of the most promising, most interesting new talents working in the UK right now. Emerging talents.

I got stuck on that word. Emerging. It was impossible not to ponder its particular resonance in this moment, after the year and a half we lived through – some of us, just barely. Covid-19 was a great wave of horribleness that washed over this country and the world. It submerged us, and we haven’t fully emerged from it; we aren’t yet comfortably looking back at the pandemic from a safe distance. In fact, many of us are still holding our breaths as if under water, looking up to an elusive surface that we can’t quite break. This is the question that kept niggling at me: what does it mean to emerge in 2021?

Nothing lasts forever, not even pandemics, and even with variants rising that elusive surface seems closer than it has for months. A new age beckons, even if its shape is indistinct, and even if the thought of it excites and worries us in equal measure. Will it be the same old, same old? Will we make better choices this time? And who will help us to articulate the kind of world we want to emerge from this?

To that last question, I can think of no better answer than these ten writers. Reading and rereading their works was undoubtedly the most fulfilling part of my own lockdown experience. They are ‘emerging talents’ in the traditional sense of that phrase; they are only just at the beginnings of what looks like promising careers but already they are winning the big prizes; already, they are writing books that critics have slapped with epithets like ‘magical’ and ‘essential’.

Still, it is more than that. In 2021, it has to be more. 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. The list is unapologetically – even triumphantly – diverse. These writers are differently raced, differently gendered and differently abled – but what they each can do with a pen is breath-taking.

Daisy Lafarge and Steven Lovatt call our attention back to that place that we neglected to our detriment – the environment. Caleb Azumah Nelson shows us what black intellect and love can look like; Rachel Long adds to this the particularities of womanhood and being mixed heritage. Sairish Hussain shows us absolute ordinariness of a Muslim British family grappling with the shifting shape of our modernity; Gail McConnell and Mícheál McCann are expanding the vistas of queer being and queer love, and queer parenthood; Ingrid Persaud writes the contemporary Caribbean with more empathy than I have ever seen on the page; Jarred McGinnis’ darkly comic autofiction allows many of us to imaginatively navigate the world from a wheelchair; writing out of Scotland, Helen McClory’s boldly playful practice is poising itself to open up whole new genres for our new age.

Please read these writers. Yes, they are amongst the best of the UK’s emerging writers, but it is more than that. Their books have the potential to buoy up a new and better world.

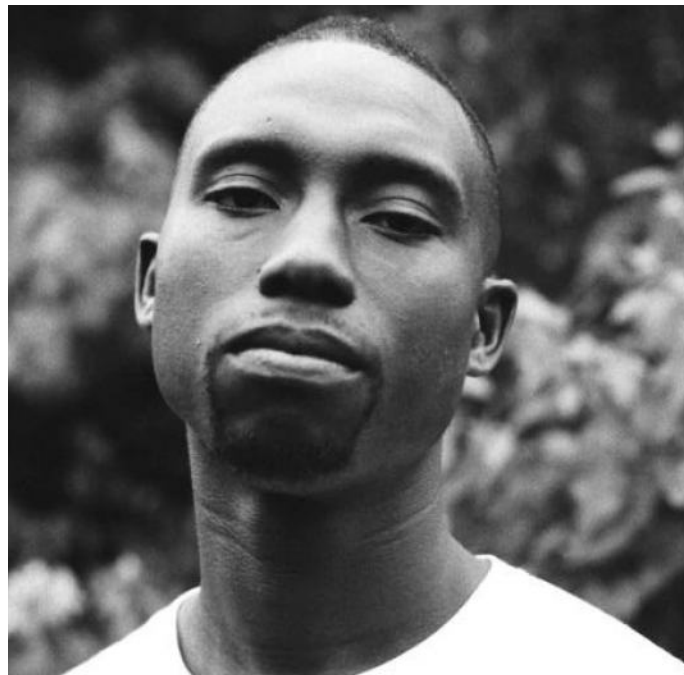
**Kei Miller** was born in Jamaica in 1978 and has written several books across a range of genres. His 2014 poetry collection, *The Cartographer Tries to Map a Way to Zion*, won the *Forward Prize for Best Collection*; his 2017 novel, *Augustown*, won the *Bocas Prize for Caribbean Literature*, the *Prix Les Afriques* and the *Prix Carbet de la Caraïbe et du Tout-Monde*. In 2010, the *Institute of Jamaica* awarded him the *Silver Musgrave medal for his contributions to Literature* and in 2018 he was awarded the *Anthony Sabga medal for Arts & Letters*. Kei has an MA in Creative Writing from *Manchester Metropolitan University* and a PhD in English Literature from the *University of Glasgow*. He has taught at the *Universities of Glasgow, Royal Holloway and Exeter*. He was the 2019 *Ida Beam Distinguished Visiting Professor to the University of Iowa* and is a *Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature*.

