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GROUND-BREAKING WOMEN POETS' PRIZE OPENS FOR 2020 SUBMISSIONS

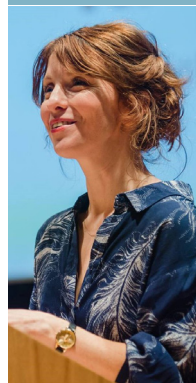
- *Evaluation calls prize "important model for literature organisations in the UK going forward"*
 - *Royal Birmingham Conservatoire joins network of prestigious prize partners*
- *All longlisted poets to be offered membership to TLC's innovative Being A Writer platform*
 - *Liz Berry, Malika Booker and Pascale Petit confirmed as 2020 judges*

The biennial Women Poets' Prize, founded by the Rebecca Swift Foundation, launches into its second prize year today. Honouring Rebecca Swift's two key passions – poetry and women's empowerment – the unique prize is awarded every two years to three women writers who each receive a holistic package that combines financial aid, creative development, well-being, and pastoral support. This includes:

- a £1000 cash bursary,
- a poetry mentor for the duration of a year,
- the offer of pastoral coaching,
- creative opportunities, from performance to bookbinding,
- practical support, such as digital skills training and childcare cover, and
- links and collaborations with prize partners.

The **Royal Birmingham Conservatoire** – one of the UK's most prestigious music and drama schools – comes on board as a new partner in 2020, working with the prize to provide poets with voice coaching opportunities. The RBC joins **Faber and Faber**, **Bath Spa University**, **The Literary Consultancy** (TLC), **City Lit**, **Verve Festival**, and **The Poetry School** as partners through which the full benefits of the prize are being delivered.

2020 judges



Liz Berry



Malika Booker



Pascale Petit

2018 winners



Claire Collison



Anita Pati



Nina Mingya Powles

Also new in 2020, all 30 poets on the longlist will be offered a year's free membership to **Being A Writer**, the innovative writers' creativity platform just launched by prize partners TLC, the UK's leading editorial consultancy.

The Women Poets' Prize returns after a hugely successful inaugural year: In 2018, it received nearly **600 submissions** by poets from across the UK. At least one third of applicants were women of colour, with an age range spanning 18-70s.

An independent evaluation of the first year – conducted by literary consultant Nathalie Teitler – found the Women Poets' Prize to be **“an essential new prize”** bringing together an unusually diverse range of voices across the UK, many of whom were entering a prize for the first time. The report found that many women, **often silenced by socio-economic or cultural reasons**, were encouraged by the unique mix of financial aid, professional and pastoral support, making it “an important model for literature organisations in the UK going forward.”

The judges for 2020 are confirmed to be the award-winning poets **Liz Berry, Malika Booker** and **Pascale Petit**.

Pascale Petit said: *“I won't know what I'm looking for until I find it – I'm hoping for surprises! I'm open to work that is beyond my aesthetic and taste, and will read with an adventurous mind. This is such a fantastic prize, where the winners will be nurtured and fully supported with pastoral care as well as top mentors. There are so many new women's worlds to discover, it's exciting to be part of that process and I can't wait for the discussions with my dream co-judges Malika and Liz.”*

Commenting on the impact of the prize, the three 2018 winners said the following:

“Along with the opportunities and nurturing – not least, the sustained mentoring with Mona Arshi – the Women Poets' Prize did something profound to my sense of myself as a poet: being taken seriously gave me confidence - and confidence is the magic ingredient in our ability to write.”

– **Claire Collison**

“The Women Poets' Prize was such a lovely thing to be awarded, and gave me a boost when I needed it. The best part has been the six sessions of mentorship from my highly-professional and astute mentor (Isobel Dixon), as well as feeling.” – **Anita Pati**

“It's been incredibly invigorating and energising for me, and has allowed me to access opportunities that I don't think I would ever have been able to access otherwise. At the time when I won the prize I feel like I was still very new to the poetry landscape in the UK, and totally new to publishing, and so I think it's given me a sense of community and ongoing support. New readers have come to my work through the prize, which is incredible, and quite life-changing.” – **Nina Mingya Powles**

When **Nina Mingya Powles's** debut, *Magnolia*, was shortlisted for the Forward Prizes for Poetry last month, she found herself on the list alongside two of the poets who mentored her through the Women Poets' Prize: **Martha Sprackland** (*Citadel*) and **Rachel Long** (*My Darling from the Lions*).

Submissions for the 2020 Women Poets' Prize close on **Friday, 14th August**. The prize is free to enter. For guidelines on how to submit, visit: www.rebeccaswiftfoundation.org/women-poets-prize

The shortlist will be announced on **Friday, 2nd October 2020**. Find out more and join the conversation via www.rebeccaswiftfoundation.org | [@FoundationSwift](https://twitter.com/FoundationSwift)

About the judges

Liz Berry's first book of poems, *Black Country* (Chatto 2014), described as a 'sooty, soaring hymn to her native West Midlands' (*Guardian*) was a Poetry Book Society Recommendation, received a Somerset Maugham Award and won the Geoffrey Faber Memorial Award and Forward Prize for Best First Collection 2014. Her pamphlet *The Republic of Motherhood* (Chatto, 2018) was a Poetry Book Society Pamphlet choice and the title poem won the Forward Prize for Best Single Poem 2018. Liz is a patron of Writing West Midlands and works as a tutor for organisations including the Arvon Foundation and The Poetry School.

