

Institution: University of Liverpool		
Unit of Assessment: UoA27 English Language and Literature		
Title of case study: Changing and shaping the perception, reception and cultural value of poetry by women and poets of colour		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2005-2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Professor Sandeep Parmar Professor Deryn Rees-Jones	Professor Professor	2012 - present 2002 - present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2014 - 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact <p>The Centre for New and International Writing has internationalised and diversified British writing primarily through 2 distinct projects, developed out of the research of Rees-Jones and Parmar. Pavilion Poetry, a new poetry imprint based on an innovative model of support evolving from the research of Rees-Jones, was created as a new international platform for diverse poets; Pavilion has had significant success in promoting and developing the writing and profiles of women poets through extensive mentoring and editorial support. The Ledbury Poetry Critics scheme evolved from the work of Parmar, and has created and developed another immersive and intensive mentorship programme, this time for reviewers, to address the reception of UK poets of colour, and crucially, has succeeded in demonstrably increasing the visibility and representation of critics of colour in the media.</p>		
2. Underpinning research <p>Research by Rees-Jones and Parmar has recovered and re-evaluated the work of women and non-white poets. Their critical, editorial and advocacy work has also challenged poets', critics', editors' and audience's prevailing perceptions about the canon and its marginalisation of voices of women and people of colour. In addition, their research challenges the ways in which representations of gender and race are read within poetry culture, the media and the academy. Assumptions about women's poetic concerns—limited to the domestic, erotic or maternal—as well as those made about poets of colour—bound by displacement, migration and exoticism—traditionally pervade British poetry culture. These notions have been perpetually and forcefully challenged by Rees-Jones and Parmar.</p> <p>Rees-Jones' 2005 critical study of 3 generations of women poets <i>Consorting with Angels</i> (3.1) ('an important achievement', <i>TLS</i>) is a bold feminist revision of a largely male twentieth-century poetry canon. Staking a claim for historically underappreciated female poets, including work by major poets of colour (Nichols, Kay, Alvi), Rees-Jones lays bare how poetic strategies of craft and subject combat stereotyping and exclusion based on race and gender. Rees-Jones argues against exceptionalising women poets, and her study was accompanied by a landmark companion anthology, <i>Modern Women Poets</i> (3.2). This anthology mapped the first extensive and chronological survey of British twentieth-century women's poetry, providing critical contexts for reading 103 women poets, including non-white writers (e.g. Marson, Brookes, Nichols, Alvi, Kay). It has since provided a comprehensive poetic lineage for a generation of new women writers to develop their own unique style in relation to gender and racial identity. Her continued reframing of women's writing includes a psychoanalytic approach to subjectivity and perceptions about female embodiment in lyric poetry. (3.3)</p>		

Parmar's archival research, editing and scholarly biographical work on modernist women poets includes *Reading Mina Loy's Autobiographies: Myth of the Modern Woman*, the *Selected Poems of Nancy Cunard*, 'magnificent' (*The Guardian*), the *Collected Poems of Hope Mirrlees* and her 'illuminating' (*Sunday Times*) *Paris: A Poem*, as well as numerous BBC Radio 3 and 4 features, programmes and a podcast for the Poetry Foundation (US). These interventions on the modernist canon have extended and deepened this feminist revisionist literary agenda by: (i) recovering the work of twentieth-century women poets (ii) foregrounding the totality of their oeuvres, (iii) re-evaluating their critical reputations and their experimentalism for new audiences as well as to a generation of emerging poets (for example, reframing Mina Loy as not only a celebrated 'modern woman' of the vanguard but one who is embedded in a strong sense of the past and its traditions).

In 2015 Parmar published 'Not a British Subject: Race and Poetry in the UK' (3.4) (*Los Angeles Review of Books*), a widely-read essay which argued that British poets of colour had not received equal critical value or exposure compared to their white counterparts. Parmar's 2017/18 essay in *Poetry London* and *Threads* 'Lyric Violence, the Nomadic Subject and the Fourth Space' (3.5) drew attention specifically to the formal questions presented by lyricism for British poets of colour. This was followed in 2020 by an in-depth analysis of race, publishing and the UK poetry market culture in her introduction ('Still Not a British Subject') (3.6) to a special issue of *The Journal of British and Irish Innovative Poetry* on race, edited by Parmar. This special issue is the first of its kind to comprehensively map this scholarly field of research and includes many peer-reviewed contributions by critics of colour (3.6).

