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2019 Forward Prizes for Poetry Shortlists Celebrate Poetry of Witness and Daring

A collage of verbatim survivor testimonies from the Hillsborough disaster, a drama of deafness, a verse reconstruction of Super Mario World and a celebration of pink-toed tarantulas: Britain's most coveted poetry awards, the Forward Prizes for Poetry, today announce three shortlists that play havoc with the boundaries of literature, combining formal ambition and emotional charge.

The chair of the 2019 jury, broadcaster and academic **Shahidha Bari**, said: "What stood out was a playfulness and willingness to experiment with genre. Some of the work we've selected will look like poetry, sound like poetry, but it could also fall into the categories of other forms: there are lots of prose poems too. And we were surprised at how blurred the boundary between poetry and drama has become. Perhaps that shouldn't be surprising as we have such a rich tradition of performance poetry in this country, but this is a different development. It's been so thrilling in the last few years watching the boom in poetry, the great affection for poetry, the passion for poetry. That's given people who both read and teach poetry a great deal of comfort, inspiration and hope."

Poet **Andrew McMillan** commented: "Certain poets in the past may have thought that politics was beneath art but a lot of these collections, especially from newer poets, are really getting down in the mud and wrestling with the intricacies and difficulties of our new political situation. Poetry remains high art but has come down from its high shelf: its boundaries have expanded."

The Forward Prizes for Best Collection shortlist:

Fiona Benson repurposes Greek mythology in *Vertigo & Ghost*, in which Zeus is a highly contemporary figure: a serial rapist whose violence against women is both exposed and overlooked.

In *Noctuary*, **Niall Campbell** voices the late nights and early mornings of fatherhood in poems from a world reshaped by half-waking dreams and interrupted sleep.

Ukraine-born poet **Ilya Kaminsky** uses sign language to punctuate *Deaf Republic*, a love story set in a fictional military occupation where resistance takes the form of deafness.

Vidyan Ravinthiran in *The Million-petalled Flower of Being Here* offers love sonnets finely balanced between inward and outward, tracing immigrant anxiety and the intimacies of marriage.

Helen Tookey's *City of Departures* mixes prose and verse to create an urban patchwork of glimpsed moments and chance affiliations.

Certain themes present in the Best Collection shortlist – deafness, voices suppressed and ignored, and a world renewed by close observation – also crop up in the shortlist for the **Felix Dennis Prize for Best First Collection**.

Raymond Antrobus, who is, like **Ilya Kaminsky**, deaf, writes of loss and contested versions of experience in *The Perseverance*. In *Surge*, **Jay Bernard** combines documentary and song to animate the 13 young black lives lost in the 1981 New Cross fire – a precursor of the Grenfell Tower tragedy. In *Truth Street*, **David Cain** finds poetry in the verbatim testimony and witness statements of the Hillsborough inquests. **Isabel Galleymore** brings news from the teeming life-forms of the Amazon jungle in *Significant Other*, and in *If All the World and Love Were Young*, **Stephen Sexton** writes of the video-games that shaped his experience of his mother's death.

Susannah Herbert, director of the **Forward Arts Foundation**, the charity which runs the Forward Prizes, said: "The sharply rising sales figures of the past five years show poetry reaching audiences in ways that are the envy of other genres. As if in response, this year's crop of best new collections reflect fresh confidence among both publishers and poets: while straying onto territory of film-makers, historians and dramatists, they position poetry as the most capacious, lively and communicative of contemporary arts."

The 2019 Forward Prize for Best Collection (£10,000)

Fiona Benson – *Vertigo & Ghost* (Cape Poetry)

Niall Campbell – *Noctuary* (Bloodaxe Books)

Ilya Kaminsky – *Deaf Republic* (Faber & Faber)

Vidyan Ravinthiran – *The Million-petalled Flowers of Being Here* (Bloodaxe Books)

Helen Tookey - *City of Departures* (Carcenet)

The 2019 Felix Dennis Prize for Best First Collection (£5,000)

Raymond Antrobus – *The Perseverance* (Penned in the Margins)

Jay Bernard – *Surge* (Chatto & Windus)

David Cain – *Truth Street* (Smokestack Books)

Isabel Galleymore – *Significant Other* (Carcenet)

Stephen Sexton – *If All the World and Love Were Young* (Penguin Books)

The 2019 Forward Prize for Best Single Poem (£1,000)

Liz Berry – *Highbury Park* (Wild Court)

Mary Jean Chan – *The Window* (National Poetry Competition)

Jonathan Edwards – *Bridge* (The Frogmore Papers)

Parwana Fayyaz – *Forty Names* (PN Review)

Holly Pester – *Comic Timing* (Granta Magazine)

The 2019 judging panel is chaired by **Shahidha Bari**, presenter of BBC Radio 3, *Free Thinking*. She is joined by **Jamie Andrews**, head of the British Library's Cultural and Learning Programme and poets **Tara Bergin**, **Andrew McMillan**, **Carol Rumens**. The jury read 204 collections and 183 single poems.

