



The Baillie Gifford Prize for Non-Fiction 2026 announces shortlist

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- *"It is an eclectic list united by stories of people navigating a world full of conflict as well as hope. At a time when many of us are trying to make sense of a complex and frightening world, non-fiction can help us find our way through."*, says chair of judges, Kirsty Lang
- This year's shortlist explores remarkable lives, from James Baldwin, Barbara Cartland and George Forster to Alexander the Great, while also examining a mysterious death in modern London and the human stories behind the Syrian revolution.
- From the courts of ancient Macedon and the upheaval of the French Revolution to contemporary London and revolutionary Syria, this year's shortlist spans biography, history, investigation and political reportage.
- Two authors previously recognised by the prize feature on the 2026 shortlist: 2021 winner **Patrick Radden Keefe** and 2008 longlisted **Andrea Wulf**.
- Other recognised authors on this year's shortlist include writer and independent scholar **Nicholas Boggs**, Pulitzer and National Book Award finalist **Anand Gopal**, Professor and author **Edmund Richardson**, and writer, author and broadcaster **Matthew Sweet**.
- UK publishers on the list include: Bloomsbury Publishing which has two titles on this year's shortlist, from Bloomsbury Circus and Bloomsbury Publishing. Penguin Random House and Hachette are each represented by one title, published by Allen Lane and Hodder & Stoughton respectively, while books from Picador (Pan Macmillan) and Pluto Press complete the shortlist.
- Winner to be announced on Wednesday 4 November.

Imagery can be downloaded [here](#).

Thursday 1 October 2026 – Nicholas Boggs, Anand Gopal, Patrick Radden Keefe, Edmund Richardson, Matthew Sweet and Andrea Wulf have been announced as the six authors shortlisted for the Baillie Gifford Prize for Non-Fiction 2026.

The Baillie Gifford Prize for Non-Fiction is widely recognised as the world's most prestigious international award for literary non-fiction that is open to books on any subject and to writers of any nationality. Since 1999 it has named the best non-fiction book of the year. The winning author receives £50,000.

The shortlist of six books were chosen by this year's judging panel: **Kirsty Lang**, broadcaster and arts journalist (chair); head of books at Waterstones, **Bea Carvalho**; writer and cultural historian **Dr Tiffany Jenkins**; literary editor of *The Spectator*, **Sam Leith**; editor and reporter, **Ravi Mattu**; and award-winning novelist and storyteller, **Elif Shafak**.

Their selection was made from over 350 eligible books published between 1 November 2025 and 31 October 2026.

The titles on this year's shortlist are:

Author / translator (Nationality)	Title (Imprint, UK publishing house)
Nicholas Boggs (American)	<i>Baldwin: A Love Story</i> (Bloomsbury Circus, Bloomsbury Publishing) (Farrar, Straus and Giroux (FSG), US)
Anand Gopal (American)	<i>Days of Love and Rage: A Story of Revolution</i> (Pluto Press) (Simon & Schuster, US)
Patrick Radden Keefe (American)	<i>London Falling: A Mysterious Death in a Gilded City and a Family's Search for Truth</i> (Picador, Pan Macmillan) (Doubleday (Penguin Random House), US)
Edmund Richardson (British)	<i>Alexander: God, King, Man</i> (Bloomsbury Publishing) (St. Martin's Press, US)
Matthew Sweet (British)	<i>The Great Dictator: A Life of Barbara Cartland</i> (Hodder & Stoughton)
Andrea Wulf (German)	<i>The Traveller: The Revolutionary Life of George Forster and his Search for Humanity</i> (Allen Lane, Penguin Press) (Knopf (Penguin Random House), US)

Kirsty Lang, chair of judges, says:

"This is a charismatic shortlist which I hope will inspire more people to read non-fiction. There is something for everyone: a romantic novelist, a civil rights activist,

an eighteenth-century explorer, an ancient king, the Syrian revolution told from the ground up, and a dark portrait of contemporary London. It is an eclectic list united by stories of people navigating a world full of conflict as well as hope. At a time when many of us are trying to make sense of a complex and frightening world, non-fiction can help us find our way through."

