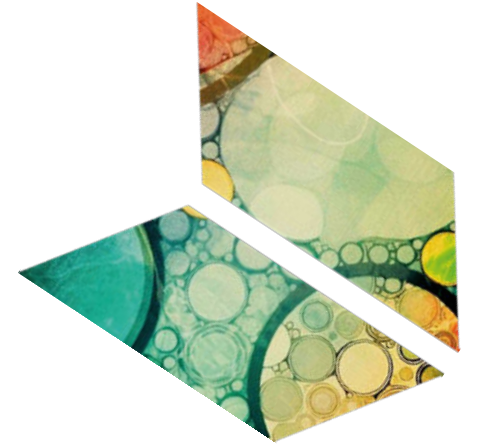




International
Literature
Exchange

ILLX10

Meet the Rising Stars
of UK Writing



On behalf of National Centre for Writing (NCW), I am delighted to present the ILX10: a selection of ten exciting, dynamic, and thought-provoking early-career writers based in the UK whose work has the powerful potential to speak to and engage with global literary audiences.

The ILX10 encompasses writers of prose, poetry, creative non-fiction, and those working across intersections of form, and is intended to represent to our international community just how pluralistic, diverse, and globally engaged the UK literature scene is.

We hope the list will inspire festivals, publishers, educators, and activists around the world and act as a springboard for new conversations, partnerships, and projects for ILX participants and beyond.

NCW, based in Norwich UNESCO City of Literature, teamed up with our fellow UNESCO Cities of Literature here in the UK – Edinburgh, Exeter, Manchester and Nottingham – to select our writers, drawing on their expertise and geographical spread to ensure we created as distinctive and wide-ranging a list as possible. We're really grateful for their input.

Please enjoy the ILX10 and do consider adding these talented writers to your 'to read' list and as artists for your future programmes. Further opportunities for those working with words, books and literature will be announced by NCW later in the year. Details will be shared at nationalcentreforwriting.org.uk/ilx.

Holly Ainley

Head of Programme & Creative Engagement
National Centre for Writing



NICK BRADLEY

Nick Bradley is the author of two novels: *The Cat and The City* (2020) and *Four Seasons in Japan* (2023). He lived and worked in Japan for many years as a translator before returning to the UK to attend the Creative Writing MA at UEA. He holds a PhD focussing on the figure of the cat in Japanese literature. He currently teaches on the Creative Writing master's programme at the University of Cambridge, and the MA in Creative Writing at UEA.

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WRITERS I ADMIRE

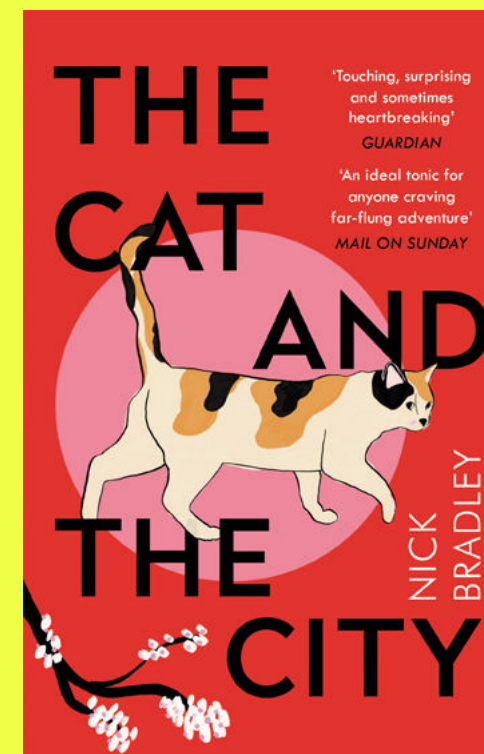
Iain Banks
Jun'ichirō Tanizaki
Leo Tolstoy

HOW HAS LIVING ABROAD SHAPED YOU AS A WRITER?

