



Media Release | embargoed until 9pm Monday 28 November 2022

BERNARDINE EVARISTO & JOELLE TAYLOR NAMED CHAIRS FOR 2023 JUDGING PANELS AS WINNERS OF 30TH ANNIVERSARY FORWARD POETRY PRIZES REVEALED



(From left to right: Kim Moore, Stephanie Sy-Quia, Nick Laird, Bernardine Evaristo, Joelle Taylor)

As the winners of UK's most coveted prizes for poetry were revealed live from Contact, Manchester in front of a sell-out audience, the Forward Arts Foundation announced Bernardine Evaristo and Joelle Taylor as the chairs of the prizes' two judging panels for 2023.

The 2023 prizes will include a new category: Best Single Poem - Performed, which will sit alongside the Best Single Poem - Written category. Evaristo will chair the panel judging the collection-length entries, and Taylor will chair the panel focusing on the two single poem prizes. Other judges include Karen McCarthy Woolf and Kate Fox.

'We are ecstatic to work with such powerhouses as Bernardine Evaristo and Joelle Taylor in 2023. They're writers whose craft and activism we deeply admire, and it feels particularly fitting as we launch a new category that seeks to rebalance historical inequities in our emphasis on written over performed poetry. These approaches are in constant conversation with each other. We also hope it will increase the ways poets and audiences access and engage with the Prizes.' Mónica Parle, Co-Executive Director, Forward Arts Foundation

'I've been following the Forward for about thirty years now and I've long admired how it's progressed and flourished through the decades. I'm looking forward to chairing the judging panel for the collections' categories in 2023, not least because it will mean immersing myself in oceans of contemporary poetry. Poetry is essential to the creative and cultural life of the UK and every year this prize draws attention to the art form and enhances and celebrates the careers of the many writers who make its lists and win its prizes. Long may it continue.' Bernardine Evaristo, Jury Chair, Collection Prizes 2023

'This new category is great news for the wide range of poetics on offer, and will undoubtedly revive a scene damaged by the pandemic. I'm excited to be working with Forward to develop a new element to their work that reflects my long engagement in performance and spoken word.' Joelle Taylor, Jury Chair, Single Poem Prizes 2023

In 1992 the current Poet Laureate Simon Armitage won the prize for Best First Collection, former Scottish Makar Jackie Kay won Best Single Poem, and Thom Gunn won the Best Collection. Since then, the Forward Prizes have become the most influential awards for new poetry published in the UK and Ireland. The three winning poets take their places on an astonishing list of previous winners which include many of contemporary literature's most celebrated names: Seamus Heaney, Ted Hughes, Carol Ann Duffy and Claudia Rankine. **This year's winners are:**

Forward Prize for Best Collection (£10,000)

All the Men I Never Married by Kim Moore (Seren)

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

Amnion by Stephanie Sy-Quia (Granta Poetry)

Best Single Poem (£1,000)

'Up Late' by Nick Laird (Granta)

Kim Moore, *All the Men I Never Married (Seren)* deals with experiences of everyday sexism through forty-eight numbered poems and a gallery of exes and significant others. Stephen Sexton praised the book as a 'tonally profound collection which is precise, careful, unfolding, whose methodical, numbered poems show us the work and process of overcoming people and encounters' whilst the judges chair, Fatima Bhutto found the collection 'full of dangerous wit and knowing humour that speaks directly to the reader in a hugely pleasurable way.' Nadine Aisha Jassat described it as 'a phenomenal and powerful collection, and one I urgently want to share with everyone I know. It feels so true, precise, brilliant and layered.' Kim Moore of *All the Men I Never Married*: 'I know that poetry can be transformative because it's changed my life, and I wanted to see if I could write poetry that might change or shift people's ways of thinking about sexism and gender-based microaggressions. What I didn't expect is that the writing of the book changed me – my perceptions, my understanding of sexism and its impact on me.'

Amnion (Granta Poetry) by Stephanie Sy-Quia spotlights colonialism, class and migration through an accomplished blending of fiction, epic poetry and the lyric essay. *Amnion* explores the reverberations that the actions of one generation can have on the next, through acts of bravery and resistance, great and small. Judge Alice Hiller praised the collection for 'working in crucial new territory around questions of migrations and gendered identity, both thematically, and in terms of delivery. Through the extended, fragmented form, Sy-Quia interlinks multiple generations and diverse identities, always questioning how the individual narratives are sited relative to the dominant power structures and historical realities shaping their outcomes.' Rishi Dastidar said: '*Amnion* makes the blood flow faster, it is dazzling, new and exciting in the way it braids the personal with the broader context.' Sy-Quia started writing *Amnion* when she was fifteen and has taken her nine years to complete: '*Amnion* is my attempt to wrestle with the metrics for provenance and belonging. The early passages of the book are very precious to me, because they represent the oldest material: there are phrases in there which date from my teens, and I like to think that their continued inclusion in the text is a kind of loyalty to former selves.'