Two authors are recognised by the prize for a second time: Patrick Radden Keefe (winner in 2021) and Andrea Wulf (longlisted in 2008). Their shortlisted books take readers from London's shadowy underworld to the far reaches of the eighteenth-century world. In ***London Falling: A Mysterious Death in a Gilded City and a Family's Search for Truth***, Keefe investigates the death of Zac Brettler, a London teenager who was leading a secret life posing as the son of a wealthy Russian oligarch. Following Zac's parents in their search for answers, Keefe uncovers the circumstances that led him to the balcony that night and into London's shadowy underworld.

In ***The Traveller: The Revolutionary Life of George Forster and his Search for Humanity***, Wulf brings to life the radical eighteenth-century naturalist and explorer George Forster. From sailing with Captain Cook to becoming caught up in the French Revolution, she paints a vivid portrait of a visionary whose ideas about equality and humanity were far ahead of his time.

Nicholas Boggs' ***Baldwin: A Love Story*** offers the first major biography of James Baldwin in three decades. Drawing on newly uncovered archival materials, original research and interviews, he explores the intimate and artistic relationships that helped shape Baldwin's life and work, revealing new dimensions of one of the twentieth century's most influential writers.

Drawing on unprecedented access to archival materials and first-hand accounts, Matthew Sweet's ***The Great Dictator: A Life of Barbara Cartland*** reveals the woman behind the powder and mascara. From country houses and Fleet Street to fame, scandal and romance, the biography traces a life as remarkable and unpredictable as the 723 novels that made Cartland a literary phenomenon.

Edmund Richardson's ***Alexander: God, King, Man*** retells the life of Alexander the Great, from inheriting a crumbling kingdom to becoming a living god. Based on more than a decade of research, he follows Alexander's transformation from an insecure young ruler into one of history's most celebrated conquerors.

Finally, in ***Days of Love and Rage: A Story of Revolution***, Anand Gopal immerses readers in Manbij, Syria, during the 2011 revolution. Through the powerful and intimate stories of the ordinary people who helped overthrow a dictatorship, he explores the highs of camaraderie and the lows of betrayal, while laying bare the danger that inequality poses to democracy.

The shortlisted authors will be interviewed on The Baillie Gifford Prize *Read Smart* podcast, generously supported by the Blavatnik Family Foundation. All previous episodes are available on [Apple Podcasts](#), [Spotify](#) and [SoundCloud](#).

Shortlisted books: judges' comments

***Baldwin: A Love Story*, Nicholas Boggs**

"An extraordinary biography of a great figure of the 20th century. Boggs hones in on a particular aspect of Baldwin's life, rather than retelling every familiar story. He focuses on the relationships and characters in his life that mattered most, helping to explain who Baldwin was."

***Days of Love and Rage: A Story of Revolution*, Anand Gopal**

"A masterpiece of reporting. It tells the story of the Syrian revolution through ordinary citizens in a small Syrian city. Built from around 2,000 interviews, social media posts and videos, it is a moving account that helps readers understand one of the defining conflicts of our time."

***London Falling: A Mysterious Death in a Gilded City and a Family's Search for Truth*, Patrick Radden Keefe**

"The publishing phenomenon of the year. It's the story of one boy, one family and the whole city of London. The best thing has been seeing so many readers fall in love with non-fiction through it, including readers who might usually think they only like novels."

***Alexander: God, King, Man*, Edmund Richardson**

"A fascinating book about Alexander the Great, this boy who became a king, this king who became a hero. The writing is extraordinary, the research is amazing and it's wonderfully atmospheric. You feel transported into the story. This is the kind of book that stays with you. At a time when there is so little support for the humanities, I find this a very important read."

***The Great Dictator: A Life of Barbara Cartland*, Matthew Sweet**

"A dazzling biography of the great woman herself. It's called The Great Dictator because she basically dictated her 723 novels, either from the sofa or her bed, often wrapped in pink. Sweet captures her strange personality and quirks with sympathy and respect. It is an absolute tour de force."

***The Traveller: The Revolutionary Life of George Forster and his Search for Humanity*, Andrea Wulf**

"It's the roaring tale of the 18th century George Forster, who, as a young man, travelled all around the world and became a celebrated naturalist and ethnographer before such a thing was even thought of. The book carries him through the ferment of the European Enlightenment and into the French Revolution, where it all ends in tears."

An event celebrating the shortlist will take place at the Cheltenham Literature Festival on Monday 12 October.

The winner announcement.

The winner will be announced on Wednesday 4 November at an award ceremony at BMA House, generously supported by the Blavatnik Family Foundation. The announcement will also be livestreamed across the Baillie Gifford Prize for Non-Fiction social channels.

