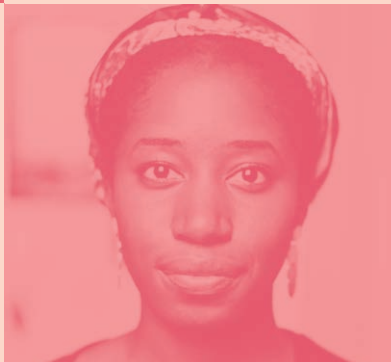




UNIVERSITY OF
LIVERPOOL

Centre for New and
International Writing



THE STATE OF POETRY AND POETRY CRITICISM

LED BURY
POETRY
FESTIVAL
2019

 @LedburyCritics #raceandreviewing

LEDBURY POETRY CRITICS MENTORSHIP SCHEME FOR BAME REVIEWERS

Since Sarah Howe and I founded the Ledbury Emerging Poetry Critics programme in the summer of 2017, it is fair to say that we have both learned a great deal more about poetry reviewing in the UK.

The programme began as an idea spurred on by shockingly low numbers of reviewers of colour in British newspapers and magazines. Although Sarah and I probably knew on some level that poetry criticism was not racially diverse, these hard statistics, collated by Dave Coates, galvanised our resolve to raise awareness and put practical measures in place. Since then, Dave's research has been invaluable to us, poetry critics, readers and commissioning editors who also see the imbalance in reviewing culture as fundamentally untenable. In November 2017, we met with our eight selected poetry critics at a two-day workshop residency in Ledbury, supported throughout by Ledbury Poetry Festival and its director, Chloe Garner. We were joined by the poet and critic Vidyan Ravinthiran, *The Sunday Times* poetry critic and academic Jeremy Noel-Tod, poet and editor Claire Trévien and Dave Coates.

Since then, only about a year and a half ago, the initial cohort of eight Ledbury Critics—Dzifa Benson, Mary Jean Chan, Jade Cuttle, Sarala Estruch, Nasser Hussain, Maryam Hessavi, Srishti Krishnamoorthy-Cavell and Jennifer Lee Tsai—have built on their existing skills as reviewers and gained access to major newspapers as well as poetry magazines. Their achievements are a result of their critical acuity, brilliance, tenacity, flexibility, and their deep belief in an inclusive literary culture. They benefitted from the guidance of excellent mentors—Jeremy Noel-Tod, Sam Riviere, Miriam Gamble, Vahni Capildeo, Vidyan Ravinthiran and Claire Trévien—and through opportunities made possible by commissioning editors who likewise believe that an open and diverse critical culture is not only necessary but invariably better than the status quo. As Dave Coates writes in his report, published in *The Brixton Review of Books*, 'There is a close relationship between BAME poets' access to major publishers and BAME critics' access to major journals: one enables, requires, demands the other.' Certainly poetry reviewing culture has also gained eight newly prominent voices who bring with them unique and multi-layered perspectives and tastes; all of whom offer knowledgeable and critically-engaged readings of poets of colour in a time when this is much needed.

The good news is that change is happening through the tremendous hard work of the Ledbury Critics. As Dave's report states: 'In the six years between 2011 and 2016, British and Irish poetry magazines and newspapers published critical work by BAME critics 130 times, just 3.7% of the total for those years. In the two years since the launch of the Ledbury Emerging Poetry Critics scheme in 2017, BAME critics have been published on the same platforms 115 times, 8.3% of the total. The Ledbury scheme has spearheaded rapid, vital change, but these successes must be taken in context as part of a fight for an inclusive poetry culture dating back many years.'

