

MEDIA RELEASE | TUESDAY, 18 SEPTEMBER 2018

DANEZ SMITH, PHOEBE POWER AND LIZ BERRY WIN 27TH FORWARD PRIZES FOR POETRY



Forward Prize for Best Collection (£10,000)

Danez Smith – *Don't Call Us Dead* (Chatto Poetry)

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

Phoebe Power – *Shrines of Upper Austria* (Carcenet)

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

Liz Berry – 'The Republic of Motherhood' (Granta)

The winners of the Forward Prizes for Poetry 2018 were announced at the Queen Elizabeth Hall tonight, with Danez Smith winning the £10,000 prize for Best Collection for *Don't Call Us Dead*. Phoebe Power won the Felix Dennis Award for Best First Collection for *Shrines of Upper Austria*, while Liz Berry's 'The Republic of Motherhood' won the award for Best Single Poem.

The critic and broadcaster Bidisha, chair of the Forward Prizes jury, said: *'The work of the three winners, taken together, speaks of poetry's power to bear witness, express new ways of seeing, and apply itself with endless versatility. At a time when poetry sales are growing, the jury's choices illuminate the capacity of contemporary poets to find public words for matters of intimate importance and political urgency.'*

The Forward Prizes for Poetry are Britain's most coveted poetry prizes: the three awards celebrate the best new poetry published in the British Isles and honour both established and emerging writers. They are sponsored by Bookmark Content, the content and communications company.

Danez Smith, at 29 the Best Collection Prize's youngest ever winner – and the first to take the pronoun 'they' - writes jubilant, confrontational lyrical poems described as 'poetic dynamite': while drawing on the experience of being black, gender-neutral and HIV positive in the American mid-west, they appeal to a very wide audience, particularly on screen and in live performance. Speaking of the Forward Prizes, Smith says: 'I hope someone out there will see my work – my black, queer loud-mouth work on this platform – and recognize the worthiness in themselves'.

A charismatic advocate for poems that 'make the worlds within them feel possible,' Smith reaches hundreds of thousands through YouTube, but speaks eloquently of the power of reading and writing, advising fans: 'You need no-one's permission to be a real-deal poet. Read more than you write, write even when it's bad – and when it's bad you probably should read more.'

Bidisha, on behalf of the judges, said: *'The tight lyrical poems in Don't Call Us Dead feel utterly contemporary, and exciting. Showing an astonishing formal and emotional range and a mastery of metrical, musical language, Smith's finely crafted poetry makes us look anew at the intertwined natures of politics and sexuality and stands as a powerful warning: this is what's happening, be alert, pay attention.'*

Phoebe Power's *Shrines of Upper Austria* began as a narrative sequence 'Austrian Murder Case', that became an extended exploration of the culture and environment of Austria, her grandmother's homeland. A former Foyle Young Poet, from Newcastle, Power combines playfulness and horror with formal inventiveness.

Bidisha, on behalf of the judges, said: *'In this wonderfully crisp collection, which takes in childhood, climate change, office culture, a murder investigation, relics of the last war and warnings about how we live now, Power travels across Europe to share a wide perspective that makes the reader see her native UK in a different way. Surprising, observed with a sharp eye for detail and a quick sense of humour, Shrines of Upper Austria unsettles and delights: Power's utterly contemporary voice is one you want to hear more from.'*

Liz Berry's 'The Republic of Motherhood' addresses to the experience of becoming a new mother. The poem responds both to the support she received from other mothers after the birth of her first child, and to a literary absence – a shortage of poetry equal to the transformations she witnessed, and underwent. Berry, whose debut, *Black Country*, won the Felix Dennis Prize for Best First Collection in 2015, was overwhelmed by the number of women who contacted her after first reading the poem in the magazine *Granta*: 'I was emboldened by their belief in the power of poems to bear witness.'

Bidisha, on behalf of the judges, said: *'In 'The Republic of Motherhood' Liz Berry shows motherhood in its rightful scale: not as something domestic, but massive, the way it really is. By exploring her own experience, she has hit upon a vein of the universal. Accessible, yet deeply profound, this is the kind of poem you want to give to friends and family, and say: Read this.'*

The Forward Prizes were awarded at a ceremony at the Queen Elizabeth Hall in London's Southbank Centre, with readings from the shortlisted collections, introduced by the prizes' founder **William Sieghart** and hosted by the jury chair Bidisha, and fellow judge **Chris McCabe**, director of the National Poetry Library. The jury also comprised poets **Mimi Khalvati** and **Niall Campbell**, plus **Jen Campbell**, poet, author and vlogger.

All shortlisted poets are included in the recently released **Forward Book of Poetry 2019**, which also contains more than 50 poems highly commended by the judges.

For further information, visit www.forwardartsfoundation.org or join the conversation at [@forwardprizes](https://twitter.com/forwardprizes) #ForwardPrizes.

Notes to editors

1. **Biographies of the shortlisted poets and samples of their work** can be found on www.forwardartsfoundation.org/forward-prizes-for-poetry

2. **The Forward Prizes** are among the most sought after 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](https://twitter.com/BookmarkContent) and bookmarkcontent.com.

4. Forward Arts Foundation, which runs the Forward Prizes for Poetry, celebrates excellence in poetry and widens its audience. An Arts Council England National Portfolio organisation, it also co-ordinates National Poetry Day. Find it at www.forwardartsfoundation.org [@forwardprizes](https://twitter.com/forwardprizes) and [@poetrydayuk](https://twitter.com/poetrydayuk).

5. **Past winners of the Forward Prize for Best Collection are:** Sinéad Morrissey for *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. 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.



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