The Forward Prizes, founded by William Sieghart and sponsored since their launch in 1992 by the content marketing agency, **Bookmark** (formerly Forward Worldwide), have been won by some of the most celebrated names in poetry: Thom Gunn, Seamus Heaney, Ted Hughes, Carol Ann Duffy and Claudia Rankine. They are awarded by the Forward Arts Foundation and supported by Arts Council England.

The awards will be presented at a special event at Southbank Centre's Queen Elizabeth Hall on **Sunday 20 October**, featuring readings from all the shortlisted books, and closing **Southbank Centre's Poetry International festival** which this year runs 17-20 October as part of **London Literature Festival**.

The judges' selection of shortlisted and highly commended poems will be published on 5 September 2019 as the annual *Forward Book of Poetry 2020* (Faber).

A recent **Poetry Summit** at The London Book Fair, convened by the Forward Arts Foundation and Inpress Books, found that the poetry market is booming as audiences for poetry, as well as poets themselves, are diversifying. 2018 marked the best sales on record for poetry books in both volume and value: the UK poetry book market is now worth £12.3 m, a 50% increase in five years, according to data supplied to Forward Arts Foundation by Nielsen BookScan. Two thirds of poetry buyers are under the age of 34.

Tickets for the awards ceremony/readings can be bought at: <https://www.southbankcentre.co.uk/>

For further information, including interviews with the shortlisted poets, visit www.forwardartsfoundation.org or join the conversation at @forwardprizes #forwardprizes.

For press enquiries and review copies contact: Tatti de Jersey at SP Agency tatti@sp-agency.co.uk + 44 (0)7796 571 569



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Notes to Editors

1. Biographies of the shortlisted poets and samples of their work are on www.forwardartsfoundation.org/forward-prizes-for-poetry
2. The Forward Prizes are the most coveted accolades in the UK and Ireland for established and emerging poets. With a total value of £16,000, the prizes are in three categories: the Forward Prize for Best Collection (£10,000), the Felix Dennis Prize for Best First Collection (£5,000) and the Forward Prize for Best Single Poem (£1,000)
3. Bookmark, the world-leading content and communications company, has been the sponsor and key supporter of the Forward Prizes for Poetry since they were first awarded in 1992. Bookmark creates engaging, shareable content in multiple formats and languages: it has offices in the UK, Canada, the US, Peru, Chile and China and its clients include Patek Philippe, Air Canada, American Express, LATAM, Dyson, Lindt, Standard Life and Tesco. Until 2016, Bookmark traded as Forward Worldwide. For more information, see @BookmarkContent and bookmarkcontent.com.
4. Forward Arts Foundation, which runs the Forward Prizes for Poetry, celebrates excellence in poetry and widens its audience by encouraging the enjoyment, discovery and sharing of poems. An Arts Council England National Portfolio organisation, it also co-ordinates National Poetry Day, which falls this year on October 3rd. www.forwardartsfoundation.org @forwardprizes and @poetrydayuk.
5. Past winners of the Forward Prize for Best Collection are: Danez Smith *Don't Call Us Dead*, (2018) Sinéad Morrissey *On Balance* (2017), Vahni Capildeo *Measure of Expatriation* (Carcanet) 2016, Claudia Rankine *Citizen: An American Lyric* (Penguin) 2015, Kei Miller *The Cartographer Tries to Map a Way to Zion* (Carcanet) 2014, Michael Symmons Roberts *Drysalter* (Cape Poetry) 2013, Jorie Graham *PLACE* (Carcanet) 2012, John Burnside *Black Cat Bone* (Cape Poetry) 2011, Seamus Heaney *Human Chain* (Faber & Faber) 2010, Don Paterson *Rain* (Faber & Faber) 2009, Mick Imlah *The Lost Leader* (Faber & Faber) 2008, Sean O'Brien *The Drowned Book* (Picador Poetry) 2007, Robin Robertson *Swithering* (Picador Poetry) 2006, David Harsent *Legion* (Faber & Faber) 2005, Kathleen Jamie *The Tree House* (Picador Poetry) 2004, Ciaran Carson *Breaking News* (Gallery Press) 2003, Peter Porter *Max is Missing* (Picador Poetry) 2002, Sean O'Brien *Downriver* (Picador Poetry) 2001, Michael Donaghy *Conjure* (Picador Poetry) 2000, Jo Shapcott *My Life Asleep* (OUP) 1999, Ted Hughes *Birthday Letters* (Faber & Faber) 1998, Jamie McKendrick *The Marble Fly* (OUP) 1997, John Fuller *Stones and Fires* (Chatto) 1996, Sean O'Brien *Ghost Train* (OUP) 1995, Alan Jenkins *Harm* (Chatto) 1994, Carol Ann Duffy *Mean Time* (Anvil Press) 1993 and Thom Gunn *The Man with Night Sweats* (Faber & Faber) 1992.