Indeed many of the editors Sarah and I have worked with over the past few months have shared our conviction that this change to reviewing culture is long overdue. I'd like to highlight a few editors in particular who have, either through our prompting or in tandem with our own ambitions, been exceptionally supportive to the critics: Emily Berry (*The Poetry Review*); Sian Cain and Nicholas Wroe (*The Guardian*); Tristram Fane-Saunders (*The Telegraph*); Tom Gatti (*The New Statesman*); Clare Pollard (*Modern Poetry in Translation*); Nia Davies (*Poetry Wales*); Dai George (*Poetry London*) and André Naffis-Sahely (*Ambit*). The Poetry Book Society and The Poetry School were among the early commissioners of shorter reviews, so we're very grateful to Alice Mullen and Ali Lewis. Our advisory board includes several of the above supporters, as well as Nathalie Teitler, Kayo Chingonyi, Rishi Dastidar and Charles Whalley.

In June 2019 we will be joined by four new critics—Victoria Adukwei Bulley, Joanna Lee, Stephanie Sy-Quia and Sarah-Jean Zubair—who each bring with them an attentive and in-depth critical perspective. Expect to see their names with increasing frequency, along with our eight critics from the first round. These, and others in the wider network of poetry critics of colour we hope to engage with by extension, are the critics of the future. Sarah and I, along with many others, could not be more inspired, honoured and proud to know them and their important work.

As Sarah said in a recent interview for the Scottish Poetry Library, the Ledbury Critics programme 'was never only a question of statistics: if the long-term goal is to shift the critical discussion towards greater awareness and sophistication around matters of race, what better way to do that than by supporting a new generation of BAME critical voices?' There is no measurable statistical threshold for the right to be included and heard. Our collective aims are to expand the debates around poetry as an aesthetic and social form; to consider what is valued and why; to read the work as primary, rather than secondary to the perceived raced experiences of the poet. To even up not just the scales of representation but to address and rectify the ways in which poets of colour are often misrepresented in the space of whiteness. And we intend to continue until there is no longer any such disparity.



Sandeep Parmar
June 6, 2019

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

A new report reveals that poetry reviewing is more diverse than ever, due to the work done in the last two years by initiatives such as the Ledbury Emerging Poetry Critics and The Complete Works, as part of an ongoing fight for an inclusive poetry culture dating much further back.

Through intensive mentoring of new Black, Asian, minority ethnic (BAME) critics and close collaboration with commissioning editors the Ledbury Emerging Poetry Critics, co-founded by poets Sandeep Parmar and Sarah Howe in 2017, has more than doubled the total number of BAME poetry reviewers writing for national publications in the last two years. Despite this progress, the report also sheds light on the publications which are slow to commission a more diverse range of critics.

Sandeep Parmar comments: 'My sense is that in the long term, critics of colour will find in-roads into every poetry reviewing platform, and editors will be encouraged, by a revived interest in reviewing, to raise the profile of reviewing on their pages....on the whole, the programme has received tremendous support from editors and, where necessary, we will keep reminding those few who have yet to take action.'

The research on reviewing between 2011-2018, which was completed by Dave Coates and commissioned by Liverpool's Centre for New and International Writing, draws data from 28 magazines/newspapers; 26 of which are still in regular publication, including *The Guardian*, *The Poetry Review* and *The London Review of Books* from January 2011 – December 2018, examining a total of 4,866 review articles.

The research asked in simple terms – across those 28 publications – whose poetry is reviewed and whose reviews are commissioned and published?

The Poetry Review accounts for 18% of all reviews written by BAME critics since 2011. The magazine's editor, Emily Berry, acknowledges the impact of the programme::

'The high standard of the work produced by the first round of Ledbury Emerging Critics gives the lie to the demeaning notion often trotted out by detractors of diversity schemes that 'quality suffers'. In fact this scheme has been hugely enriching to poetry reviewing culture overall... reviewing culture urgently needs more of this kind of attention and input if it is to remain alive.'

The publication of today's report also marks the start of the second round of the Ledbury Emerging Poetry Critics programme, as four new mentees join the existing cohort of eight poetry critics: Victoria Adukwei Bulley, Joanna Lee, Stephanie Sy-Quia and Sarah-Jean Zubair (biographies below). Whilst in the US, a sister programme based on the Ledbury Emerging Poetry Critics model will launch in November 2019 co-ordinated by the poet Ilya Kaminsky with Sandeep Parmar and Sarah Howe.

