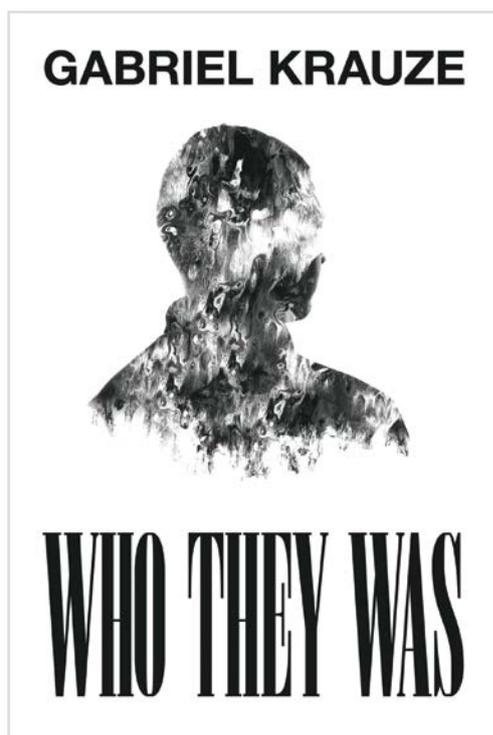


The
2020
Booker
Prize

Readers' Guide



Who They Was Gabriel Krauze

4th Estate

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About the author

Gabriel Krauze grew up in London, UK in a Polish family and was drawn to a life of crime and gangs from an early age. Now in his thirties, he has left that world behind and is recapturing his life through writing. He has published short stories in *Vice*. *Who They Was* is his first novel. He lives in London.

About the book

Who They Was is an urgent and electrifying work of autofiction: the first-hand account of a young man who has lived a life of violent crime, and who expresses it boldly, accurately, and at times even beautifully.

Gabriel Krauze came of age among the high rises and back streets of South Kilburn. He was not an observer on the periphery of violence. He was – personally – heavily involved in gangs, drugs, guns, stabbing and robbery, all while completing an English degree at Queen Mary University, London. *Who They Was* comes directly from that experience and as such it is confronting, exhilarating, morally complex, and utterly unique.

It is a story of extreme and toxic masculinity – reminiscent of the film *La Haine* and the TV series, *Gomorrah* – about the thrill of violence and the trauma it leaves behind. But it's also about brotherhood, belonging, choices and their consequences.

What the judges thought

'Magnificent in its relentless intensity and searing honesty, this is a new voice arriving fully formed and raring to go.'

Discussion points

Who They Was is a work of autofiction, based on Gabriel Krauze's own life and experiences. Why do you think he chose to write his story as fiction, rather than as a memoir?

How did you feel reading about the violent acts that happen, in particular knowing that they are based on reality?

The novel is set in distinct areas of North and East London. How does the author create a strong sense of place?

Do you think it's important that the novel is written in slang, rather than standard English? Does the language affect how you read the book?

How important is education to Gabriel and what role does it play in his life?

Themed reading

In Our Mad And Furious City by Guy Gunaratne

NW by Zadie Smith

Nightingale Point by Luan Goldie

The Young Team by Graham Armstrong

The Quarry by Ben Halls

Useful links

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2020/aug/29/who-they-was-by-gabriel-krauze-review-the-double-life-of-a-london-gangster>

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/books/what-to-read/gabriel-krauze-review-autofiction-meets-grand-theft-auto-gangland/>

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/the-russell-group-uni-gangster-with-grade-eight-piano-w632g0x3h>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dy7jhbFHQJg&feature=youtu.be>

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