'I went to watch Wim Wenders' new film *Perfect Days* earlier this week. The film is set in Tokyo, about a man who cleans toilets. I connected with the main character a lot. Writing a book is a lot like cleaning a toilet. It's not. I'm joking, obviously. Cleaning toilets is hard work. Writing is... What is writing? It's just days, months, years of feeling lost.

'But why did I identify with the main character in the film? Maybe it was because living in Japan taught me important life lessons. Hirayama the toilet cleaner takes pride in his work. He gets up each day and derives joy from the smallest moments.

That's what living in Japan taught me – to take my work seriously, and derive pleasure from the mundane. To not focus on success, or an end result, but the pure joy found in the simple act of creating. Each day, I get up, and I do a bit of writing, and those small bits add up to something larger than myself. Perhaps I'd be a different kind of writer if I'd lived in Russia, Colombia, or Kenya. But I like to tell myself that wherever I'd lived, I'd still be a writer.'



'Nick Bradley's ingenious choreography of a constantly moving city, is touching, surprising and sometimes heartbreaking.' — *Guardian*

'The key pleasure of reading this book is its sprightly vigour – cool but not hipsterish, ambitious but not pretentious – that evokes a similar liveliness in the reader. It makes you feel young again.' — John Self, *The Times*

'In a very impressive, finely observed debut, Nick Bradley masterfully weaves together seemingly disparate threads to conjure up a vivid tapestry of Tokyo; its glory, its shame, its characters, and a calico cat.' — David Peace, author of the Tokyo trilogy



TICE CIN

Tice Cin is an interdisciplinary artist from North London. She has been commissioned by organisations like Cartier and Montblanc. She was named one of *Complex Magazine*'s best music journalists of 2021 and 2022, and has written for places such as *DJ Mag* and *Mixmag*. *Keeping the House* has been named one of the *Guardian*'s Best Books of 2021, awarded a Society of Authors Somerset Maugham Prize, and has been featured in *The Scotsman*, *The New York Times* and the *Washington Post*. A filmmaker, through her company Neoprene Genie, she has just produced and directed her first music video. A DJ and music producer, she has recently completed writing her sophomore novel about clubbing and holding space.

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YouTube @ticecinartist

WRITERS I ADMIRE

Norman Erikson Pasaribu
Gboyega Odubanjo
Lola Olufemi

IS THERE A RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE CULTURAL EXPERIENCE YOU WRITE FROM, AND YOUR EMBRACING OF VARIED ARTFORMS

'I told my friend I feel like a kraken, I'm trying to reach as much as I can with what I can. The different stretches of me run from me being the type of person who watches her mum read Turkish coffee granules, to finding glimmers of freedom in a block party. Then I want to know if I can capture a fortune told in a song, or work closely with a digital artist on the softness of dance. Where can we spread out? I write novels so a genie can slouch outside a shop, I dance to our poetry so that my body can feel connected to space. I film cousins in ends who shiver in drained park pools. How do we arch around concrete?

I want to pass the mic between my neighbours' doors, and watch a woman float in silver on a carpet I lifted out for her. If I grew up around a culture of 'suskunluk', of inward silence as a protective method, then how can I talk so that the rhythms of the people I love be louder and louder? There are places around me so beautiful that I just want to invite us in, I knew that those girls loved each other before you did, so now we will show you.'



'*Keeping The House* drew me in from the first few lines. A glorious novel which thrums with feeling, illustrating the London community with a sharp and confident eye. Her characters are full and sure, and traverse their world with humour, boldness and love. Hope fills these pages.' — Caleb Azumah Nelson, author of *Small Worlds* and *Open Water*

'Crackling with energy . . . An exhilaratingly idiosyncratic first novel, *Keeping the House* has "cult classic" written all over it.' — Michael Donkor, *Guardian*

'*Keeping the House* is such a bold and yet poignant read: musical, nimble, affectionate and (thank GOD) rule-breaking.' — Lisa McInerney, *The Stinging Fly*



AFSHAN D'SOUZA-LODHI

afshan d'souza-lodhi was born in Dubai and forged in Manchester. She is a writer of scripts and poetry. Her work has been performed and translated into numerous languages across the world. Her debut poetry collection *[re:desire]* (Burning Eye Books) was longlisted for the Jhalak Prize.

afshan is currently a BAFTA BFI Flare mentee. She received The National Theatre's Peter Shaffer award and was also on the Warner Bros Discovery Writers Access programme. A TV pilot she wrote called *Chop Chop*, was selected for the #MuslimList (The Black List). Last year, afshan was the first writer-in-residence for Bluebird Pictures.