Ledbury Emerging Poetry Critics co-founder Sarah Howe comments: *'The immense success of the programme's first round is a tribute to the hard work of its eight talented participants. Article by article, they are changing the culture...I hope that the gains of the last year or so won't prove a brief comet, but a more lasting change: ultimately, it's up to reviews editors to take up that mantle in their ongoing commissioning.'*

KEY STATISTICS FROM THE REPORT INCLUDE

Between 2011 and 2016, British and Irish poetry magazines and newspapers published review articles by BAME critics

130 times

3.7% of the total for those years.

Between 2017-2018, in the two years since the launch of the Ledbury Emerging Poetry Critics scheme, BAME critics have been published on the same platforms

115 times

8.3% of the total for those years.

Of these 245 articles written by BAME critics,

117 (47.8%)

were written by fellows of The Complete Works mentoring programme, the Ledbury Emerging Poetry Critics mentoring programme, or both.

The London Review of Books has published 70 articles by 33 different poetry critics. All 33 were white.

Those 70 articles reviewed 86 different books.

All 86 were by white poets

Of those 83% are male.

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: The 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%).

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.

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%.

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), The Poetry Review (19%), and The White Review (16.6%).

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%).

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).

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.

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.

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

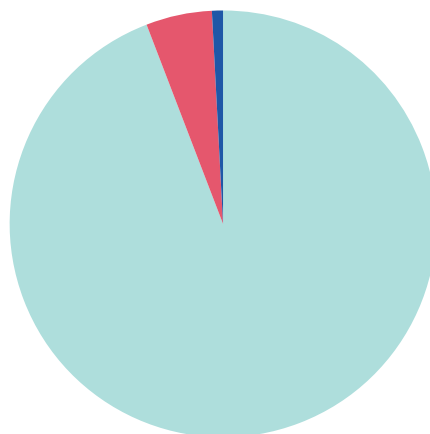
T.S. Eliot Prize winners is 50.5

Forward Best Collection 51.3,
Forward Best First Collection 36.2,
Costa Prize for Poetry 50.4, Ted Hughes Award 40.3.



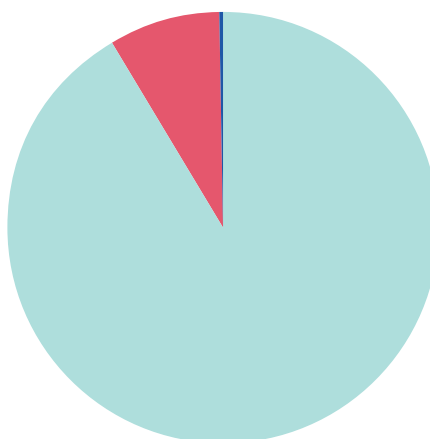
VISUALISING DIVERSITY IN UK & IRISH POETRY