# Caleb Azumah Nelson



‘It is the intelligence that infuses almost every keenly observed sentence that strikes you [...] the kind of intelligence that holds within it a quality of vulnerability.’

— Kei Miller



## Novelist and photographer documenting people and their infinitudes

Caleb Azumah Nelson is a British-Ghanaian writer and photographer living in south-east London. His writing has been published in *The White Review* and *Granta*. He has been shortlisted for the Palm Photo Prize and the BBC National Short Story Prize 2020. His debut novel, *Open Water*, was published in 2021.

Read more about Caleb [online](#).

(c) Stuart Ruel

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# Sairish Hussain



‘To tell a story that is unapologetically domestic [...] and to pack it with so much tension that we can hardly breathe as we read’

— Kei Miller



## Young writer, old soul, smashing stereotypes by writing human stories

Sairish Hussain is a Bradford based author and Lecturer in Creative Writing. She studied English at the University of Huddersfield and progressed on to a Masters degree after being awarded the university's Vice-Chancellor's Scholarship. Sairish completed her PhD in 2019 and her debut novel, *The Family Tree*, was published by HarperCollins the following year. It was shortlisted for the Costa First Novel Award, and longlisted for the Authors' Club Best First Novel Award. Sairish is now writing her second book.

Read more about Sairish [online](#).

(c) Sam Raz

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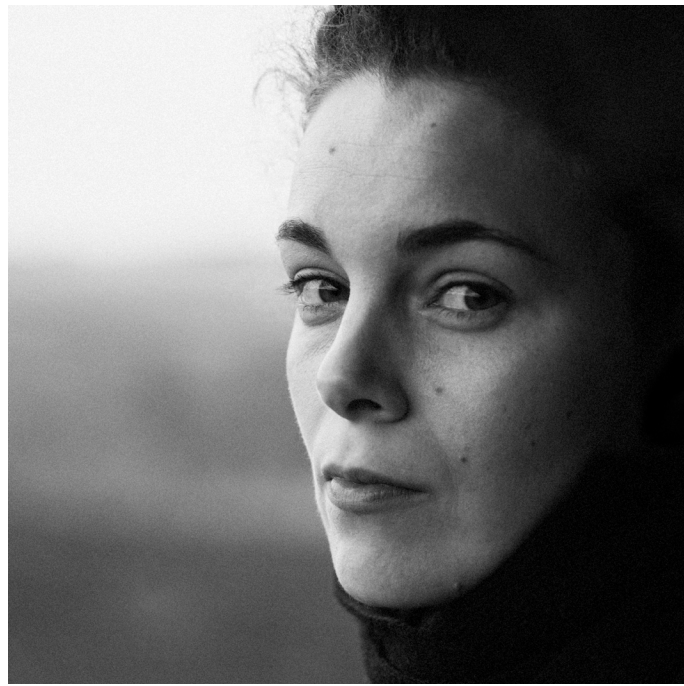


# Daisy Lafarge



‘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.’

