

**THEAKSTON OLD PECULIER CRIME NOVEL OF THE YEAR 2020:  
INTERNATIONAL SHORTLIST REVEALED FOR CRIME WRITING'S PREMIERE PRIZE**

**Oyinkan Braithwaite | Helen Fitzgerald | Jane Harper  
Mick Herron | Adrian McKinty | Abir Mukherjee**

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**Harrogate, Tuesday 9 June 2020:** The shortlist for the 16<sup>th</sup> Theakston Old Peculier Crime Novel of the Year has been announced, taking the reader on an international crime spree from New York to Calcutta, London to Lagos via Glasgow and the Australian outback.

Chosen by a public vote and the prize Academy, the titles in contention for this most prestigious of prize's – which feature five Theakston award alumni and one debut novelist – showcase exceptional variety and originality, including spy espionage, historical crime, gallows humour, outback noir and serial killing siblings.

The news coincides with updated lockdown reading research from Nielsen Book showing that the genre is continuing to soar in popularity, a trend led by younger readers and men. Alongside an increase in the overall number of crime and thriller novels in the bestseller charts, even more people are turning to the genre in lockdown, particularly younger readers (18-44). Of the three quarters saying that their fiction interests have changed, 26% say that crime and thriller has become their genre of choice.

Marking a meteoric rise since being selected by Val McDermid as a spotlight author in the 2019 Festival's highly respected 'New Blood' panel, **Oyinkan Braithwaite** remains in pursuit of the coveted trophy with the Booker nominated *My Sister, the Serial Killer*. Based in Nigeria, Braithwaite is the only debut author remaining, and one of the youngest ever to be shortlisted. Inspired by the black widow spider, Braithwaite turns the crime genre on its head with a darkly comic exploration of sibling rivalry, exploring society's feelings towards beauty and perfection.

The remaining five authors on the shortlist are all previous contenders hoping 2020 is their year to claim the trophy. The legendary **Mick Herron**, likened to John Le Carré, has picked up a fifth nomination with *Joe Country*, the latest in his espionage masterclass *Slough House*. A former legal editor, Herron's commute from Oxford to London led to the creation of this much-lauded series, which is currently being adapted for television with Gary Oldman taking on the iconic role of Jackson Lamb.

Scottish-Bengali author **Abir Mukherjee** is vying for the title with *Smoke & Ashes*, described by *The Times* as one of the best crime novels since 1945. Accountant turned bestseller, Mukherjee was shortlisted in 2018 for the first book in the Wyndham & Banerjee series set in Raj-era India, *The Rising Man*. *Smoke & Ashes* – the third instalment – is set in 1921 in Calcutta, where Mukherjee's parents grew up and where he spent six weeks each year during his childhood.

Authors making it through to the shortlist for the first time include Glasgow's **Helen Fitzgerald** for *Worst Case Scenario*, which marks her first appearance on the Theakston list since *The Cry*, adapted into a major BBC drama starting Jenna Colman, was longlisted in 2013. Packed with gallows humour, *Worst Case Scenario* takes inspiration

from Fitzgerald's time as a criminal justice social worker in Glasgow's Barlinnie Prison, alongside her experiences with depression and going through the menopause.

Despite receiving international recognition, before Belfast's **Adrian McKinty** started writing *The Chain* – for which he picks up his second Theakston nod – he had been evicted from his home and was working as an Uber driver to make ends meet. Persuaded to give writing one last go, McKinty started on what would become the terrifying thriller that sees parents forced to kidnap children to save their own, and for which Paramount Pictures has acquired the screen rights in a seven-figure film deal.

The final title on the shortlist is *The Lost Man* by former journalist **Jane Harper**, who was previously longlisted for her debut *The Dry* in 2018, for which the film adaptation starring Eric Bana is due to be released this year. Inspired by the beautifully brutal Australian environment, *The Lost Man* explores how people live – and die – in the unforgiving outback and is a moving – particularly topical – study in the psychological and physical impact of isolation.

**The full shortlist for the Theakston Old Peculier Crime Novel of the Year 2020 is:**

- ***My Sister the Serial Killer*** by **Oyinkan Braithwaite** (Atlantic Books)
- ***Worst Case Scenario*** by **Helen Fitzgerald** (Orenda Books)
- ***The Lost Man*** by **Jane Harper** (Little, Brown Book Group, Little, Brown)
- ***Joe Country*** by **Mick Herron** (John Murray Press)
- ***The Chain*** by **Adrian McKinty** (Orion Publishing Group, Orion Fiction)
- ***Smoke and Ashes*** by **Abir Mukherjee** (VINTAGE, Harvill Secker)

**Executive director of T&R Theakston, Simon Theakston, said:** "Seeing the huge variety and originality within this shortlist, it comes as no surprise to hear that crime fiction is dominating our lockdown reading habits. Offering both escapism and resolution, these exceptional titles transport readers around the world and I can't wait to see where we settle on 23 July when one of these extraordinary authors takes home the 2020 Theakston Old Peculier cask."

