



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

Selected by Elif Shafak,
Val McDermid and Jackie Kay

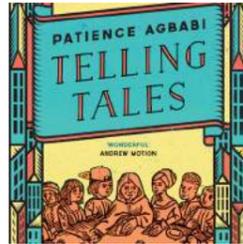


International
Literature
Showcase

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



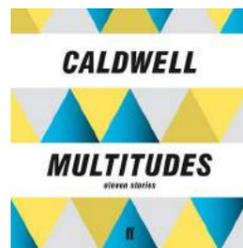
'I see these ten writers as the voice of our conscience. Together and on their own, they work, they write, they resist and they renew our faith in humanity.'



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)



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.

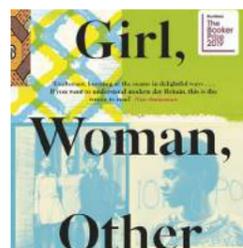
Read: *Multitudes* (Faber, 2016)



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*.

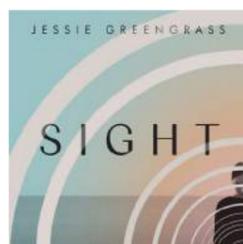
Read: *Selected Poems* (Picador, 2016)



Bernadine Evaristo

Bernadine 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)



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.

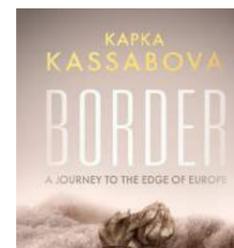
Read: *Sight* (John Murray, 2018)



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)



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.

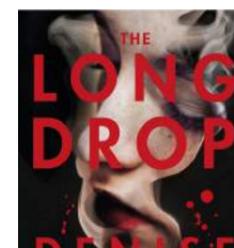
Read: *Border: A Journey to the Edge of Europe* (Granta, 2017 / Greywolf, 2017)



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)



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)



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* (Pantheon, 2014)

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



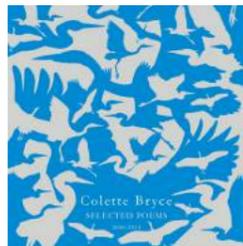
'These are the works of writers who have something to say that can be — and should be — heard by as many people as possible.'



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.

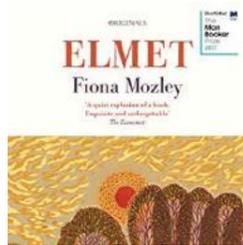
Read: *physical* (Jonathan Cape, 2015)



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.

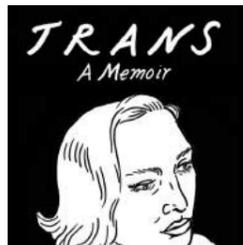
Read: *Selected Poems* (Picador, 2017)



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)



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)



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 storytelling workshops in underprivileged schools.

Read: *Meat Market* (Quercus, 2019)



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.

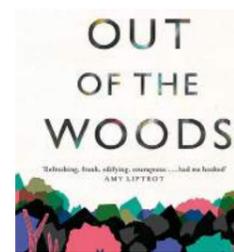
Read: *Selah* (Burning Eye, 2017)



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.

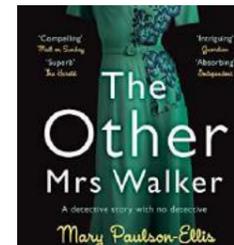
Read: *The Gloaming* (Harvill Secker, 2018)



Luke Turner

Luke Turner is a writer, editor, film-maker and founder of the music website *The Quietus*, 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.

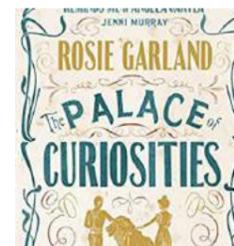
Read: *Out of the Woods* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2019)



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)



Rosie Garland

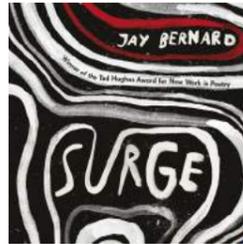
Rosie Garland is a poet, short story writer and novelist whose work also incorporates a wide range of performance. Her debut novel *The Palace of Curiosities* was described by Sarah Waters as 'a jewel-box of a novel.'

Read: *The Palace of Curiosities* (Harper Collins, 2013)

Jackie Kay's selection of ten of the most exciting BAME 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.

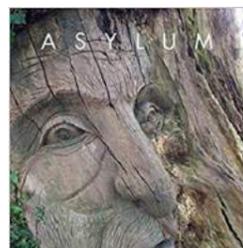
Read: *Surge* (Chatto & Windus, 2019)



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.

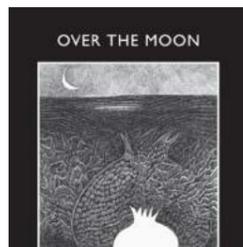
Read: *Flèche* (Faber & Faber, 2019)



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.

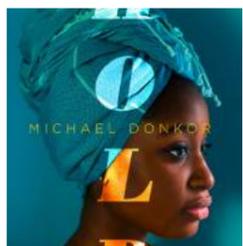
Read: *Asylum* (Hafan Books, 2016)



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.

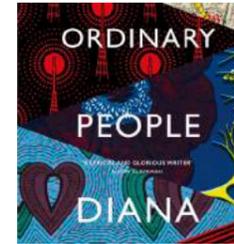
Read: *Over the Moon* (Bloodaxe Books, 2014)



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'.

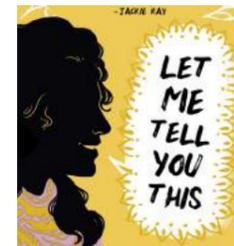
Read: *Hold* (Fourth Estate, 2018)



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.

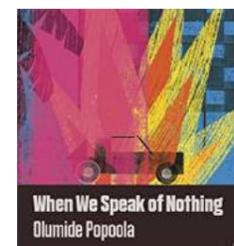
Read: *Us* (Faber & Faber, 2018)



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)

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 six 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