— Kei Miller



**Writer and overthinker interested in gut flora and gut feelings**

Daisy Lafarge was born in Hastings and studied at the universities of Edinburgh and Glasgow. Her collection of poetry *Life Without Air* (Granta Books) was shortlisted for the T.S. Eliot Prize 2020 and was recommended by the Poetry Book Society. Her debut novel *Paul* received a Betty Trask Award, and will be published by Granta Books in August 2021.

Read more about Daisy [online](#).

(c) James McNaught

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# Rachel Long



‘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’

— Kei Miller



**Poet/Writer. Preoccupied by dreams, desire & stories of women/girls**

Rachel Long’s debut collection, *My Darling from the Lions* was published by Picador in 2020 (forthcoming from Tin House in the US, in September 2021). It was shortlisted for the Forward Prize for Best First Collection, The Costa Book Award, The Rathbones Folio Prize, and the Jhalak Prize Book of the Year by a Writer of Colour. She is the founder of Octavia Poetry Collective for women of colour.

Read more about Rachel [online](#).

(c) Amaal Said

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# Steven Lovatt



‘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.’

— Kei Miller



## Words and the world finding a home in each other

Steven lives in Swansea, Wales, where he works as a copyeditor, teacher and critic. His first book, *Birdsong in a Time of Silence*, was published by Particular Books in March 2021.

Read more about Steven [online](#).

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# Mícheál McCann



‘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.’

— Kei Miller



(c) Jonathan Ryder

## Poet, reader and community arts worker; warmth of spirit

Mícheál McCann was born in Derry, and now lives in Belfast. His poems have appeared in journals across Ireland and the U.K. A pamphlet of poems (*Safe Home*) was published by Green Bottle Press in 2020, and he was a co-editor of *Hold Open the Door* published by UCD Press that same year. Alongside completing his first collection, he is currently at work on a collaborative publication with Nidhi Zak/Aria Eipe of Skein Press that is forthcoming in 2022.

Read more about Mícheál [online](#).

## Contact

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Green Bottle Press: Jennifer Grigg



# Helen McClory



‘Her practice is endlessly playful, formally inventive, and always stretching itself into new territories.’

— Kei Miller



## Writer, reader, hybrid creature

Helen McClory was raised between the Isle of Skye and Edinburgh, where she currently lives. Her first story collection *On the Edges of Vision*, won the Saltire First Book of the Year 2015. Her second, *Mayhem & Death*, was written for the lonely and published in 2018. *The Goldblum Variations*, a collection of microfictions about Jeff Goldblum and you, came out in October 2019, and a novel, *Bitterhall*, in April 2021. There is a moor and a cold sea in her heart.

Read more about Helen [online](#).

# Gail McConnell



‘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.’

— Kei Miller



## Curious about language, queerness, parenthood, the living and the dead

Gail McConnell is a writer and critic from Belfast. Her forthcoming book of poetry, *The Sun is Open*, flits between a child and adult self in approaching an archive relating to her father’s murder. *Fothermather* explores love, queerness, baby talk, new parenthood and forms of attachment. It was shortlisted for the Michael Marks Poetry Award and made into a BBC Radio 4 programme and *Seriously...* podcast (Pick of the Week in *The Observer* and Radio 4). *Fourteen* explores creatureliness, IVF, bonds and breaks. Gail is Senior Lecturer in English at Queen’s University Belfast and author of Northern Irish Poetry and Theology.

Read more about Gail [online](#).