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WRITERS I ADMIRE

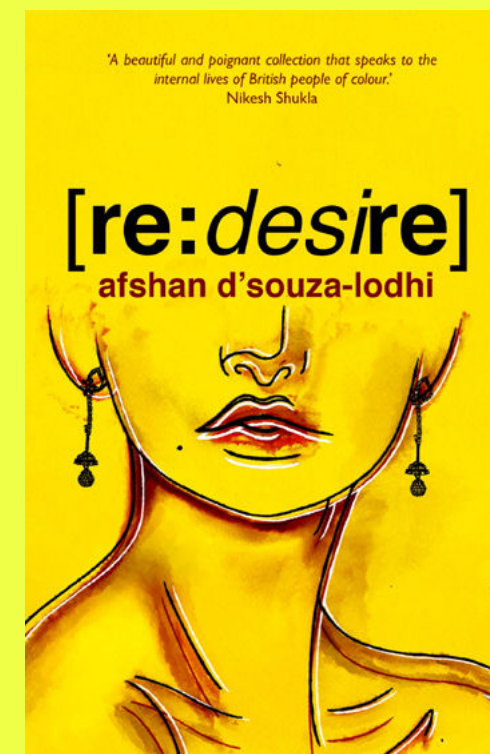
Rosie Garland
Jennifer Makumbi
Desiree Reynolds

ARE 'TENDER' AND 'SHARPLY POLITICAL' OPPOSITES IN YOUR WRITING?

'My existence itself as a woman who identifies as both queer and Muslim is inherently political. My art therefore is political. Even when I don't write about politics directly, even when I write about joy and explore the tenderness that love and desire can bring to the world, I am being political. To not write about the ailments of the world, to ignore the atrocities, is then a political act.'

'Noor Hindi in the poem 'Fuck Your Lecture on Craft, My People Are Dying' writes: 'I want to be like those poets who care about the moon'. I have the privilege of not living in a war zone, of not living through a genocide and so I can write whole poems on the moon

or about mangoes or about love and desire. But I also have the responsibility to write the world as it stands so that we may work through the issues together. I do this mainly through writing that brings joy, writing that makes people laugh before making them cry, making their belly hurt before forcing them to investigate their own ethical compass that leads them to have conversations with family and friends about morality; about the state of the world; about their own complicity. I don't believe for a second that my writing will change the world, but I hope it pushes at least one person into action.'



'The language of poetry has many voices. afshan's is melodic, powerful, mixing English with her mother tongue in a harmony of verses.' — Dr SuAndi, OBE

'A beautiful and poignant collection that speaks to the internal lives of British people of colour.' — Nikesh Shukla, author of *The Good Immigrant* and *The One Who Wrote Destiny*

'In *[re:desire]*, afshan d'souza-lodhi's fiery and evocative retelling of the desi woman's experience, she touches on the distance between mothers and daughters through language, the yearning for love and pleasure, along with the constant pressure that is put on South Asian women.' — Nikita Gill, author of *Wild Embers*



LUCY HOLLAND

Lucy Holland is the author of *The Times* bestselling *Sistersong*, which was a finalist for the Goldsboro Books Glass Bell Award and the British Fantasy Award for Best Novel in 2022. Her second historical fantasy novel, *Song of the Huntress*, is published by Pan Macmillan in 2024. As Lucy Hounsom, she wrote the Worldmaker Trilogy. She worked twelve years in corporate account sales for Waterstones Booksellers before becoming a full-time author. Lucy co-hosts the intersectional feminist podcast 'Breaking the Glass Slipper', which won Best Audio in the 2019 British Fantasy Awards. She lives in Devon.