Biographies of Shortlisted Poets

Best Collection

Fiona Benson (b. 1978, Wroughton, Wiltshire) lives in Devon with her husband and their two daughters. Her first collection, *Bright Travellers*, was shortlisted for the T. S. Eliot Prize and the Forward Prize for Best First Collection. It won the 2015 Geoffrey Faber Memorial Prize and the 2015 Seamus Heaney Centre for Poetry Prize for First Full Collection.

Niall Campbell (b. 1984, South Uist, Outer Hebrides) won the £20,000 Edwin Morgan Poetry Award, as well as the Saltire First Book of the Year Award for his first collection *Moontide* (Bloodaxe Books, 2014). It was shortlisted for the Forward Prize for Best First Collection, the Fenton Aldeburgh First Collection Prize and the Michael Murphy Memorial Prize and was a Poetry Book Society Recommendation. He now lives in Leeds.

Ilya Kaminsky (b. 1977, Odessa, former Soviet Union) lost most of his hearing at the age of four after a doctor misdiagnosed mumps as a cold. In 1993 his family was granted political asylum by the United States and Kaminsky began to write poems in English following his father's death in 1994. He is the author of *Dancing in Odessa* and *Deaf Republic* is his second full-length collection. His work has been translated into more than twenty languages.

Vidyan Ravinthiran was born in Leeds in 1984 to Sri Lankan parents. He is an editor of the online magazine *Prac Crit* and the author of award-winning literary criticism. He currently teaches at the University of Birmingham. *Grun-tu-molani* (2014) was shortlisted for the Forward Prize for Best First Collection, the Seamus Heaney Centre Poetry Prize and the Michael Murphy Memorial Prize. *The Million-petalled Flower of Being Here* is a Poetry Book Society Recommendation.

Helen Tookey (b. 1969, nr Leicester) is now based in Liverpool, where she teaches creative writing at Liverpool John Moores University. *Missel-Child* (2014) was shortlisted for the Seamus Heaney First Collection Prize. Her pamphlet *In the Glasshouse* was published by HappenStance Press in 2016, and the CD/booklet *If You Put Out Your Hand*, a collaboration with musician Sharron Kraus, came out from Wounded Wolf Press in 2016.

Best First Collection

Raymond Antrobus (b. 1986, London) was thought to be dyslexic until he was diagnosed as deaf at the age of six. He has an MA in Spoken Word Education from Goldsmiths and has had residencies in deaf and hearing schools around London. *The Perseverance*, which explores the d/Deaf experience and Antrobus's Jamaican-British heritage, was a Poetry Book Society Choice and has won the Ted Hughes Award and the Rathbones Folio Prize.

Jay Bernard (b. 1988, London) is the author of three pamphlets, including *The Red and Yellow Nothing* (Ink Sweat & Tears Press, 2016). Their performance piece *Surge:Side A* (Speaking Volumes) won the Ted Hughes Award 2017. Jay was a SLAMBassadors UK spoken word champion in 2004, a Foyle Young Poet of the Year in 2005, and participated in The Complete Works II project in 2014.

Jay's inter-disciplinary practice includes poetry, film and archives: they work as a film programmer at BFI Flare and an archivist at Statewatch.

David Cain (b 1972, Luton) leads sporting and social history projects across the East of England using literature and art to explore history. In 2012 a number of his short bird poems were set to music and performed by Cerys Matthews on her BBC Radio Six Music show. *Truth Street* is his first book. He lives in Suffolk.

Isabel Galley (b. 1988, London) was poet-in-residence at the Tambopata Research Centre in the Amazon rainforest in 2016. Her debut pamphlet, *Dazzle Ship*, was published by Worple Press in 2014 and her work has featured in *POETRY*, the *London Review of Books* and *New Poetries VII*. In 2017 she received an Eric Gregory Award. She teaches at the University of Birmingham.