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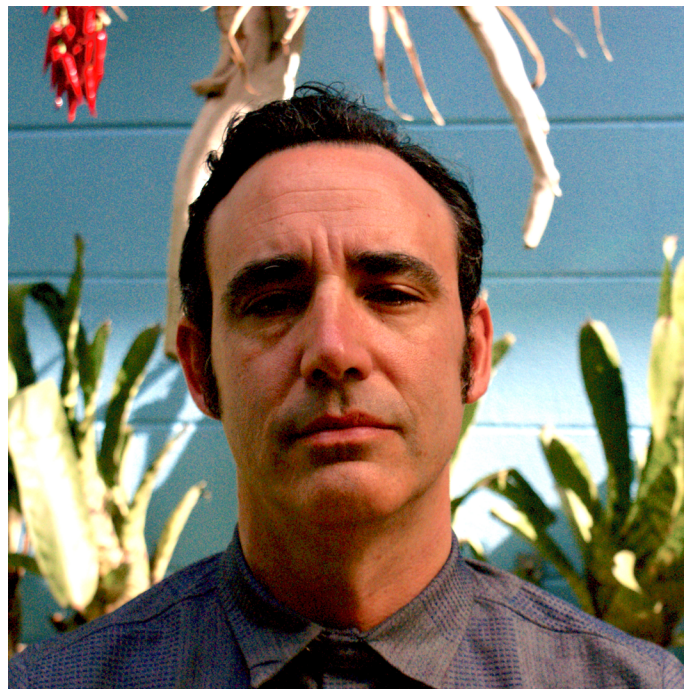


# Jarred McGinnis



‘McGinnis doesn’t require his readers to walk a mile in his shoes [...] but instead to navigate the world and its new strangeness from a wheelchair.’

— Kei Miller



## An author finding joy in the tragedy of it all

Jarred McGinnis’ debut novel *The Coward* is published by Canongate (July 2021).

He is the co-founder of The Special Relationship, which makes large-scale community-driven literature events such as a four-day immersive multimedia reading of Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick* at the Southbank Centre.

His short fiction has been commissioned for BBC Radio 4 and appeared in respected journals in the UK, Canada, USA and Ireland.

He also has a PhD in Artificial Intelligence, but mostly he inspires the able-bodied by using public transport and taking his daughters to the playground.

Read more about Jarred [online](#).

(c) Sarah McGinnis

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# Ingrid Persaud



‘It’s not just that Persaud creates well-drawn and believable characters, but that she feels for them and draws us into that feeling.’

— Kei Miller



## I write knowing that laugh and cry live in the same house

Ingrid Persaud was born in Trinidad. Her debut novel, *Love After Love*, won the Costa First Novel Award 2020. She also won the BBC National Short Story Award in 2018 and the Commonwealth Short Story Prize in 2017. She read law at the LSE and was an academic before studying fine art at Goldsmiths and Central Saint Martins. She has written for BBC Radio 4 and her writing has appeared in several newspapers and magazines including *Granta*, *Prospect*, *Five Dials*, *Alexander*, *The Guardian* and *National Geographic*. She lives in London.

Read more about Ingrid [online](#).

(c) Nick Gegan

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# ‘A catalogue of firmly grounded visionaries, writing with mind, heart, and soul’

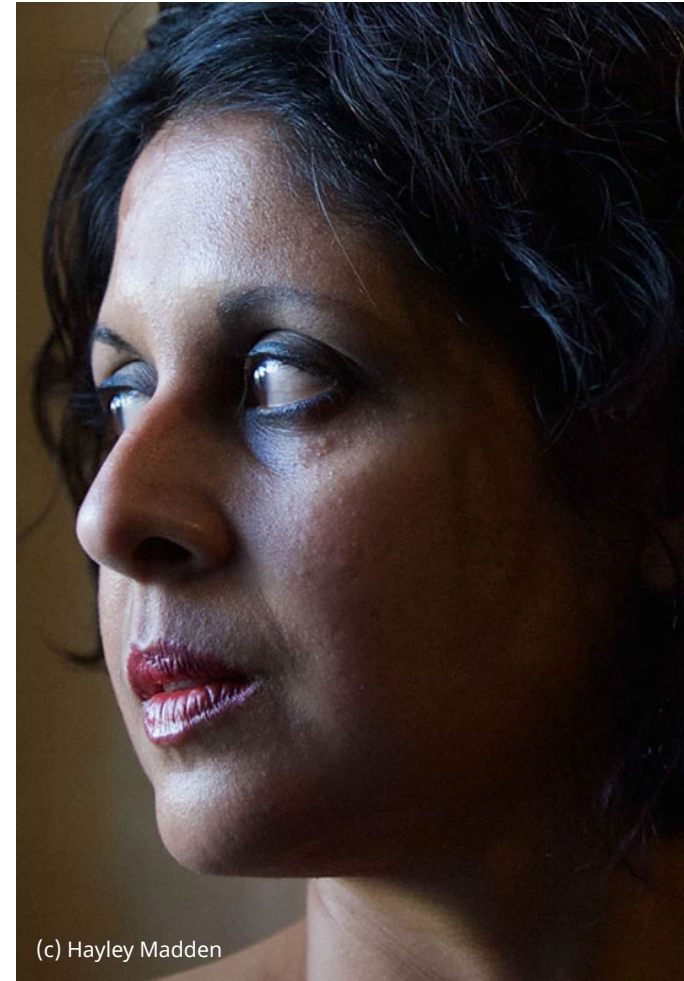
## Vahni Capildeo contextualises Kei Miller’s ten unmissable emerging UK writers