The award is run by Harrogate International Festivals and supported by T&R Theakston Ltd, WHSmith and the Express, and is open to full length crime novels published in paperback from 1 May 2018 to 30 April 2019 by UK and Irish authors.

The shortlist was selected by an academy of crime writing authors, agents, editors, reviewers, members of the Theakston Old Peculier Crime Writing Festival Programming Committee, representatives from T&R Theakston Ltd, the Express, and WHSmith, alongside a public vote.

The shortlist will be promoted in a dedicated online campaign from WHSmith, digital promotional materials will be made available for independent bookstores, and the Theakston Old Peculier Crime Writing Festival's online community – [You're Booked](#) – features exclusive interviews and interactive content. This forms part of the Harrogate International Festival virtual season of events, HIF at Home, which presents a raft of live music, specially commissioned performances, literary events and interviews to bring a free festival experience to your own digital doorstep.

The public vote for the winner is now open on [www.harrogatetheakstoncrimeaward.com](http://www.harrogatetheakstoncrimeaward.com), with the champion set to be revealed in a virtual awards ceremony on Thursday 23 July marking what would have been the opening evening of the *Theakston Old Peculier Crime Writing Festival*. The legendary gathering – which formed part of Harrogate International Festival Summer Season – was cancelled, with much sadness, due to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. The winner will receive £3,000 and an engraved oak beer cask, hand-carved by one of Britain's last coopers from Theakstons Brewery.

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**About Harrogate International Festivals**

‘Harrogate International Festivals’ is a charitable organisation with a mission to present a diverse year-long programme of live events that bring immersive and moving cultural experiences to as many people as possible. Delivering artistic work of national importance, the Festival curates and produces over 300 unique and surprising performances each year, celebrating world-renowned artists and championing new and up-coming talent across music, literature, science, philosophy and psychology. The HIF+ ongoing education outreach programme engages schools, young people and the local community with workshops, talks, projects and inspiring activities, ensuring everyone can experience the Festival’s world class programme and the transformative power of the arts.

Established in 1966, Harrogate International Festivals are an artistic force to be reckoned with and a key cultural provider for the North of England.

Find out more at:

- Website: [www.harrogateinternationalfestivals.com](http://www.harrogateinternationalfestivals.com)
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### **About Theakston Old Peculier Crime Novel of the Year**

Launched in 2005, the *Theakston Old Peculier Crime Novel of the Year Award* is the most prestigious crime novel prize in the country and is a much-coveted accolade recognising the very best crime writing of the year.

Previous winners include Mark Billingham, Val McDermid, Belinda Bauer, Denise Mina, Lee Child, Clare Mackintosh and last year’s champion Steve Cavanagh, who was awarded the trophy for the fifth book in his Eddie Flynn crime thriller series, *Thirteen*.

The 2020 award is run by Harrogate International Festivals in partnership with T&R Theakston Ltd, WHSmith and the Express. It is open to full length crime novels published in paperback from 1 May 2019 to 30 April 2020 by UK and Irish authors.

The longlist of 18 titles is selected by an academy of crime writing authors, agents, editors, reviewers, members of the Theakston Old Peculier Crime Writing Festival Programming Committee, and representatives from T&R Theakston Ltd, the Express, and WHSmith. The shortlist and winner are selected the academy, alongside a public vote, with the winner receiving £3,000, and a handmade, engraved beer barrel provided by Theakston Old Peculier.

The award forms part of the Theakston Old Peculier Crime Writing Festival, staged by Harrogate International Festivals in the Old Swan Hotel, Harrogate, and is traditionally awarded on the opening evening of the festival.

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### **TITLE & AUTHOR INFORMATION: Theakston Old Peculier Crime Novel of the Year 2020**

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#### ***My Sister the Serial Killer* by Oyinkan Braithwaite (Atlantic Books)**

*My Sister, the Serial Killer* is a blackly comic novel about how blood is thicker - and more difficult to get out of the carpet - than water...

**Oyinkan Braithwaite** is a graduate of Creative Writing and Law from Kingston University. Following her degree, she worked as an assistant editor at Kachifo and has been freelancing as a writer and editor since. She has had short stories published in anthologies and has also self published work. In 2014, she was shortlisted as a top ten spoken word artist in the Eko Poetry Slam.

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#### ***Worst Case Scenario* by Helen Fitzgerald (Orenda Books)**

*Mary Shields* is a moody, acerbic probation offer, dealing with some of Glasgow’s worst cases, and her job is on the line. Liam Macdowall was imprisoned for murdering his wife, and he’s published a series of letters to the dead

woman, in a book that makes him an unlikely hero – and a poster boy for Men’s Rights activists. Liam is released on licence into Mary’s care, but things are far from simple. Mary develops a poisonous obsession with Liam and his world, and when her son and Liam’s daughter form a relationship, Mary will stop at nothing to impose her own brand of justice ... with devastating consequences.