Nick Laird wrote his winning poem 'Up Late' as an elegy to his father who died of Covid in March 2021. He said 'it has a weird real-time element to it that wouldn't be there if I'd been able to be with my father, so it's of the moment in that sense. It was the peculiar circumstances of the covid pandemic, where you couldn't be with your dying loved ones, that brought the poem about in that form.' The judges felt Laird's poem sincerely engaged with death, grief and the private and shared lived experience of the pandemic in ways which readers will find profoundly moving and cathartic.

The Forward Prizes winners this year highlight the importance of contemporary poetry to voice and process grief and to bend and play with the language of identity in ways readers can feel lived experience in moving, engaging and profound ways.

'The jury this year read such an incredible selection of work, and it took six hours just to reach a shortlist. It was also tough to winnow down to one - all the shortlisted collections and poems were so accomplished and are a great testament to the radical spirit of poetry today. Etel Adnan said 'the poem is the last place we can imagine freedom' and it was a true pleasure spending this year with reading such incredible poets. We're proud of our final selection and voices they celebrate.' Fatima Bhutto, Chair of 2022 Judges

William Sieghart, founder of the Forward Prizes said: 'The Prizes have three aims; to deepen appreciation of poetry's value, to celebrate excellence in poetry and to increase poetry's audience. All that we have done over the last three decades was devised with these goals in mind and we are so grateful to our thoughtful and committed jury for the 2022 Prizes. The winners and shortlists reveal a vital benchmark of excellence, a celebration of talent and innovation, and a provocation for further creative endeavour.'

For further information, including Q&As with the winning poets, visit www.forwardartsfoundation.org
For interview requests: Dusty Miller PR dustymillerpr@gmail.com 07955 904 482 or Forward Arts Foundation info@forwardartsfoundation.org 020 7845 4655

Notes to Editors:

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 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.

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.

Contact is a vibrant multidisciplinary arts venue in Manchester, recognised nationally and internationally as a game-changer in the field of youth leadership and creativity. At Contact young people aged 13-30 genuinely lead, working alongside staff in deciding the artistic programme, making staff appointments and acting as full Board members. This model is seen as a national exemplar of best practice in relation to young people and diversity and accessibility, influencing organisations nationwide. Contact recently reopened following a £6.75million redevelopment which has transformed the building for the next generation of audiences, artists and young people with new performance spaces, a new recording studio, an arts and health development space and many other exciting features. www.contactmcr.com Contact receives core funding from Arts Council England, Greater Manchester Combined Authority, Manchester City Council and The University of Manchester and is also supported by charitable trusts & foundations and individual donors.

Winning poets 2022:

Kim Moore lives in Barrow, Cumbria. She completed her doctorate in Poetry and Everyday Sexism at Manchester Metropolitan University in 2020. Her poems have been published in the *TLS*, *Poetry Review*, *Poetry London*, and elsewhere. She regularly appears at festivals and events, her prize-winning pamphlet, *If we could speak like wolves* (Smith-Doorstop) was chosen as an Independent Book of the Year in 2012 and was shortlisted for other prizes.

Moore won an Eric Gregory Award in 2011 and the Geoffrey Dearmer Prize in 2010. In 2014 she won a Northern Promise award. Her debut collection *The Art of Falling* won the Geoffrey Faber Memorial Prize and was longlisted for Lakeland Book of the Year in 2016. Her second collection *All the Men I Never Married* was published in 2021 to wide acclaim. Her book of lyric essays *What the Trumpet Taught Me* (Smith-Doorstop) was published in 2022. A second book of lyric essays *Yes, I Am Judging You* is forthcoming from Seren in September 2022.

Stephanie Sy-Quia was born in 1995 in California and now lives in London. She studied English at Oxford and currently works as a freelance journalist. Her writing has appeared in the *FT Weekend*, the *TLS*, the *Economist*, *The Spectator* and *TANK* magazine, and has twice been shortlisted for the FT Bodley Head Essay Prize.

Nick Laird was born in County Tyrone in 1975. A poet, novelist, screenwriter, critic and former lawyer, his awards include the Betty Trask Prize, the Rooney Prize for Irish Literature, the Geoffrey Faber Memorial Prize, the Somerset Maugham Award and a Guggenheim fellowship. *Feel Free*, his most recent collection, was shortlisted for the TS Eliot prize and the Derek Walcott award. A Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature, he's on faculty at New York University, and is the Seamus Heaney Professor of Poetry at Queens' University, Belfast. He curates the annual Irish Art Centre's Poetryfest in New York, and last year published a book for children, *Weirdo*, co-written with Zadie Smith. A new collection is forthcoming in June 2023.

Judges 2022:

Chair: **Fatima Bhutto** is the author of several books of fiction and nonfiction, most recently the novel, *The Runaways*, and the nonfiction reportage about globalisation and popular culture, *New Kings of the World*.