Kei Miller’s list of emergent writers fizzles with hope, like an old-timey musical. Spring is bustin’ out all over, and it’s named Caleb Azumah Nelson, Daisy Lafarge, Gail McConnell, Helen McClory, Ingrid Persaud, Jarred McGinnis, Mícheál McCann, Rachel Long, Sairish Hussain, and Steven Lovatt. There is something for everyone: six novels, three volumes of poetry, and non-fiction. Two novels are family sagas which would make a book club happy. Another scratches the itch for horror. What qualities might these titles share – apart from being stunningly well-written?

First, there is, yes, hope. These writers, fearless and uncensored, deal with hard topics: violent death, the loss of love between mother and child, the disappearance of beloved nature, the ravages of illness. Still, loss is not the lesson. Their courage opens many worlds. None is a pornographer of misery or a documentary consumer of otherness. They sweep us up on a high tide of creativity. We are carried by – emerging or no – the joy of the craft.

This craft is evident in how the sense of genre dissolves in the sense of pleasure or astonishment. ‘To love is both to swim and drown’, says the narrator of **Caleb Azumah Nelson**’s London novel *Open Water*, which reads like a lyric, looping through nifty dreams and dancing out trauma. *Open Water* asks both reader and story ‘How are you feeling?’ Poet **Gail McConnell**’s *The Sun is Open* deserves to be read by lovers of art and non-fiction, too. The epigraph, from a newspaper, specifies McConnell’s father was ‘shot dead in front of his wife and three-year-old daughter’ in Northern Ireland. Using typography and verbal collage, McConnell’s journey leads from the infant imagination, taking keep of bereavement, into redemptive queer parenthood.

Whether we are seen or not seen is a serious theme shared by Miller’s choices, which move easily between multiple perspectives. **Rachel Long**’s *My Darling from the Lions* is gorgeous with tangible details: incense, snow, wigs, crabs, dolls. In the fascinating variations on single, short poems, something as visceral as a scream can be variously experienced and explained. The Acknowledgements portray a new writing world of connexion and support. Authors are not lone heroes. **Daisy Lafarge**’s novel *Paul* flows, perversely akin to a holiday read about sun-drenched France. However, its suspense is worthy of Hitchcock and du Maurier. With apocalyptic irony, the conditions that let Man who would be Genius flourish are exposed in the bright, dissociative voice of a younger woman, and in parallels between this Paul and Gauguin.



(c) Hayley Madden

Tender masculinity to the fore, toxic masculinity decentred: another common trait of Miller’s chosen titles. **Mícheál McCann**’s *Safe Home* breathes a pine forest of forgiveness and love while chronicling muddiness and pain. Like Lafarge’s novel, these poems are ecologically aware, prickling with the rural, urban, and technological.