Last year's winner was Helen Garner for *How to End a Story: Collected Diaries*.

To sign up for the Baillie Gifford Prize newsletter, please visit <http://thebailliegiffordprize.co.uk/newsletter>

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or follow us on X @BGPrize #BGPrize2026

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Imagery, including UK and US book jackets can be downloaded [here](#).

About the shortlist (from the publishers)

Baldwin: A Love Story

Nicholas Boggs

Published by Bloomsbury Publishing, Bloomsbury Circus (Farrar, Straus and Giroux (FSG), US)

Publicist: Grace Nzita-Kiki / grace.nzita-kiki@bloomsbury.com

Drawing on newly uncovered archival material, original research and interviews, this is the first major biography of James Baldwin in three decades. It reveals how profoundly the writer's personal relationships shaped his life and work through exploring his most sustaining intimate and artistic relationships: with his mentor, the Black American painter Beauford Delaney; with his lover and muse, the Swiss painter Lucien Happersberger; and with his collaborators, the famed Turkish actor Engin Cezzar and the iconoclastic French artist Yoran Cazac, whose long-overlooked significance as Baldwin's last great love is explored in these pages for the first time.

Baldwin: A Love Story magnifies our understanding of the public and private lives of one of the major literary figures of the twentieth century

Nicholas Boggs is a writer and independent scholar. He rediscovered and co-edited a new edition of Baldwin's out-of-print collaboration with the French artist Yoran Cazac, *Little Man, Little Man: A Story of Childhood*. He is the recipient of a 2023 Whiting Creative Nonfiction Grant and fellowships from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Beinecke Library and Gilder Lehrman Center at Yale, the Schomburg Center Scholars-in-Residence Program, the National Humanities Center, and the Eccles Center for American Studies at the British Library.

Days of Love and Rage: A Story of Revolution

Anand Gopal

Published by Pluto Press (Simon & Schuster, US)

Publicist: Rina Gill / rina@tigerteamcreative.com

In 2011, in a city in northern Syria, a small group of men and women began a movement that overthrew a brutal dictatorship. For the next eighteen months, many of the citizens of Manbij carried out one of the most remarkable experiments in democracy in modern times.

Days of Love and Rage: A Story of Revolution details the powerfully intimate narratives of the men and women who led this struggle, and who experienced the highs of camaraderie and the lows of betrayal. Among them: a pair of best friends torn apart by political polarization, a mother who stands up to male dominance, and a worker who risks everything for the dream of equality. Gopal immerses you in the world of a single city in the throes of revolution, and lays bare the danger that inequality poses to democracy.

Anand Gopal is a writer for The New Yorker. He is the author of *Days of Love and Rage: A Story of Revolution* and *No Good Men Among the Living*, and writes about democracy, inequality and conflict.

London Falling: A Mysterious Death in a Gilded City and a Family's Search for Truth

Patrick Radden Keefe

Published by Picador, Pan Macmillan (Doubleday (Penguin Random House), US)

Publicist: Kate Green / Kate.Green@macmillan.com

In 2019, a London teenager, Zac Brettler, fell to his death from a luxury apartment building on the banks of the Thames. On a desperate quest to understand how their son had died, his grieving parents made a terrible discovery: Zac had been leading a fantasy life, posing as the son of a wealthy Russian oligarch.

In his inimitably gripping and forensic style, Keefe follows Zac's parents on a dark journey to find out what brought him to the balcony that night – and how a teenager's life of make-believe drew him into the city's terrifying underworld.

Patrick Radden Keefe is a staff writer at The New Yorker and the author of the bestsellers *Empire of Pain: The Secret History of the Sackler Dynasty* (winner of the Baillie Gifford Prize for Non-Fiction), *Rogues: True Stories of Grifters, Killers, Rebels and Crooks* and *Say Nothing: A True Story of Murder and Memory in Northern Ireland*, as well as *The Snakehead* and *Chatter*. He is the writer and host of the eight-part podcast *Wind of Change* and the recipient of the National Magazine Award for Feature Writing, the Orwell Prize for Political Writing and the National Book Critics Circle Award for Nonfiction.