Rishi Dastidar's poetry has been published by the *Financial Times* and BBC amongst many others. He is a fellow of The Complete Works, a consulting editor at *The Rialto* magazine, a member of Malika's Poetry Kitchen, and chair of writer development organization Spread The Word. A poem from his debut collection *Ticker-tape* was included in *The Forward Book of Poetry 2018*, and his second collection, *Saffron Jack*, was published in the UK by Nine Arches Press in 2020. He is also editor of *The Craft: A Guide to Making Poetry Happen in the 21st Century* (Nine Arches Press), and co-editor of *Too Young, Too Loud, Too Different: Poems from Malika's Poetry Kitchen (Corsair)*

alice hillier's debut, *bird of winter*, was shortlisted for the 2021 Forward Prize for Best First Collection and the 2022 John Pollard Prize. Author of *The T-Shirt Book*, she has reviewed widely, and holds a PhD from UCL. alice blogs, podcasts and interviews at alicehillier.info. She founded the www.voicingoursilences.com collective. She's also the creative director of the Oscar Nemon Estate (www.oscarnemon.org.uk). For 2022, alice is curating *Dancing with Shadows*, exploring the impacts of genocide on Nemon's work of the 1940s.

Nadine Aisha Jassat is the author of acclaimed poetry collection *Let Me Tell You This*, and her work has been published widely in popular anthologies such as Picador's *It's Not About the Burqa* (Shortlisted for Foyles Non-Fiction Book of the Year) and Bloodaxe's *Staying Human*. Her work has drawn significant acclaim, including being shortlisted for the Edwin Morgan Poetry award and winning a Scottish Book Trust New Writers' Award. Nadine recently took part in Moniack Mhor's International Writers' Residency, in partnership with Lagos International Poetry Festival, and she has performed and taught internationally, from Hyderabad Literary Festival to Edinburgh International Book Festival's *Outriders Africa*. Her debut novel for children, *the Stories Grandma Forgot (And How I Found Them)*, is a gripping middle-grade verse mystery that shines a light on Alzheimer's and identity, forthcoming with Hachette Children's Group in May 2023.

Stephen Sexton's first book, *If All the World and Love Were Young* was the winner of the Forward Prize for Best First Collection in 2019 and the Shine / Strong Award for Best First Collection. He was awarded the E.M. Forster Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters and the Rooney Prize for Irish Literature in 2020. He was the winner of the National Poetry Competition in 2016 and the recipient of an Eric Gregory Award in 2018. *Cheryl's Destinies* was published in 2021 and was shortlisted for the Forward Prize for Best Collection.

Chairs of Judging panels 2023:

Bernardine Evaristo won the Booker Prize 2019 with her eighth book, *Girl, Woman, Other* (Penguin 2019), the first black woman and black British person to win it. Her latest publication and tenth book is a memoir, *Manifesto: On Never Giving Up* (Penguin 2021). Her writing spans fiction, poetry, non-fiction, literary criticism and drama. She has founded several successful arts inclusion projects since 1982, latterly literature projects, and she is currently the literature mentor for the Rolex Mentor & Protégé Arts Initiative (2022-2024). The recipient of many honours, including two recent British Book Awards, and she was named 'Person of the Year' by the UK *Bookseller* magazine in 2021. She is Professor of Creative Writing at Brunel University London, an Honorary Fellow of St. Anne's College, University of Oxford; an International Honorary Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and President of the Royal Society of Literature. www.bevaristo.com

Joelle Taylor is the author of 4 collections of poetry. Her most recent collection *C+NTO & Othered Poems* won the 2021 T.S Eliot Prize and was the subject of a Radio 4 arts documentary 'Butch'. *C+NTO* was nominated for the Rathbone Folio Prize, longlisted for the Ondaatje Prize, and has been shortlisted for the Polari Book Prize. It was named by *Telegraph*, *New Statesman*, *White Review* and *Times Literary Supplement* as one of the best poetry books of the year, as well as *DIVA* magazine's Book of the Month, and awarded 5 stars by the *Morning Star*. She has recently completed a book tour of Australia including Sydney Opera House (March 2022). *C+NTO* is currently being adapted for theatre with a view to touring. A former UK SLAM Champion she founded the national youth poetry slams SLAMBassadors through the Poetry Society in 2001, remaining its Artistic Director until 2018. She is a co-curator and host of Out-Spoken Live, resident at the Southbank Centre, and an editor at Out-Spoken Press. She is also completing her memoirs for publication in 2024, as well as a novel of interconnecting stories *The Night Alphabet*. She is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature, and the 2022 Saboteur Spoken Word Artist of the Year.

Past winners of the Forward Prize for Best Collection:

Luke Kennard *Notes on the Sonnet* (Penned in the Margins) 2021, Caroline Bird *The Air Year* (Carcenet) 2020, Fiona Benson *Vertigo & Ghost* (Cape Poetry) 2019, Danez Smith *Don't Call Us Dead* (Chatto & Windus) 2018, Sinéad Morrissey *On Balance* (Carcenet) 2017, Vahni Capildeo *Measures of Expatriation* (Carcenet) 2016, Claudia Rankine *Citizen: An American Lyric* (Penguin) 2015, Kei Miller *The Cartographer Tries to Map a Way to Zion* (Carcenet) 2014, Michael Symmons Roberts *Drysalter* (Cape Poetry) 2013, Jorie Graham *PLACE* (Carcenet) 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.



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