CRITICS BY RACE
2011–18



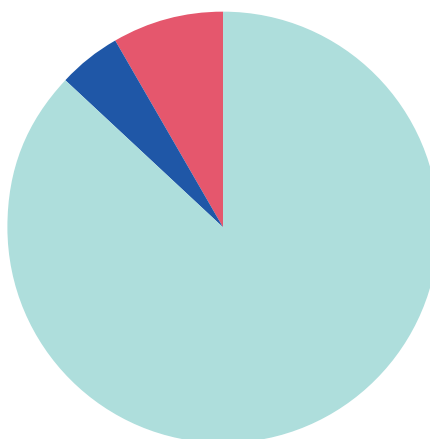
WHITE: 93.9%
BAME: 5.03%
N/A: 1.07%

POEMS BY RACE
2011–18



WHITE: 91.59%
BAME: 8.3%
N/A: 0.11%

**BOOKS REVIEWED
BY RACE**
2011–18



WHITE: 87.13%
BAME: 8.13%
N/A: 4.74%



VICTORIA ADUKWEI BULLEY is a British-born Ghanaian poet, writer and filmmaker. An alumna of the Barbican Young Poets, her work has appeared in *The Poetry Review*, *Ambit*, and *The Chicago Review*, in addition to featuring on BBC Radio 4 Woman's Hour. In 2016 she was shortlisted for the Brunel International African Poetry Prize. She won a Society of Authors Eric Gregory Award for promising British writers under 30 in 2018, and has held artistic residencies internationally in the US, Brazil, and the V&A Museum in London. Victoria is the director of *MOTHER TONGUES*, an intergenerational poetry, film and translation project exploring the indigenous language heritages of poets of colour, supported by Arts Council England and Autograph. She is a Complete Works and Instituto Sacatar fellow, and sits on the advisory board of the Poetry Translation Centre. Her debut pamphlet is *Girl B*.



DZIFA BENSON is a poet, dramatist, journalist and Ledbury Poetry critic who is currently studying for an MA in Text & Performance at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art and Birkbeck University. The intersections between art, science, the body, ritual and digital technologies animate her practice which she explores through poetry, theatre, opera, performance, storytelling, and journalism. Her poetry, and literary and arts journalism have appeared in *The Telegraph*, *The Guardian*, *The Times Literary Supplement*, *The Financial Times*, *The Poetry Review*, *Poetry London* and other journals. She was an artist-in-residence at the Courtauld Institute of Art, a core artist in BBC Africa Beyond's multimedia, collaborative project, Translations and a director on Shrinking Space's The Wonder Project in association with Kew Gardens. She is currently developing a transmedia project, *The Spit of Me*, an artistic, social, biological and digital exploration of the body's relationship with time, culture, identity, memory and migration.



MARY JEAN CHAN is a poet and editor from Hong Kong. Her poetry has been shortlisted for the 2017 and 2019 Forward Prize for *Best Single Poem*, and is featured in *Carcanet New Poetries VII*. Her work has appeared in *The Poetry Review*, *The White Review*, *Ambit Magazine*, *The London Magazine* and her reviews have been published in *The Guardian*, *The Hong Kong Review of Books* and *The Poetry Review*, among others. Mary Jean holds a PhD from Royal Holloway and is currently lecturing at Oxford Brookes University. She co-edits *Oxford Poetry* and is the winner of the 2017 PSA/Journal of Postcolonial Writing Postgraduate Essay Prize. Her pamphlet, *A Hurry of English*, was published by ignitionpress (2018) and was the 2018 Summer Poetry Book Society Pamphlet Choice. Her debut collection *Flèche* will be published by Faber in July 2019 and was a PBS Recommendation.



JADE CUTTLE graduated from the University of Cambridge with First-Class Honours in Modern

& Medieval Languages & Literature (French & Russian), going on to undertake an MA in Creative Writing (Poetry) at the University of East Anglia. Deputy Poetry Editor at *Ambit* and judging the Costa Book Awards 2019, Jade has written for *The Guardian*, *The Times Literary Supplement*, *The Spectator*, *The Times*, *The Sunday Times*, *the Observer*, *The Spectator*, *The Poetry Review* and elsewhere. She won Best Reviewer (Editor's Choice) in the 2018 Saboteur Awards. A poet and plant-whisperer, her creative writing has been broadcast on BBC Radio 3 and in association with BBC Proms. She will release an album of nature-inspired poem-songs later this year with funding and support from PRS Foundation. www.jadecuttle.com



SARALA ESTRUCH is a freelance writer, poet and critic based in London. Her work has been short- and long-listed for several prizes, including the Wasafiri New Writing Prize and the National Poetry Competition, and she was a winner of the Poetry School/Nine Arches Press Primers competition in 2017. Also in 2017, Sarala was selected for the first round of the Ledbury Emerging Poetry Critics scheme. Since then, her literary criticism has appeared in newspapers and journals including *The Poetry Review*, *The Times Literary Supplement*, *Wasafiri*, and *The Guardian*, and has been featured on BBC Radio 3.