Alexander: God, King, Man

Edmund Richardson

Published by Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, Bloomsbury Publishing (St. Martin's Press, US)

Publicist: Jonny Coward / Jonny.Coward@bloomsbury.com

In 336 BCE, at the age of twenty, Alexander, a wide-eyed boy from the hills of Macedon, inherited a tumbledown kingdom, a pile of debts and an army which answered to nobody. Desperate to hold on to power, he led the army east, into the heart of the vast Persian Empire, and inadvertently began the greatest military campaign in history. The young man became a king, the king became a hero, the hero became a living god, and the god died aged thirty-two, broken-hearted in Babylon.

Based on more than a decade of cutting-edge research, Alexander allows readers to feel the desert wind and experience the full horror of battle. Richardson's research has taken him from the catacombs of Egypt to the passes of Afghanistan. *Alexander* is a cinematic, revelatory retelling of one of the most elusive stories in history

Edmund Richardson is Professor of Classics at Durham University. He has published *Alexandria: The Quest for the Lost City*, *The King's Shadow* and *Classical Victorians: Scholars, Scoundrels and Generals in Pursuit of Antiquity*, and was named one of the BBC/AHRC New Generation Thinkers in 2016.

The Great Dictator: A Life of Barbara Cartland

Matthew Sweet

Published by Hodder & Stoughton

Publicist: Louise Court / louise.court@hodder.co.uk

Penniless virgins. Reckless dukes. Flappers. Airmen. Suffragettes. Barbara Cartland made them fall in love. She wrote 723 books without touching a typewriter: instead,

she reclined on her sofa with a Pekinese on her lap - and romantic fiction billowed out of her. *The Great Dictator: A Life of Barbara Cartland* reveals the woman behind the powder and mascara - a clever, socially precarious writer navigating a twentieth-century world of war-damaged men, class conflict and sexual peril.

After 49 proposals, she chose the wrong one. What followed was a life stranger than any of her novels. From country house weekends to Fleet Street offices, from Mayfair bedrooms to the divorce court, Sweet traces Cartland's extraordinary journey through a century of upheaval. Drawing on unprecedented access to Cartland's vast archives and firsthand accounts from those who knew her, *The Great Dictator: A Life of Barbara Cartland* reveals how a literary legend was made.

Matthew Sweet is co-writer, with Mark Gatiss, of the TV detective series, *Bookish*. He is the author of *Inventing the Victorians*, *Shepperton Babylon*, *The West End Front* and *Operation Chaos*. His novel, *The New Forest Murders* was published in 2025. He presents *Free Thinking* on *BBC Radio 4*. His 25 years of broadcasting include 12 years of *Sound of Cinema (Radio 3)*, five series of *The Philosophers Arms (Radio 4)* and *1922: The Birth of Now*, a ten-part history of modernism (*Radio 4*). He is a Public Humanities Fellow at the School of Advanced Study, University of London.

The Traveller: The Revolutionary Life of George Forster and his Search for Humanity

Andrea Wulf

Published by Penguin Press, Allen Lane (Knopf (Penguin Random House), US)

Publicist: Annabel Huxley / ahuxley@penguinrandomhouse.co.uk

George Forster was a man out of time: he journeyed to the far reaches of the known world and challenged the worldviews of eighteenth-century Europe with radical ideas about equality and freedom. Celebrated during his lifetime, he knew Goethe, Benjamin Franklin, Mary Wollstonecraft and Alexander von Humboldt but has since been largely forgotten by history. *The Traveller* seeks to restore Forster as one of the great visionaries of his era.

At the age of seventeen he joined Captain Cook's second voyage – an exploration of vast contrasts from the icy world of Antarctica to the tropical islands of the South Pacific. A brilliant mind driven by boundless curiosity, he studied the diverse nature, people and cultures he encountered and came back imbued with a deep belief in the equality of races. On his return he was feted in England, France, Germany and Poland, using his fame to advocate for freedom and human rights and against empire, racism and slavery. He admired strong and educated women and was proud to have daughters. The book traces how – inspired by the French Revolution – he became a leader of the short-lived Republic of Mainz and was eventually forced into exile in Paris during the Reign of Terror.

Andrea Wulf was born in India and moved to Germany as a child. She is the author of *The Invention of Nature: Alexander von Humboldt's New World* (Winner of the 2015 Costa Biography Award and the 2016 Royal Society Science Book Prize) and *Magnificent Rebels: The First Romantics and the Invention of the Self*. A member of PEN American Center and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature, she is currently a Miller Scholar at the Santa Fe Institute.