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Patreon @lucyholland

WRITERS I ADMIRE

Alan Garner
Ursula K. Le Guin
Patricia A. McKillip

HOW DO FEMINISM AND MYTHOLOGY OVERLAP IN YOUR WRITING

'I have always been drawn to the blurred boundary between history and myth. Not only is this liminal space fertile imaginative ground, but it offers us a chance to interrogate the dominant social narrative that governs the way women – and marginalised identities – are traditionally seen.'

'Myth is a kind of deep truth. It is people grappling to understand the complex reality in which we find ourselves. Because of this, it will always have a place in our stories. I use its structures and motifs to push beyond the accepted roles women have historically been assigned. Rather than force a modern interpretation of feminism onto my characters, I aim to give them agency within their environments.'

'My feminism is, above all, intersectional. Re-examining the mythological epics not only gives us new tales within familiar frameworks, but enables us to hear the hitherto silenced voices of those who have always been there, but who may not have had the chance to tell their stories.'



'*Sistersong* gave us a beguiling blend of Dark Ages history, strong heroines and magic. She's gone and done it again, but even better. Captivating.' — *Daily Mail*, 2024 Book to Watch

'Lucy Holland's lyrical prose and powerful storytelling will lure you in.' — Jennifer Saint, author of *Ariadne*, on *Sistersong*

'Original and wrenching, this take on the Wild Hunt is as dark, and wild and beautiful as love itself. Lucy Holland's skill is even sharper than it was in *Sistersong* — It won't be long before you fall in love.' — C.L. Clarke, author of the Magic of the Lost trilogy, on *Song of the Huntress*



FERDIA LENNON

Ferdia Lennon was born and raised in Dublin. He holds a BA in History and Classics from University College Dublin and an MA in Creative Writing from the University of East Anglia. His fiction has appeared in publications such as the *Irish Times* and *The Stinging Fly*. In 2019 and 2021, he received Literature Bursary Awards from the Arts Council of Ireland. After spending many years in Paris, he now lives in Norwich with his wife and son. His debut novel, *Glorious Exploits*, is published by Fig Tree in the UK and Henry Holt in the US.

Website ferdialennon.com
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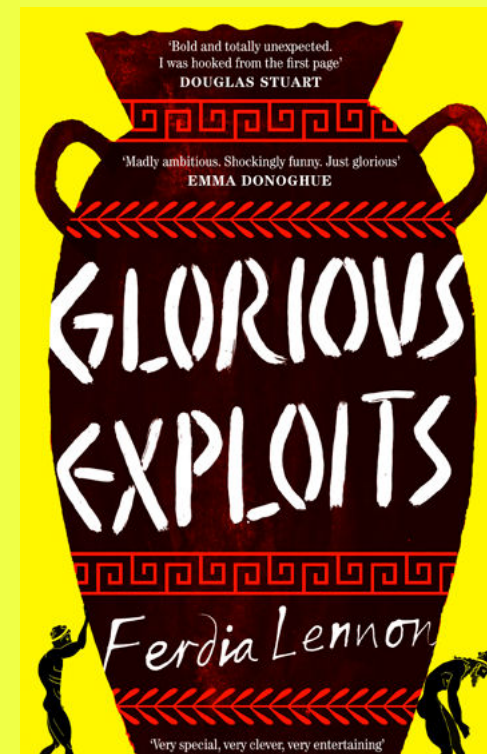
WRITERS I ADMIRE

Pat Barker
Roberto Bolaño
Hilary Mantel

HOW DO THE CLASSICS HELP US EXPLORE AND TELL STORIES ABOUT TODAY?

