

Media Release

Judges for 2020 Forward Prizes for Poetry announced



'Never before have I felt so powerfully that literary history is being made now, as extraordinary writers are finding words and forms for the times'

Alexandra Harris, chair

The jury for the 2020 Forward Prizes, the UK's most widely coveted awards for new poetry, is announced today (20 Jan 2020).

Alexandra Harris, writer, critic and social historian will chair the judging panel. She is joined by poets **Kim Moore**, **Roger Robinson** and **David Wheatley** and by journalist and novelist **Leaf Arbuthnot**.

The Forward Prizes are distinctive in honouring fresh voices alongside internationally established names, and celebrating work that shapes new ways of speaking and perceiving. Past winners include Seamus Heaney, Ted Hughes, Alice Oswald and Claudia Rankine: most recently the prize for Best Collection went to Fiona Benson for *Vertigo & Ghost* in which the classical god Zeus figures as a contemporary sexual predator of the Me Too era.

The 2020 Forward Prizes will be presented on Sunday 25 October 2020 at a public ceremony as part of Southbank Centre's *London Literature Festival*.

Alexandra Harris says: *"I am truly delighted and honoured to chair the judges for the 2020 Forward Prizes. I spend much time thinking about the history of literature but never before have I felt so powerfully that literary history is being*

made now, as extraordinary writers are finding words and forms for the times...It's a joy to be starting out on this adventure, with reading light angled, mind open, and worlds unfolding, here and now, in the palm of my hand."

The awards - worth a total of £16,000 - are sponsored by Bookmark, the global content marketing and communications agency, and are run by the Forward Arts Foundation. They comprise 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).

Kim Moore, a former Forward Prize shortlistee and one of three poets on the 2020 jury says, "Being shortlisted for a Forward Prize felt like a dream but the invitation to be one of the judges this year just feels like a gift - not only because of the chance to read widely, but because of the joy of discussing and thinking about poetry with my fellow judges, and the certainty that I'm going to be surprised, challenged and inspired by what we find."

The judges' selection of shortlisted and highly commended poems will be published on 5 September 2019 in the 29th annual *Forward Book of Poetry*.

Poems of the Decade: An Anthology of the Forward Books of Poetry has been an A level English set text on the Edexcel exam board since 2014.

Notes to Editors:

1. **The Forward Prizes for Poetry** are the most widely coveted awards for new poetry published in the UK and Ireland. The annual ceremony brings poetry's biggest names to London's Southbank to perform alongside rising talent before diverse and enthusiastic audiences. Notable alumni include Seamus Heaney, Ted Hughes and Claudia Rankine, while Simon Armitage, Jackie Kay, Carol Ann Duffy and Daljit Nagra are among those boosted by early career Forward recognition. The prizes, run by the Forward Arts Foundation since 1992, are sponsored by Bookmark Content. There are three categories: the Forward Prize for Best Collection, the Felix Dennis Prize for Best First Collection and the Forward Prize for Best Single Poem. Poems from the shortlisted and highly commended books are published in the annual *Forward Book of Poetry* creating an invaluable overview for poetry lovers and a perfect introduction for new poetry readers.

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2. **Judges** (photos available on request)

Alexandra Harris is a writer, teacher, literary critic and cultural historian. Her work includes *Romantic Moderns* (2010), *Weatherland: Writers and Artists Under English Skies* (2015), *Time and Place* (2019) and many essays on books, paintings, people and places; she is currently working on a study of rural history and local feeling. She reviews for the *Guardian* and has presented a range of arts programmes for BBC radio. She is a Professor of English at the University of Birmingham and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature.

Leaf Arbuthnot is a freelance journalist and poetry critic whose reviews have been published in the *Sunday Times*, the *Times Literary Supplement*, *Ambit* and elsewhere. She judged the 2017 Michael Marks Awards for poetry pamphlets. Her first novel, *Looking for Eliza*, is to be published by Orion in May, and is about a poet's unlikely friendship with a young woman in Oxford.

Kim Moore's first collection *The Art of Falling* (Seren, 2015) won the 2016 Geoffrey Faber Memorial Prize. She won a Northern Writers Award in 2014, an Eric Gregory Award in 2011 and the Geoffrey Dearmer Prize in 2010. Her pamphlet *If We Could Speak Like Wolves* was a winner in the 2012 Poetry Business Pamphlet Competition. She is a PhD candidate at Manchester Metropolitan University and is working on her second collection. Along with Clare Shaw, she is Co-Director of Kendal Poetry Festival.

Roger Robinson is a writer who has performed worldwide and was chosen by Decibel as one of 50 writers who have influenced the black-British writing canon. He was shortlisted for The OCM Bocas Poetry Prize, The Oxford Brookes Poetry Prize, highly commended by the Forward Poetry Prize. He is an alumnus of The Complete Works. His latest book *A Portable Paradise* was chosen as a New Statesman Book Of The Year and won the T.S. Eliot Prize 2019. He has toured extensively with the British Council and is a co-founder of both Spoke Lab and the international writing collective Malika's Kitchen.

David Wheatley was born in Dublin and has published five collections of poetry, most recently *The President of Planet Earth* (Carcanet, 2017). A former Forward Prize shortlistee, he has been awarded the Rooney Prize for Irish Literature and the Vincent Buckley Poetry Prize. He writes on poetry for many journals, including *The Guardian*, *Times Literary Supplement*, and *London Review of Books*, and is the author of a critical study, *Contemporary British Poetry* (Palgrave, 2015). He lectures at the University of Aberdeen.

3. **Past winners of the Forward Prize for Best Collection are:** Fiona Benson *Vertigo & Ghost* (Cape Poetry) 2019, Danez Smith *Don't Call Us Dead* (Chatto & Windus) 2018, Sinéad Morrissey *On Balance* (Carcanet) 2017, Vahni Capildeo *Measures 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 and Faber) 2010, Don Paterson *Rain* (Faber and Faber) 2009, Mick Imlah *The Lost Leader* (Faber and Faber) 2008, Sean O'Brien *The Drowned Book* (Picador Poetry) 2007, Robin Robertson *Swithering* (Cape Poetry) 2006, David Harsent *Legion* (Faber and 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 and 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 and Faber) 1992.

4. **Forward Arts Foundation** promotes knowledge and enjoyment of poetry across the UK. A national charity, we change lives by giving people the confidence to create and communicate, we support poets and we strengthen communities.

Our flagship programmes, **National Poetry Day** and the **Forward Prizes for Poetry**, enable all to enjoy, discover and share poetry as performers, writers, listeners and readers.

5. **Bookmark Content**, 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.
6. **Southbank Centre** is the UK's largest arts centre occupying a 17 acre site that sits in the midst of London's most vibrant cultural quarter on the South Bank of the Thames. The site has an extraordinary creative and architectural history stretching back to 1951 Festival of Britain. Southbank Centre is home to the Royal Festival Hall, Queen Elizabeth Hall, Purcell Room and Hayward Gallery as well as the National Poetry Library and the Arts Council Collection. For further information please visit southbankcentre.co.uk

