



28 September 2015

CLAUDIA RANKINE
WINS
FORWARD PRIZE FOR BEST COLLECTION

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

Claudia Rankine, *Citizen: An American Lyric* (Penguin Books)

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

Mona Arshi, *Small Hands*, (Liverpool University Press)

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

Claire Harman, "*The Mighty Hudson*" (TLS)

The winner of the 2015 Forward Prize for the Best Poetry Collection is Jamaica-born Claudia Rankine for *Citizen: An American Lyric*, described by the jury as a "powerful book for our time". AL Kennedy, chair of the five-strong jury, said: "This is writing we can recommend with real urgency and joy. *Citizen* is a stylistically daring poetic project about the dehumanization of outsiders: we found it exhilarating and genuinely transformative."

"*Citizen* is a brave book, with many dimensions: it takes risks, gives courage and provokes profound self-questioning. We read it as a celebration of the power of language, not simply as a call to arms but a call to speak out and to share. Several of us have, individually, pressed this book on others with real fervour. It will, we know, raise questions about the nature, purpose and importance of poetry.

Citizen: An American Lyric (Penguin Books) is published as poetry and has also been described as a "lyric essay", a creative non-fiction genre combining the essay form with poetic technique, using juxtaposition instead of argument or narrative. The book features extracts from documentary film scripts, an essay on Venus Williams, screen grabs of Zinedine Zidane's 2006 World Cup head-butt, President Obama's oath of office, JMW Turner's painting *The Slave Ship* and witness testimony to acts of everyday racism.

Mona Arshi's *Small Hands* (Liverpool University Press) wins the Felix Dennis Prize for Best First Collection. London-born Arshi, who spent ten years as a human-rights lawyer, drew on both her legal experience and her Punjabi Sikh heritage for her debut collection, which the jury praised for its "imagination, sensuality and beguiling playfulness".

They particularly admired her "beautiful precision and her willingness to experiment with form, including couplets, ghazals, sonnets and prose poetry." They also remarked on the subtlety with which Arshi left her mark on the reader's memory, whether writing about the iniquity of using "shop-bought garam masala" or the case of right-to-die campaigner Diane Pretty, whom she represented as a lawyer.

"The Mighty Hudson" by Claire Harman, first published in the TLS, was awarded the Best Single Poem prize. The poem, a biographical sketch of a strongman who over-reaches himself spectacularly, delighted the judges with its "inventiveness and wit".

The Forward Prizes for Poetry were awarded at the Royal Festival Hall in London with poets reading from the shortlisted collections, introduced by a musical performance by Cerys Matthews. All shortlisted poets are included in the 24th annual Forward Book of Poetry, which also contains more than 50 poems highly recommended by the judges.

Students at GCSE and A Level stages have been invited to participate in the judging process by writing critiques of selected poems on the shortlists, available on the Forward Arts Foundation website.

www.forwardartsfoundation.org
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For biographical details, see

www.forwardartsfoundation.org/poet/claudia-rankine

www.forwardartsfoundation.org/poet/mona-arshi

www.forwardartsfoundation.org/poet/clare-harman



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Notes to Editors:

1. **The Forward Prizes**, now in their 24th year, are the most sought after accolades in the UK and Ireland for both established and emerging poets. With a total value of £16,000, the prizes are divided into 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)
2. Previous winners of the **Forward Prize for Best Collection** are: Kei Miller, *The Cartographer Tries to Map a Way to Zion* (Carcenet) 2014, Michael Symmons Roberts *Drysalter* (Cape) 2013, Jorie Graham *PLACE* (Carcenet) 2012, John Burnside *Black Cat Bone* (Jonathan Cape) 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) 2007, Robin Robertson *Swithering* (Picador) 2006, David Harsent *Legion* (Faber & Faber) 2005, Kathleen Jamie *The Tree House* (Picador) 2004, Ciaran Carson *Breaking News* (Gallery Press) 2003, Peter Porter *Max is Missing* (Picador) 2002, Sean O'Brien *Downriver* (Picador) 2001, Michael Donaghy *Conjure* (Picador) 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
3. The Forward Prizes are run by the **Forward Arts Foundation**, a charity that promotes excellence in poetry and increases its audience. Its programmes include National Poetry Day, an annual mass-participation celebration of poetry that marks its 21st anniversary this year with nationwide events, performances and activities on 8 October 2015. Its supporters include Forward Worldwide, Arts Council England, the John Ellerman Foundation, the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, the Rothschild Foundation and the estate of the late Felix Dennis.
4. **The Forward Book of Poetry 2016**, with a foreword by AL Kennedy and cover by contemporary artist Georgie Hopton, is available for RRP £8.99. It is published by Forward Worldwide/Faber & Faber ISBN [978-0-571-32538-2].
5. **Forward Worldwide**, a leading content marketing agency based in London, Shanghai and Singapore, is the sponsor and key supporter of the Forward Prizes for Poetry. It develops digital products and creates engaging, shareable content in multiple languages, raising brand awareness and driving sales. Clients include beautifully Patek Philippe, American Express, Standard Life, Fidelity, B & Q and Tesco.. www.forwardww.com