‘In a sense, the beating heart of the classics has always been their ability to speak to contemporary issues. The story of Medea was already very old, 2500 years ago, when Euripides sat down to write his version. When, in 415 BCE, he wanted to write an anti-war polemic, he didn’t write directly about the ongoing Peloponnesian War but instead took inspiration from Homer’s *Iliad*. Although instead of telling yet another story of the famous Greek heroes, he focused on the war’s victims in his masterpiece *The Trojan Women*. Then, as now, the obliqueness of shifting the perspective of a familiar narrative was a way to create novel

layers of engagement, dramatic irony, and meaning. The real power of the retelling lies in the active role it gives to the audience. They are the ones making the connections and noticing the points of departure, allowing them room to explore and reconsider what they think they know on their own terms. Today, a new generation of writers has realised, just like Euripides, that old and familiar stories can sometimes be the best way to say something new, strange and urgent.’



‘Bold and totally unexpected, I loved this book. A brilliant novel about friendship, the healing power of art, and why we must fight for our dreams. I was hooked from the first page’ — Douglas Stuart, author of *Shuggie Bain*

‘With all the blunt humanity of Roddy Doyle, *Glorious Exploits* is a vividly conjured vision of the past. Madly ambitious, cathartic like all great tragedy, but shockingly funny too, Ferdia Lennon’s outstandingly original début is just glorious.’ — Emma Donoghue, author of *Room*

‘A delicious treat of a read. I loved it.’ — Jon McGregor, author of *Lean Fall Stand*



MARJORIE LOTFI

Marjorie Lotfi was born in New Orleans, moved to Tehran as a baby with her American mother and Persian father, and fled Iran during the Iranian Revolution. She settled in the UK in 1999, and now lives in Edinburgh. She was joint winner of the inaugural James Berry Poetry Prize in 2021, and her first book-length collection, *The Wrong Person to Ask* (Bloodaxe Books, 2023), is a Poetry Book Society Special Commendation. Marjorie also is a Co-Founder and Director of the charity Open Book. She is Co-chair of the board of StAnza, Scotland's International Poetry Festival.

Instagram/Twitter @marjorielotfi

WRITERS I ADMIRE

John Glenday
Philip Levine
Sharon Olds

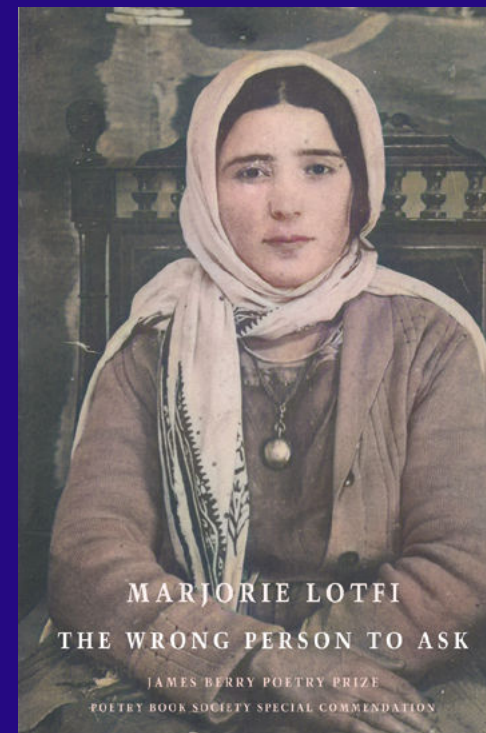
HOW IS COMMUNITY REFLECTED IN YOUR WORK

'If asked why I write, I might say that I want to document the experiences of children living through displacement, and the after-effects of those early experiences on a lifetime lived in apparent safety. I'm drawn to the personal stories of family across multiple generations and continents, to the fabric of life post-migration, even post-exile.

'But how is community reflected in my work? Writing is a way to re-define community, bind myself to a group of people I've been separated from for many years, as well as an opportunity to connect myself to those around me who also live away from their 'homeland'. Sometimes that exploration comes at a cost,

especially when you're 'from' more than one place and don't neatly fit within any community. Writing for me involves re-drawing those boundaries of community, weaving together what I've carried, acquired, and created for myself along the way.

'Of course, writing isn't entirely one-sided, it's also an invitation to a reader to join in and ask themselves the same questions. However unfamiliar the experiences or the lives depicted, ultimately, I hope a reader will find something of themselves in my words.'



