



30 September 2014

**KEI MILLER WINS  
FORWARD PRIZE FOR BEST COLLECTION**

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

*The Cartographer Tries to Map a Way to Zion, Kei Miller, Carcanet*

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

*Black Country, Liz Berry, Chatto Poetry*

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

*In a Restaurant, Stephen Santus, Bridport Prize*

The winner of the 2014 Forward Prize for the Best Poetry Collection is Kei Miller for *The Cartographer Tries to Map a Way to Zion*, described by the judges as a “stand out” book opening new worlds to the reader – and to the listener. The book is structured as a dialogue between a map-maker striving to impose order on an unfamiliar land, and a “Rasta-man” who undercuts his project, each joke and question shows what cannot be measured. The judges relished Miller’s ability to defy expectations, set up oppositions only to undermine them: the Rasta-man, like Miller himself, has a PhD, while the cartographer sucks his teeth like a local.

Chair of the judges Jeremy Paxman, historian and broadcaster, whose panel consisted of singer-songwriter Cerys Matthews and poets Dannie Abse, Vahni Capildeo and Helen Mort said: “Kei is doing something you don’t come across often: this is a beautifully voiced collection which struck us all with its boldness and wit. Many poets refer to multiple realities, different ways of observing the world, Kei doesn’t just refer, he articulates them.”

Kei Miller first discovered the power of his own voice when growing up in Jamaica, where his ability to induce fainting fits among listeners through his skills as a young preacher won him a following he did not always appreciate. The church did not retain his loyalty: on coming to Britain to pursue an academic career, he made ends meet by winning poetry slams, a secret he tried to hide from the professor who is now his

publisher, Michael Schmidt. "I am ashamed to have won that prize, and truth be told I am also ashamed that I am ashamed," he said of his 2004 victory as Manchester's slam poetry champion.

He was born in Kingston in 1978 and has published three collections of poetry and a collection of short stories about homophobia in Jamaica that was shortlisted in 2007 for the Commonwealth Writers' Best First Book prize. He has a PhD in Caribbean Literature from the University of Glasgow and currently teaches creative writing at Royal Holloway College, University of London.

Liz Berry wins the Felix Dennis Prize for Best First Collection. In *Black Country*, named after her place of birth, she takes an often disparaged dialect – the language of her childhood, her family and friends - and turns it into the language of poetry.

Jeremy Paxman said: "Liz Berry makes you look at the world differently: her book is a real appreciation of a place that's not often appreciated. She is a fresh, exciting and distinctive new voice. Her work is that rare thing: a collection that leaves you feeling full of real optimism and hope."

*In a Restaurant* by Stephen Santus is the Best Single Poem. Santus, who teaches at a language school in Oxford, has never been published before. Jeremy Paxman says: "His poem takes an everyday simple gesture, one we all recognise, and unpacks it. The poem is simple, on first sight, but it becomes more resonant with each re-reading."

The Forward Prizes for Poetry were awarded at a public event with poets reading from the shortlisted collections together with actors Samuel West, Juliet Stevenson, Simon McBurney and Zawe Ashton. All shortlisted poets are included in the 23<sup>rd</sup> annual Forward Book of Poetry, containing the judges' choice of the year's best poems.

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.

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## Notes to Editors:

1. The Forward Prizes, now in their 23<sup>rd</sup> 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: Michael Symmons Roberts *Drysalter* (Cape) 2013, Jorie Graham *PLACE* (Carcanet) 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* (Jonathan Cape) 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. **Forward Arts Foundation**, which runs both the Forward Prizes for Poetry and National Poetry Day, is one of the UK's foremost supporters of the literary arts. The Foundation seeks to extend poetry's audience, raise poetry's profile and link poetry to people in new ways. 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 2015, with a foreword by Jeremy Paxman and cover by contemporary artist Gary Hume, is available from 30 September for RRP £8.99. It is published by Forward Worldwide/Faber & Faber ISBN 978-0-571-31524-6
5. Forward Worldwide, one of the UK's leading customer publishing agencies, is sponsor and key supporter of the Forward Prizes for Poetry. Forward creates beautifully crafted, highly targeted customer communications for clients such as Patek Philippe, Bang & Olufsen, Tesco, Ford, Standard Life, Transport for London and Barclays. Forward's bespoke magazines, websites, ezines and emails are produced in 38 languages and reach customers in 172 countries. [www.forwardww.com](http://www.forwardww.com)



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