THE STATE OF POETRY AND POETRY CRITICISM IN THE UK AND IRELAND 2011-2018

Comissioned by the Centre for New and International Writing at the University of Liverpool for the Ledbury Emerging Poetry Critics programme.


Poetry Criticism

- Of 4,866 articles published, 245 (5.03%) were written by BAME critics. Of these 245, 115 were published in 2017 and 2018, almost doubling the previous total.

- Of these 245 articles, 117 (47.8%) were written by fellows of The Complete Works mentoring programme, the Ledbury Emerging Critics mentoring programme, or both.

- Of these 245 articles, 44 were published in Poetry Review (14.5% of their total articles) and 40 by Poetry London (18.3%).

- The London Review of Books has published 70 articles by 33 different critics. All 33 were white. Those 70 articles reviewed 86 different books. All 86 were by white poets.

- Although the Times Literary Supplement is one of only five platforms to publish more than 20 articles by BAME critics, this constitutes 3.6% of their total.

- At the 2011 census, 12.9% of the UK population identified as BAME. Of the twenty-six magazines in the data set still regularly publishing, five surpassed this figure: Poetry Review (14.5%), Poetry London (18.3%), Oxford Poetry (18.5%), The Poetry School Blog (20.4%) and Modern Poetry in Translation (21.4%).

- Of 7,711 books reviewed in the data set, 627 (8.13%) were written by BAME poets. This figure stayed largely fixed between 2011 (5.9%) and 2016 (7.7%), with a peak in 2012 (7.1%) and a dip in 2013 (4.9%). In the past two years, however, there has been a substantial
increase in critical attention to books by BAME poets: **12.9%** of all books reviewed in 2017 and **13.1%** in 2018.

- Of **4,866** articles published, **1,999 (41.08%)** were written by women and NB people. This figure has fluctuated but is rising, from **37.3%** between 2011-14 to **43.7%** between 2015-18.

- Of the twenty-six magazines in the data set still regularly publishing, only **eight** surpassed 50% of articles by women and NB people. **Nine** published less than 40%, while **five** published less than 30%: *Poetry Salzburg Review* (27%), *PN Review* (26.5%), *Acumen* (22.3%), *The London Review of Books* (17.1%), and *Stride* (11.9%).

- Though female critics are roughly as likely to review female poets as not, male critics review male poets **66.9%** of the time, compared with just **28.9%** female poets.

- The number of books per article a critic reviews differs along gender and racial intersections. An average white male critic reviews **1.53** books per article; a white female critic reviews **1.64**; a male BAME critic reviews **1.76**; a female BAME critic reviews **1.86**.

### Poems

- Of the **31,646** poems in the data set, **14,279 (45.12%)** were written by women and NB people. This percentage has risen year on year since the beginning of the data set, from **39.4%** in **2011** to **48.6%** in **2018**. It has never been above **50%**.

- In **ten** of the thirty-nine magazines surveyed, less than 40% of contributors were female or non-binary. In **two** of these, the figure was lower than 30%: *The London Review of Books* (29.4%), and *The Times Literary Supplement* (27.8%).

- **2,637 (8.33%)** were written by BAME poets. Unlike the steady progress made in publishing poems by women, this figure has remained largely fixed throughout the data set. In 2011, **8.7%** of all poems were by BAME poets; in 2018, this figure was **8.4%**. The figure dips in 2013/4 (6.4%; 6.9%) and peaks in 2016/7 (10.8%; 10.9%).

- **612** of those **2,637** (23.2%) were published in one magazine, *Modern Poetry in Translation*. Without it, the figure drops to **2,025**, or **6.7%** of the adjusted total.

- At the 2011 census, **12.9%** of the UK population identified as BAME. Of the magazines in the data set still regularly publishing, only **three** surpassed this figure: *MPT* (39.5% of contributors), *Poetry Review* (19%), and *The White Review* (16.6%).

### Editors

- In December 2018, I could find 88 editorial staff at the 41 platforms surveyed; 30 as Editor or Editor-in-Chief, and 48 in other editorial positions, covering editorial assistants or editorship by committee, which I have sorted under ‘Co-Editor’. Due to the small sample size, and the wide variation in what editorship entails in a large periodical and a small blog, for example,
the following figures are not as robust as those detailed above. They do, however, give an outline of how magazines are currently run.

- Of the thirty Editors, **seventeen** were women/NB people. All **thirty** were white.

- Of the forty-eight Co-Editors, **thirty-four** were women/NB people. **Seven** were BAME. Of those seven, one was on a magazine which has ceased publication (*The Wolf*), five were at publications that published just once in 2018 (*Prac Crit, Oxford Poetry*). Six of these seven were fellows of either The Complete Works or the Ledbury Emerging Poetry Critics.

**Prizes**

- **Eleven** of the **fifteen** total wins by BAME poets of the T.S. Eliot, Forward Best & First Collection, Costa and Ted Hughes prizes have come since Kei Miller’s Forward Best Collection win in 2014.

- **Forty** of the **sixty-three** total shortlistings for BAME poets have come in the same period.

- The T.S. Eliot has been won by BAME poets **three times** in its twenty-six year history, in 2010 (Derek Walcott), 2015 (Sarah Howe) and 2017 (Ocean Vuong).

- The Forward Prize for Best Collection has been won by BAME poets **four times** in its twenty-seven year history, in 2014 (Kei Miller), 2015 (Claudia Rankine), 2016 (Vahni Capildeo) and 2018 (Danez Smith).

- The Forward Prize for Best First Collection has been won by BAME poets **six times** in its twenty-seven year history, in 1994 (Kwame Dawes), 2006 (Tishani Doshi), 2007 (Daljit Nagra), 2015 (Mona Arshi), 2016 (Tiphanie Yanique) and 2017 (Ocean Vuong).

- The Costa Prize for Poetry has **never** been won by a BAME poet in its thirty-five year history.

- The Ted Hughes Award has been won **twice** by BAME poets in its ten year history, in 2017 (Jay Bernard) and 2018 (Raymond Antrobus).

- Three white poets – Don Paterson (six wins), Seamus Heaney (five) and Sean O’Brien (four) – have won the above prizes as often as all BAME poets combined.

- 17 of the **197** shortlistees for the T.S. Eliot Prize are BAME (8.6%); **eight** of those since 2014.

- 11 of the **133** shortlistees for the Forward Prize for Best Collection are BAME (8.2%); **eight** since 2014.

- 17 of the **130** shortlistees for the Forward Prize for Best First Collection are BAME (13.1%); **ten** since 2014.

- 6 of the **109** shortlistees for the Costa Prize for Poetry are BAME (5.5%); **three** since 2014.
• **12** of the **60** shortlistees for the Ted Hughes Award are BAME (20%); **eleven** since 2014.

• **45** of the **125** total wins were by female and non-binary poets (36%).

• **269** of the **629** total shortlistees were female and non-binary poets (42.8%).

• The average age of T.S. Eliot Prize winners is **50.5**, Forward Best Collection **51.3**, Forward Best First Collection **36.2**, Costa Prize for Poetry **50.4**, Ted Hughes Award **40.3**.