'Lotfi's imagistically rich debut collection moves from her childhood in Iran, where her family were uprooted by the revolution, to her youth in America and her current home in Scotland. Lotfi is sensitively attuned to the painful dislocation of self that can come from moving between different nations. Again and again her radiant language turns over the loss of family intimacy and identity caused by political upheaval and violence ... Lotfi's book mourns these losses and separations, while at the same time rendering the possibilities of a capacious, multifaceted sense of belonging.'

— Rebecca Tamás, *Guardian* (Best recent poetry roundup)



AYANNA LLOYD BANWO

Ayanna Lloyd Banwo (b. 1980) is a writer from Trinidad and Tobago. Her debut novel *When We Were Birds* was the 2023 winner of the OCM Bocas Prize for Caribbean Literature, the Author's Club Best First Novel Award, the Goldsboro Books Glass Bell Award, and the American Book Award. It was also shortlisted for the Jhalak Prize, the Kitschies Golden Tentacle Award, the McKitterick Prize and named one of the UK *Observer's* Best Debuts and *The Economist's* Best Books of 2022. Her short fiction and non-fiction have been published in *Moko Magazine*, *Small Axe* and *PREE*, among others and shortlisted for the Small Axe Literary Competition and the Wasafiri New Writing Prize. She is the 2023

winner of the Eccles Centre & Hay Festival Writer's Award and is at work on her second novel. She currently lives in Norwich.

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Twitter @AyaRoots

WRITERS I ADMIRE

Earl Lovelace

Toni Morrison

Olive Senior

DOES LIVING IN THE UK SHAPE THE STORIES YOU TELL ABOUT TRINIDAD?

'I write home no matter where I am. My maternal family are five generations deep in Trinidad and Tobago. It is the place that I was born, the place I first found other worlds in the pages of books, the place I grew to adulthood and began to write, the place I buried my dead. Although I have now lived in the UK for seven years and tentatively put down roots, I still feel like a stranger here sometimes – learning the geography of bus routes and train stations, always wearing the wrong coat for the weather, quarrelling about the ever-increasing price of plantain and hunting for good curry goat. Then

I catch a snatch of an accent that sounds like mine in a crowd or hear soca music blasting from a passing car and the terrain shifts. For a second, dusky blues, the hazy, goldenlight of afternoons, and the brilliant greens of mountains drenched by a heavy downpour of rain feel powerfully close. I am here and I am there – the place I know best and that knows me back. It is not homesickness or nostalgia. It is a reminder to be as close to home as possible in my writing, to honour its crossings, and speak in its tongues, to always write my islands as if they were continents, as if they were the centre of the world.'



'[A] masterly debut novel. It announces an important new voice in fiction, at once grounded and mythic in its scope and carried by an incantatory prose style that recalls Arundhati Roy's hugely impactful debut, *The God of Small Things* . . . Her writing draws on grief, but Lloyd Banwo's literary gift lies in her capacity to transfigure that emotion – to conjure a cosmic landscape where the living coexist among the dead.' — *The Observer* (Top Ten Debut Novels of 2022)

'A searing symphony of magic and loss, love and hope, where in the middle of death, love comes shiny, sparkling and alive. This book might just heal you.' — Marlon James, author of *A Brief History of Seven Killings*



LYNSEY MAY

Lynsey May lives, loves and writes in Edinburgh. Her debut novel, *Weak Teeth*, was published by Polygon in May 2023. She's won prizes and fellowships such as a Scottish Book Trust New Writers Award, Emerging Scottish Writer at Cove Park and a Robert Louis Stevenson Fellowship.

Her short fiction has been published in various journals and anthologies, including *The Stinging Fly*, *Gutter*, *New Writing Scotland* and *Banshee*. She's never far from a cup of coffee and her bag is always too heavy.

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WRITERS I ADMIRE

Jenni Fagan
Ali Smith
Evie Wyld

HOW HAS PLACE SHAPED YOUR WRITING

'I never felt strongly tethered to a place, growing up. I wanted to be international, continental, despite never having holidayed outside of the UK. I said I was British rather than Scottish and was incensed by the idea of division. I thought our differences were dangers, things that could pull us apart.'