Notes to Editors

About Baillie Gifford, The Baillie Gifford Prize for Non-Fiction and The Blavatnik Family Foundation:

- **Baillie Gifford** is an independent investment manager founded in Edinburgh over a century ago, owned and run by 54 partners who all work at the firm. While much has changed in 118 years, the firm's focus on seeking truly long-term investment returns for clients remains constant. Baillie Gifford's mission is to identify game-changing companies (both public and private) capable of sustaining growth over decades. Like its investments, Baillie Gifford aims to have long-term relationships and has sponsored the Baillie Gifford Prize (formerly the Samuel Johnson Prize) since 2016. In 2026, Baillie Gifford confirmed its support for the prize for an additional five years.
- **The Baillie Gifford Prize for Non-Fiction** is widely recognised as the world's most prestigious literary non-fiction award that is open to books on any subject and to writers of any nationality. Since 1999 it has named the best non-fiction book of the year. Eligible books may have been first written and published in any language, anywhere in the world, provided they are published in English in the UK during the year of entry. Where a book is translated, the translator shares the prize.
- Each year a new independent panel considers more than 350 eligible books to find a single book: one that expands and illuminates the world through an extraordinary human story, deep investigation, intellectual courage, and written with precision, clarity and craft. All the best stories are true.
- The winner receives £50,000. Nielsen BookData research found that in the four weeks after the announcement, a winning book's sales rise by an average of 860% against the four weeks before.
- It is owned by The Samuel Johnson Prize Ltd, a not-for-profit company limited by guarantee. It is governed by a Board of Directors and administered by Four Agency. The Board comprises Sir Peter Bazalgette (Chair of Creative Industries Council and RCA, Member of Soft Power Council), Chair; Toby Mundy (Prize Director and CEO, Aevitas Creative Management UK); Ailah Ahmed (former Publishing Director, Penguin

Random House); Caroline Daniel (Partner at Brunswick); Morgan Entrekin (Founder and CEO, Grove/Atlantic Inc) (observer); Peter Florence CBE (Director of The Conversation and chair of the European Festivals Forest); Dotti Irving (Founding Director and literary agent at Greyhound Literary); Rosamund McCarthy (Partner and Head of Charity Sector, Stone King); Shreya Ramroop (Director, Siena Accounting); Peter Straus CBE (Managing Director, Rogers, Coleridge and White); Frederick Studemann (Literary Editor, *Financial Times*); and Sandra Taylor (Deputy Publicity Director, Penguin Random House).

- The prize operates entirely independently of its sponsors. The judges are entirely free to consider any book of their choosing, whether it is formally submitted by publishers or not.
- Previous winners are: *Stalingrad* by Antony Beevor (1999), *Berlioz: Servitude and Greatness* by David Cairns (2000), *The Third Reich: A New History* by Michael Burleigh (2001), *Peacemakers: The Paris Peace Conference of 1919* by Margaret Macmillan (2002), *Pushkin: A biography* by T.J. Binyon (2003), *Stasiland* by Anna Funder (2004), *Like a Fiery Elephant* by Jonathan Coe (2005), *1599: A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare* by James Shapiro (2006), *Imperial Life in the Emerald City* by Rajiv Chandrasekaran (2007), *The Suspicions of Mr Whicher* by Kate Summerscale (2008), *Leviathan or The Whale* by Philip Hoare (2009), *Nothing to Envy: Real Lives in North Korea* by Barbara Demick (2010), *Mao's Great Famine* by Frank Dikötter (2011), *Into the Silence: The Great War, Mallory and the conquest of Everest* by Wade Davis (2012), *The Pike*, by Lucy Hughes-Hallett (2013), *H is for Hawk* by Helen Macdonald (2014), *Neurotribes: The Legacy of Autism and How to Think Smarter About People Who Think Differently* by Steve Silberman (2015), *East West Street* (2016) by Philippe Sands, *How to Survive A Plague* by David France (2017) *Chernobyl: History of a Tragedy* by Serhii Plokhyy (2018), *The Five* by Hallie Rubenhold (2019), *One Two Three Four: The Beatles in Time* by Craig Brown (2020), *Empire of Pain* by Patrick Radden Keefe (2021), *Super Infinite: The Transformations of John Donne* by Katherine Rundell (2022), *Fire Weather: A True Story from a Hotter World* by John Vaillant (2023), *Question 7* by Richard Flanagan (2024), and *How to End a Story: Collected Diaries* by Helen Garner (2025).
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