Stephen Sexton (b. 1988, Belfast) was the winner of the 2016 National Poetry Competition. His pamphlet, *Oils*, was a Poetry Book Society Pamphlet Choice. His poems have appeared in *Granta*, *POETRY*, and *Best British Poetry 2015*. He was, the recipient of an ACES award from the Arts Council of Northern Ireland and was awarded an Eric Gregory Award in 2018. He lives in Belfast.

Best Single Poem

Liz Berry (b. 1980, Black Country) won numerous awards for her debut collection, *Black Country* (2014), including the Forward Prize for Best First Collection. Her pamphlet *The Republic of Motherhood* (2018) was a Poetry Book Society Pamphlet Choice and the title poem won the Forward Prize for Best Single Poem 2018. She lives in Birmingham with her partner and two sons.

Mary Jean Chan (b. 1990, Hong Kong) is Lecturer in Creative Writing (Poetry) at Oxford Brookes University and lives in London. Her pamphlet, *A Hurry of English*, was a Poetry Book Society Pamphlet Choice. She is a Ledbury Poetry Critic and editor of *Oxford Poetry*. This is the second time she has been shortlisted for the Forward Prize for Best Single Poem. 'The Window', placed second in the 2017 National Poetry Competition, is in her debut collection *Flèche* (Faber, 2019).

Jonathan Edwards (b. 1979, Monmouthshire, Wales) won the Costa Poetry Award in 2014 for his first collection *My Family and Other Superheroes*. An English teacher in Wales for much of his life, he has written speeches for the Welsh Assembly Government and journalism for *The Big Issue Cymru*. His second collection, *Gen*, was published by Seren in 2018.

Parwana Fayyaz (b. Kabul, 1990) was raised in Pakistan. She received her BA and MA in CompLit, Creative Writing and Religious Studies from Stanford University. She is currently at Trinity College, University of Cambridge, where she is completing her PhD in Medieval Persian Poetry, concentrating on the poet Jami.

Holly Pester (b. 1982, Colchester) grew up in the West Midlands and lives between London and Wivenhoe. She lectures in Creative Writing at University of Essex and devises experimental poetry workshops with art centres and public spaces. She has written poetry and scholarship on lullabies, posture, delivery, archives and gossip.

6. About Shadhidha Bari

Shahidha Bari is a writer, academic and broadcaster working in the fields of literature, philosophy and art. Born in 1980, she studied at Cambridge and Cornell. She was one of the first ever BBC Radio 3 New Generation Thinkers (2011) and a winner of the Observer/Anthony Burgess Prize for Arts Journalism (2015). She teaches cultural theory at the University of London and is a Fellow of the Forum for Philosophy at the LSE. She writes for the Financial Times, Guardian and Frieze among other newspapers and journals. She features frequently on BBC Radio 4 and presents BBC Radio 3's Arts and Ideas programme Free Thinking. Her book *Dressed* about the hidden culture of clothes in our daily life is published this year by Cape. She lives in London.

7. About Southbank Centre

Southbank Centre is the UK's largest arts centre and one of the UK's top five visitor attractions, occupying a 17 acre site that sits in the midst of London's most vibrant cultural quarter on the South Bank of the Thames. We exist to present great cultural experiences that bring people together and we achieve this by providing the space for artists to create and present their best work and by creating a place where as many people as possible can come together to experience bold, unusual and eye-opening work.

The site has an extraordinary creative and architectural history stretching back to the 1951 Festival of Britain. Southbank Centre is made up of the Royal Festival Hall, Queen Elizabeth Hall, Purcell Room and Hayward Gallery as well as being home to the National Poetry Library and the Arts Council Collection. It is also home to four Resident Orchestras (London Philharmonic Orchestra, Philharmonia Orchestra, London Sinfonietta and Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment) and four Associate Orchestras (Aurora Orchestra, BBC Concert Orchestra, Chineke! Orchestra and National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain).

8. About Poetry International

Founded in 1967 by former poet laureate Ted Hughes, *Poetry International* is Southbank Centre's longest running festival. Formed around Hughes' idea that '*poetry is a universal language in which we can all hope to meet*', *Poetry International* celebrates the best in international poetic writing with appearances across the years from poets including Simon Armitage, WH Auden, Joseph Brodsky, Anne Carson, John Cooper Clarke, Carol Ann Duffy, Allan Ginsberg, Lavinia Greenlaw, Seamus Heaney, Claudia Rankine, Jacques Roubaud, Anne Sexton, Benjamin Zephaniah and more. *Poetry International 2019* runs 17-20 October 2019 and opens Southbank Centre's thirteenth *London Literature Festival*.