'Then, I grew up a little. I had the opportunity to travel, both in reality and in fiction. I read and read and read. And began to appreciate the ways that sights and smells and textures and experiences imprint themselves on us. Through variances in soil and air and customs, places form people in ways I'd never appreciated.'

'I grew up some more and reconciled the desire to be both Scottish and global. The more I read and the more I wrote, the more I found ways that differences build connections. They can be wefted into our words and offered up for interpretation and translation. They create space for comparison and compassion.'

'I keep growing and keep using stories to search for the universal in the specific. Not tethered to a place, but able to use the ones I have as a solid starting point.'



'An agreeably light novel which is also a serious examination of human relationships ... it treats the everyday world of common experience as serious matter for fiction. This is refreshingly unusual today.' — *The Scotsman*

'Explores themes of grief, family and mental illness with lightness of touch and plenty of warmth.' — *The Bookseller*

'Compulsively readable, darkly funny... May has a keen eye for the manifestation of emotional complexity in all human interaction and a talent for dramatising it.' — *The Skinny*



DEREK OWUSU

Derek Owusu is an award-winning writer and poet from North London. He has written for the BBC, ITV, Granta, *Esquire*, *GQ* and Tate Britain. Owusu collated, edited and contributed to *SAFE: On Black British Men Reclaiming Space*, an anthology exploring the experiences of Black men in Britain. His first novel, *That Reminds Me*, won the Desmond Elliott Prize for best debut novel published in the UK and Ireland. His second novel, *Losing the Plot*, was longlisted for the Dylan Thomas Prize and Jhalak Prize. In 2023 he was selected as one of Granta's Best of Young British Novelists.

Twitter @DerekVsOwusu

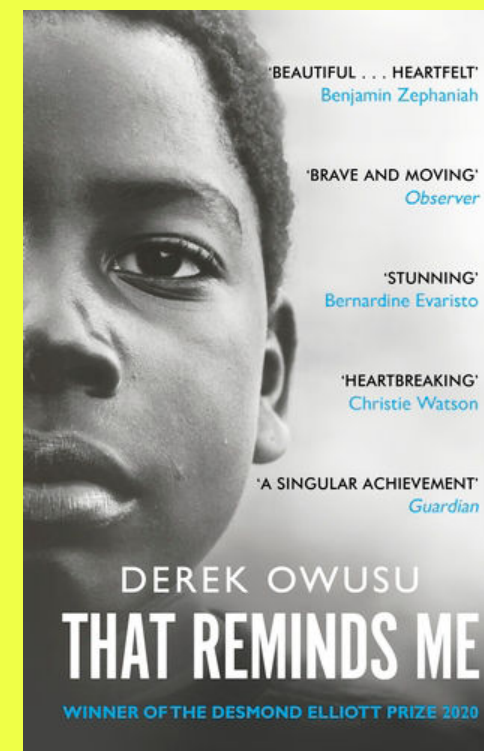
WRITERS I ADMIRE

Jennifer Clement
Yrsa Daley-Ward
Claudia Rankine

WHAT ARE THE COMMUNITIES YOU WRITE FROM AND TO?

'The 'I' leaps through a pane of glass, both bodies shatter, surrounded by fragments, different sizes, dimensions, and some more likely to cut, depending on whoever tries to take hold of a piece, my own palms susceptible. Once explored and examined, put back together, its defences no more, we feel an identity never looks the same again; a person never looks the same again -- as much as we creatively try to fill in the thin crevices with that artistic and transcendent idea of shared humanity. Me, I am from a working-class background – named after the quintessential working-class hero: Derek Trotter from *Only Fools and*

Horses. I am of Ghanaian immigrant background, never identified as a West African in our hometown of Kumasi, but a British queer care leaver who suffers from multiple mental health disorders. There's a lot going on, but that's okay, my stories are richer for it, my characters reflective without the trope of a clear surface. Each of these shards, 'communities', parts of me, deserve to be represented in my writing, and that's what I strive to do, using that incorporeal filler of human truth that touches and coheres every piece, remaining unseen. And though difference is always noted, enough will feel familiar.'