Pascale Petit was born in Paris, grew up in France and Wales and lives in Cornwall. She is of French/Welsh/Indian heritage. Her eighth collection, *Tiger Girl* (Bloodaxe Books, 2020), was shortlisted for the 2020 Forward Prize for Best Collection, and a poem from the book won the 2020 Keats-Shelley Poetry Prize. Her previous collection, *Mama Amazonica* (Bloodaxe Books, 2017), won the RSL Ondaatje Prize 2018, was a Poetry Book Society Choice, and was also shortlisted for the Roehampton Poetry Prize 2018. She published six earlier collections, four of which were shortlisted for the T.S. Eliot Prize. She received a Cholmondeley Award from the Society of Authors in 2015, and was the chair of the judges for the 2015 T.S. Eliot Prize. Her books have been translated into Spanish, Chinese, Serbian and French. Trained as a sculptor at the Royal College of Art, she spent the first part of her life as a visual artist.

Malika Booker is a British poet of Guyanese and Grenadian parentage and the founder of Malika's Poetry Kitchen. Her pamphlet *Breadfruit* (flippedeye, 2007) received a Poetry Society recommendation and her poetry collection *Pepper Seed* (Peepal Tree Press, 2013) was shortlisted for the OCM Bocas prize and the Seamus Heaney Centre 2014 prize for first full collection. She is published with the poets Sharon Olds and Warsan Shire in *The Penguin Modern Poet Series 3: Your Family: Your Body* (2017). Malika received her MA from Goldsmiths University and has recently begun a PhD at the University of Newcastle. She was the Douglas Caster Cultural Fellow in Creative Writing at Leeds University, the first British poet to be a fellow at Cave Canem and the inaugural Poet in Residence at The Royal Shakespeare Company. Malika hosts and curates New Caribbean Voices, Peepal Tree Press's literary podcast, and is currently a poetry Lecturer at Manchester Metropolitan University.

About the Women Poets' Prize

As a biennial award, the Women Poets' Prize seeks to honour Rebecca's two key passions: poetry and the empowerment of women. The Prize offers three women poets a programme of support and creative professional development opportunities in collaboration with a wide range partner organisations. The 2020 partners will be announced in mid-August.

Each winner of the Women Poets' Prize will be carefully matched with a poetry mentor in addition to a pastoral coach, facilitating a body of support that will nurture craft and wellbeing in equal measure. The three winners will also each receive a monetary award of £1,000. The Rebecca Swift Foundation is keen for poets at all career stages to apply, with a particular eye for applications from individuals who do not usually consider applying for prizes. The Foundation and the Women Poets' Prize were announced formally at the Second Home Poetry Festival in June 2018.

About the Rebecca Swift Foundation

The Rebecca Swift Foundation is a UK registered charity set up in memory of Rebecca Swift – a much-loved editor, novelist, diarist, poet, and founder and director of The Literary Consultancy from its foundation in 1996 until her early death in April 2017. The Foundation is overseen by a Board of Trustees who held Rebecca dear, with Victoria Adukwei Bulley as Project Manager.

TLC was the UK's first editorial consultancy for writers, and was co-founded by Rebecca and her colleague Hannah Griffiths after they met working together at Virago Press. At the time of its inception, TLC's aim was to bridge the gap between writers, agents and publishers. Jenny Downham, Tina Seskis, Penny Pepper, Neamat Imam, Prue Leith, and Kerry Young are among the many authors it has supported to publication over the years. Now an Arts Council England NPO, TLC also runs a nationwide bursary scheme for low-income and marginalised writers alongside its commercial editorial, mentoring, and events services. Rebecca was a prolific writer, and a great lover of poetry. Her biography of Emily Dickinson, *Dickinson: Poetic Lives*, was published in 2011 with Hesperus Press, and she wrote poetry throughout her life. She was also a Trustee of the Maya Centre, a charity supporting vulnerable women in Islington through psychodynamic counselling, and a vocal supporter of their mental health therapy programmes which focus on enabling women to heal through learning to tell their stories.

In line with these passions – poetry, mental health, and women's rights – the Rebecca Swift Foundation Women Poets' Prize will provide a programme of longterm support and creative professional development opportunities to three female-identifying poets per year, selected through a judged application process. Each poet will be matched with a poetry mentor and a separate pastoral coach, and will have access to a number of inspirational 'experience' modules including Performance, Festivals, Bookbinding, Publishing History, Digital and Transmedia Skills, and a personalised Exploration module.

Rebecca was always very clear that her wish for TLC, as for the Foundation, was to shift the emphasis away from 'outcomes' that focussed on publication, and instead to maximise vital creative space for poets within a supported environment, giving them the opportunity to explore their writing and develop their poetic voice and their central sense of self, as well as improving skills through the learning modules, combining the holistic with the practical and allowing the poetry, and the poets, to flourish.