The big question is, why hasn’t it been normal for books like these to star in our shelves, curriculums, and speeches? Where, as in **Sairish Hussain**’s *The Family Tree*, the web of everyday life and sparky conversation, city amusements and temptations, just happens to foreground a Muslim family? Where, as in **Jarred McGinnis**’s *The Coward*, the protagonist happens to be a wheelchair user who is no ‘example’, but spirals through action adventure and the shattering machismo intertwined with romance, towards unpredictable conclusions? Can we reclaim the pandemic phrase ‘the new normal’ for what such writers establish in the realm of the imagination, where the actions that shape our reality begin?

**Ingrid Persaud**’s *Love after Love* is the most heartbreakingly realistic depiction of Trinidadian society since V.S. Naipaul’s *A House for Mr Biswas*. The ear for dialogue resembles Hussain; the family relations recall

McGinnis; the burn of love and desire perhaps exceeds Long, McCann, and Nelson (who do different things surpassingly well). Told by three different narrators in alternating sections, Persaud’s novel bears formal comparison with Scottish writer **Helen McClory**’s *Bitterhall*. McClory toys with modern British obsessions with period drama and the tracing of ancestry, creating a labyrinth of dark mirrors. Each character re-tells the ‘story’. It’s like *The Turn of the Screw*, but even more so. The language is graceful and extravagant, as if McClory channels the real or back-projected dead.

**Steven Lovatt**’s *Birdsong in a Time of Silence* corrects the ‘male bias’ of scientists and birdwatchers: ‘bird listening’ is as important as birdsong. This nature writing gently presents us with another genre-bender. The sentences (some five lines long) are stop-start and intricate, poetic as birdsong. Chronicling changes to the lockdown soundscape, Lovatt resituates our predicament as sharing in the precarity of the natural world. This is not an exercise. He writes out of passion. And this is the gift Kei Miller brings us: a catalogue of firmly grounded visionaries, writing with mind, heart, and soul.

**Vahni Capildeo** is a Trinidadian Scottish writer based in Edinburgh. Their background in medieval studies, lexicography, translation theory and culture for development underpins their non-fiction and poetry. Capildeo is interested in collaborative and immersive experiments; *Skin Can Hold* (Carcanet, 2019) and *Odyssey Calling* (Sad Press, 2020) offer participatory texts for readers to re-work. Capildeo’s work has been recognized with awards including the Forward Prize (Best Collection) and the Cholmondeley Award. Their ongoing research on silence, and their concern with the ecopoetics of place, are reflected in their eighth book, *Like a Tree, Walking* (Carcanet, 2021) and their seventh pamphlet, *The Dusty Angel* (Oystercatcher, 2021).



# Reception

The launch of Kei's selected writers generated a great deal of discussion online and in the national press.

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**Books**

## Kei Miller selects the UK's 10 best emerging writers

The award-winning poet and writer puts together an 'unapologetically, triumphantly, diverse' list of talents at the start of promising careers

**Kei Miller**  
Sat 19 Jun 2021 10.00 BST

▲ 'Caleb Azumah Nelson shows us what black intellect and love can look like'. Photograph: Suki Dhanda/The Observer

**T**he brief from National Centre for Writing and British Council was a straight-forward one: to select 10 of the most promising, most interesting new talents working in the UK right now. Emerging talents.

**Forewords**

## The week in books 19 June

**New writers for a new age**  
The brief from the National Centre for Writing and the British Council was straight-forward - to select 10 of the most promising, most interesting emerging talents working in the UK right now. I got stuck on that word: "emerging". What does it mean to emerge in 2021? And who will help us to articulate the kind of world we want to emerge from this? To that last question, I can think of no better answer than these 10 writers. Daisy Lafarge and Steven Lovatt call our attention back to that place we neglected to our detriment - the environment. Caleb Azumah Nelson shows us what black intellect and love can look like; Rachel Long adds to this the particularities of womanhood and being mixed heritage. Sairish Hussain shows us the absolute ordinariness of a Muslim British family grappling with the shifting shape of our modernity; Gail McConnell and Mícheál McCann are expanding the vistas of queer being, love and parenthood. Ingrid Persaud writes the contemporary Caribbean with more empathy than I have ever seen on the page; Jarred McGinnis's darkly comic autofiction

allows many of us to imaginatively navigate the world from a wheelchair; and writing out of Scotland, Helen McClory is poised to open up whole new genres for our new age.  
**Kei Miller**