**Helen FitzGerald** is the bestselling author of ten adult and young adult thrillers, including *The Donor* (2011) and *The Cry* (2013), which was longlisted for the Theakstons Old Peculier Crime Novel of the Year, and is now a major drama for BBC1. *Ash Mountain* is the second title published with Orenda Books, after *Worst Case Scenario*. Helen worked as a criminal justice social worker for over fifteen years. She grew up in Victoria, Australia. She now lives in Glasgow with her husband.

***The Lost Man* by Jane Harper** (Little, Brown Book Group, Little, Brown)

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*He had started to remove his clothes as logic had deserted him, and his skin was cracked. Whatever had been going through Cameron's mind when he was alive, he didn't look peaceful in death. Two brothers meet at the remote border of their vast cattle properties under the unrelenting sun of the outback. In an isolated part of Australia, they are each other's nearest neighbour, their homes hours apart. They are at the stockman's grave, a landmark so old that no one can remember who is buried there. But today, the scant shadow it casts was the last hope for their middle brother, Cameron. The Bright family's quiet existence is thrown into grief and anguish. Something had been troubling Cameron. Did he choose to walk to his death? Because if he didn't, the isolation of the outback leaves few suspects...*

**Jane Harper** is the author of the international bestsellers *The Dry*, *Force of Nature* and *The Lost Man*. Her books are published in more than 36 territories worldwide, and *The Dry* is being made into a major film starring Eric Bana. Jane has won numerous top awards including the CWA Gold Dagger Award for Best Crime Novel, the British Book Awards Crime and Thriller Book of the Year, the Australian Book Industry Awards Book of the Year and the Australian Indie Awards Book of the Year. Jane worked as a print journalist for thirteen years both in Australia and the UK and now lives in Melbourne.

***Joe Country* by Mick Herron** (John Murray Press)

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*In Slough House memories are stirring, all of them bad. Catherine Standish is buying booze again, Louisa Guy is raking over the ashes of lost love, and new recruit Lech Wicinski, whose sins make him outcast even among the slow horses, is determined to discover who destroyed his career, even if he tears his life apart in the process. And with winter taking its grip Jackson Lamb would sooner be left brooding in peace, but even he can't ignore the dried blood on his carpets. So when the man responsible breaks cover at last, Lamb sends the slow horses out to even the score. This time, they're heading into joe country. And they're not all coming home.*

**Mick Herron's six** Slough House novels have been shortlisted for eight CWA Daggers, winning twice, and shortlisted for the Theakston Old Peculier Crime Novel of the Year three times. The first, *Slow Horses*, was picked as one of the best twenty spy novels of all time by the Daily Telegraph, while the most recent, *Joe Country*, was a Sunday Times top ten bestseller. Mick Herron was born in Newcastle upon Tyne, and now lives in Oxford.

***The Chain* by Adrian McKinty** (Orion Publishing Group, Orion Fiction)

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*YOUR PHONE RINGS. A STRANGER HAS KIDNAPPED YOUR CHILD. TO FREE THEM YOU MUST ABDUCT SOMEONE ELSE'S CHILD. YOUR CHILD WILL BE RELEASED WHEN YOUR VICTIM'S PARENTS KIDNAP ANOTHER CHILD. IF ANY OF THESE THINGS DON'T HAPPEN: YOUR CHILD WILL BE KILLED. VICTIM. SURVIVOR. ABDUCTOR. CRIMINAL. YOU WILL BECOME EACH ONE. YOU ARE NOW PART OF THE CHAIN.*

**Adrian McKinty** was born and grew up in Belfast, Northern Ireland during the Troubles of the 1970s and 1980s. His father was a boilermaker and ship's engineer and his mother a secretary. Adrian went to Oxford University on a full scholarship to study philosophy before emigrating to the United States to become a high school English teacher. His books have won the Edgar Award, the Ned Kelly Award, the Anthony Award, the Barry Award and have been

translated into over 20 languages. Adrian is a reviewer and critic for The Sydney Morning Herald, The Irish Times and The Guardian. He lives in New York City with his wife and two children.

***Smoke and Ashes* by Abir Mukherjee (VINTAGE, Harvill Secker)**

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*India, 1921. Captain Sam Wyndham is battling a serious addiction to opium that he must keep secret from his superiors in the Calcutta police force. But Wyndham finds himself in a tight spot when he stumbles across a corpse in an opium den. When he then comes across a second body bearing the same injuries, Wyndham is convinced that there's a deranged killer on the loose. However, revealing his presence in the opium den could cost him his career. As Wyndham and Sergeant 'Surrender-not' Banerjee set out to solve the two murders, Wyndham must tread carefully, keeping his personal demons secret, before someone else turns up dead...*

**Abir Mukherjee** is the bestselling author of the Sam Wyndham series of crime novels set in Raj-era India. His debut, *A Rising Man*, won the CWA Endeavour Dagger for best historical crime novel of 2017, was a Sunday Times Crime Book of the Month, and Waterstones' Thriller of the Month. His second novel, *A Necessary Evil*, won the Wilbur Smith Award for Adventure Writing, was shortlisted for the CWA Gold Dagger for best crime novel of 2018, and was featured on ITV as a Zoe Ball Book Club pick. Abir grew up in Scotland and now lives in London with his wife and two sons.