'Derek Owusu's *That Reminds Me* is not quite poetry. It defies categorisation: neither, strictly speaking, a memoir nor, as advance publicity would have it, a novel in verse – although it includes casual rhymes. Without forcing a label on it, this is a moving, semi-autobiographical story about a vulnerable young black man – a one-off.' — *Guardian*

'A dreamy, impressionistic offering of reassembled fragments of memories emerging through the misty beauty of a deliciously individualistic poetic sensibility with flashes of Twi and UK London ebonics to further remind us of what has been missing from British poetry... I can't tell you how impressed I was and how much I enjoyed reading this stunning book.' — Bernadine Evaristo on *That Reminds Me*



FIONA WILLIAMS

Fiona Williams holds a BSc (Hons) in Biological Sciences from the University of Westminster and an MA with Distinction in Creative Writing from Bath Spa University. She is the winner of the 2021 Bridport Prize, Peggy Chapman-Andrews First Novel Award. Originally from South-East London, she now lives with her family on the Somerset Levels. She is currently completing a PhD in Creative Writing at the University of Exeter. *The House of Broken Bricks* is her debut novel.

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Twitter @FeeWilliams75

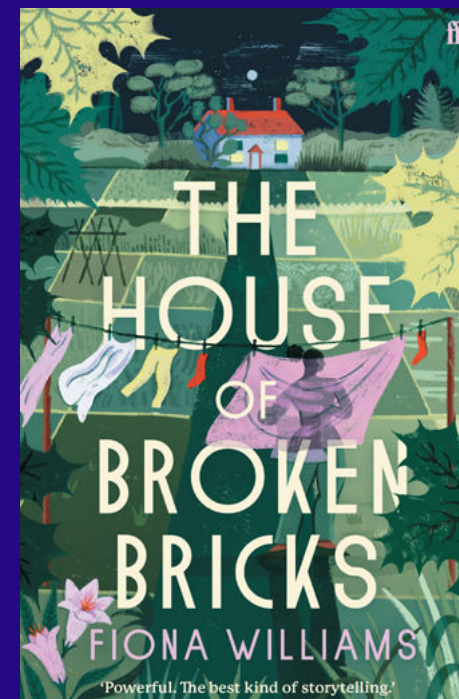
WRITERS I ADMIRE

A. S. Byatt
 Buchi Emecheta
 Elif Shafak

WHAT DREW YOU TO RECREATE THE PASTORAL ENGLISH NOVEL

‘It was never my intention to recreate the pastoral English novel, instead what I wanted to portray was the lives of ordinary British people trying to find a place for themselves amid the turmoil of human life and to share a deep appreciation for the countryside. For me, *The House of Broken Bricks* is a love letter to the West Country, that far corner of England that is still steeped in ancient traditions and rituals and, to some extent, outdated social prejudices. This is a place where the landscape has remained unchanged for many years, and yet the wildlife to be found in its patchworked fields and intersecting marshland waxes and wanes with the turning of the seasons. The cyclical nature of this rural world

seemed the perfect backdrop for a tale exploring feelings of ‘otherness’, the complexities of race, identity, family and belonging, and the experiences of grief and love. The English pastoral novel tends to inspire historical connotations and has always invoked images of quaint idylls far removed from city centres and, like the writers who have come before me, I am also eager to look beyond the urban setting and more stereotypical preconceptions around diversity and inclusion. Pastoral England is evolving, and it is important to showcase modern day rural people, while celebrating all of their heritages and the new communities that are constantly being formed and rooted.’



‘Haunting prose that cracks the English pastoral novel and lets the darkness in. A pleasure to read.’ — Sarah Moss, author of *Summerwater*

‘Wonderful...brave in its deep truths about loss and love.’ — Ingrid Persaud, author of *Love After Love*

‘A clever, heartbreaking, heartwarming depiction of family love, grief and the possibility of hope.’ — Jo Browning Wroe, author of *A Terrible Kindness*

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ENGLAND**