MARYAM HESSAVI is a British, Manchester-based poet of English and Iranian descent. An alumnus of the University of Manchester, Maryam was commissioned by the Irish World Heritage Centre to read her poem 'The Sea Gulls' at the 1916:2016 Commemoration Concert in 2016. Her work has also featured in the Peter Barlow's Cigarette series in Manchester and she is working on various collections of poetry for publication at present. Maryam's reviews have been published in *Poetry London*, *Magma*, *Poetry School*, *Poetry Wales* and *The Manchester Review*, among others.



NASSER HUSSAIN is a poet and lecturer in Literature and Creative Writing at Leeds Beckett University. His first interest in poetry was through performance, and his first collection, *Boldface*, was published by Burning Eye Books in 2014. His reviews have been published by *Poetry London* and *The Poetry School*, among others. His latest collection *SKY WRITINGS*, a book of poems composed entirely from IATA airport codes, was published by Coach House Books (2018) and his limited edition chapbook *Playing With Playing With Fire* was published by If A Leaf Falls Press (2019).



SRISHTI KRISHNAMOORTHY-CAVELL is completing a PhD in English at the University of Cambridge. Her research looks at botanical tropes as sites of political labour in contemporary women's experimental poetry. Her articles on poetics and poetry reviews have appeared in publications such as *The Journal of British and Irish Innovative Poetry*, *Intercapillary Space* and *Poetry London*. Her

research interests include contemporary poetry and cinema, gender and sexuality, ecopoetics, postcolonialism, boarding school narratives and the cultural history of chalk.



JOANNA LEE writes poetry and prose in London. Her words have appeared in *porridge magazine*, *notes* and *daikon**. Since graduating, she has worked in publishing — formerly at Faber & Faber and currently at Curtis Brown.



JENNIFER LEE TSAI is a British poet of Chinese heritage. She was born in Bebington and grew up in Liverpool. A graduate of St Andrews and Liverpool University, she holds an MA in Creative Writing (Poetry) with Distinction from the University of Manchester. Jennifer is a fellow of the The Complete Works III. Her poems appear in the anthology, *Ten: Poets of the New Generation* (Bloodaxe, 2017) and have been published in *Smoke*, *Wild Court*, *The Rialto* and elsewhere. She has written for *Modern Poetry In Translation*, *The Poetry School* among others and is Contributing Editor for *Ambit* magazine. Jennifer works as a University Teacher in English Language. Her debut poetry pamphlet *Kismet* is published by Ignition Press in July 2019.



STEPHANIE SY-QUIA is a writer and critic based between London and the south of France. She grew up in California and France, in a Filipino-European home. Her writing has appeared in the *FT Weekend Magazine*, *The Spectator*, *The TLS*, *The Los Angeles Review of Books*, *The Stockholm Review of Literature*, and others. She is interviews editor at *Review 31* and in 2018 was shortlisted for the FT Bodley Head essay prize. She graduated from the University of Oxford with a BA in English Language and Literature in 2016. She is currently working on her first book.



SARAH-JEAN ZUBAIR is a postgraduate student in English literature at University College London. She holds an MA in English and Comparative Literature from Columbia University (New York), and a BA in English from the University of Victoria (Canada). Her MA thesis investigated the theme of disturbed sleep in the poetry of Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Her current studies focus on literary portrayals of altered consciousness in Romantic-era English texts. In addition to her research, she is the current editor-in-chief of the graduate research journal *Moveable Type*, and teaches on undergraduate courses in both the Department of English and Institute of Education at UCL.

If you are a media outlet or arts organisation and would like to collaborate with the Ledbury Emerging Poetry Critics programme or commission one of the critics, please contact: Sandeep Parmar sandeep.parmar@liverpool.ac.uk

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