**Why I decided not to accept an MBE**  
Last month, I turned down an MBE for services to literature as part of the Queen's birthday honours list. My reaction, on receiving the email, was very quick: no thank you. I think a lot about Operation Le...  
eign Office pr...  
to destroy fil...  
might throw...  
the horrors of

**BookBrunch**  
@BookBrunch

...@KeiMiller names 10 'unmissable' emerging British writers as part of the @WritersCentre's International Literature Symposium this week

bookbrunch.co.uk/page/article-d... (£)

Left: 'The Week in Books', Guardian, 19 June  
Below: Bookbrunch, 19 June

**Out on the Page** @outonthepage

We're so pleased to be a voice for emerging LGBTQ+ writers at this event.

**National Centre for Writing** @WritersCentre · Jun 19  
'They are the writers of an emerging world - or, at least, the best that we might imagine that world to be.'

REVEALED: @keimiller has selected ten unmissable emerging writers working in the UK for #LitShowcase. Join the conversation! #acesupported nationalcentreforwriting.org.uk/international-...

Top: Guardian Online, 19 June

**Fundación Hispano Británica** @FundacionFHB · 19h

@keimiller, el galardonado poeta, ensayista y escritor de ficción, nos descubre los 10 #escritores británicos emergentes que no deberías perderte.

Jueves, 23 de junio.  
18:00 - 19:00 hrs.  
Online (Youtube).  
Reserva tus entradas en la web: [bit.ly/3j9dqKr](https://bit.ly/3j9dqKr)

**Edinburgh International Book Festival** @edbookfest

Well worth a look for some really exciting emerging and enormous talents.

**Ulyanovsk\_CityofLit** @Ulsk\_CityofLit · Jun 21

Work in the literature sector? Join @WritersCentre to explore the impact of 2020 and the future of the literature scene. With @wordsofcolour @mollyflatt @clairemabey @keimiller & more. 22 - 24 June, FREE, online. @ace\_national @LitBritish #LitShowcase

**Kishani Widyaratna** @KishWidyaratna · 20h

This will be wonderful! Do go see the brilliant @rachelnalong and @CalebANelson with @keimiller introducing his British Council list of emerging writers to watch!

**British Council Singapore** @sgBritish · Jun 21

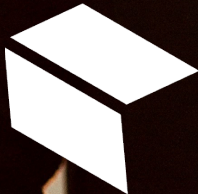
Join this free event exploring the impact of the past year & looking to the future of the Literature scene at the Int'l Literature Showcase.

**Kei Miller** presents...Exceptional times call for exceptional writers  
Thur 24 June, 5 - 6 pm BST  
[nationalcentreforwriting.org.uk/whats-on/kei-m...](https://nationalcentreforwriting.org.uk/whats-on/kei-m...)  
#CultureConnectsUs





‘I see these women  
writers as the voice of  
our conscience’

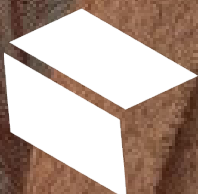


Explore Elif Shafak’s selection of ten  
of the most exciting women writers  
working in the UK today

[Read more](#)



‘These are the works  
of writers who have  
something to say’



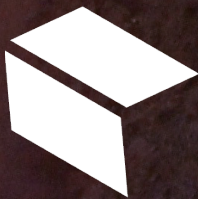
Explore Val McDermid’s selection of  
ten of the most compelling LGBTQI+  
writers working in the UK today

[Read more](#)





‘These writers open up the world to you and give you the world back’

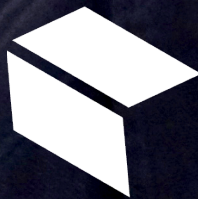


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