Both Rees-Jones and Parmar write from the point of view of being successful poets in their own right. Parmar's *Eidolon* won the Ledbury Forte Prize for Best Second Collection in 2018 (£5K); Rees-Jones' *Erato* was shortlisted for the T.S. Eliot prize and Wales Book of the Year in 2019.

3. References to the research

- 3.1 Rees-Jones, *Consorting with Angels: Essays on Modern Women Poets* (Bloodaxe Books, 2005) ISBN 9781852243920 (available on request)
- 3.2 Rees-Jones, *Modern Women Poets* (Bloodaxe Books, 2005) ISBN 9781852246785 (available on request)
- 3.3 Rees-Jones, 'A Dog's Own Chance', In P. Robinson (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Contemporary British and Irish Poetry*. (Oxford University Press, 2013) (available on request)
- 3.4 Parmar, 'Not a British Subject: Race and Poetry in the UK' (*Los Angeles Review of Books*, 2015) <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/not-a-british-subject-race-and-poetry-in-the-uk/>
- 3.5 Parmar, 'Lyric Violence, the Nomadic Subject and the Fourth Space', in *Threads*, with Bhanu Kapil and Nisha Ramayya (Poetry London, 2017 and Clinic Press, 2018) ISBN 978-0993318290 (available on request)
- 3.6 Parmar, 'Still Not a British Subject: Race and UK Poetry', Introduction to Parmar ed., Race Special issue, *Journal of British and Irish Innovative Poetics* (2020) (Open Access) DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16995/bip.3384>

4. Details of the impact

In their capacity as poet-critics and based on the findings of their own research, Parmar and Rees-Jones have established 2 major but distinct editorial and mentoring platforms to support the writing of women and critics of colour. Their impact has extended to individual poets and reviewers, enhancing and developing their careers, at the same time as creating multiple impacts on the reception of poetry by the general public and the publishing industry. Pavilion Poetry is a poetry imprint established in 2014 and The Ledbury Poetry Critics (LPC) scheme, co-founded by Parmar with fellow poet Sarah Howe, was established in 2017 to redress race and gender imbalances in

poetry and critical culture. Pavilion Poetry and the LPC scheme give an international voice to diverse poets and non-white reviewers who would have been denied by other more traditional presses (5.1). In turn, this has exposed the poetry industry and the public to new and more diverse work (5.7, 5.9).

Creating Platforms for Women and Marginalized Voices in Poetry

Under Rees-Jones's editorship, in 7 years Pavilion has established itself as an internationally-respected publisher of high-quality writing by women, and 'Notable for its range and diversity, Pavilion has breathed fresh air into English-language poetry publishing' (Director of the Poetry Society 5.3) Pavilion was created to be risk taking and challenging in its content and approach, making editorial choices that create a third way between market driven commercial and small press publishing. Its achieved objective during this period has been to foreground the work of women poets. Recognition of this has been achieved in commentary such as the 2016 article in *The Guardian* where the press was highlighted by Alison Flood for its challenge to mainstream publishing success (5.8(i)), with Ruth Padel referencing Pavilion within the article, commenting that 'It is clear that such publishers are radically altering the landscape of contemporary poetry' (5.8(iii)). Pavilion Poetry has also been recognised as filling a visible gap in university press publishing. As the Director of Liverpool University Press attests, Pavilion has allowed Liverpool University Press 'to derive economic benefit from robust sales of the individual titles (conventional wisdom is that poetry publishing isn't economically viable, this unique model is) but more importantly a poetry imprint brings cachet to a press publishing academic criticism of poetry, it helps us to serve our own mission and it has transformed the publishing ecology in the region.' (5.2.(i)). The innovative publishing model of the press has also allowed for the annual employability training of 3 undergraduate students at the University of Liverpool in the full range of publishing, marketing and typesetting. Several of the 20 students who have completed the scheme have gone on to work in publishing-related industries; one (Natalie Bolderston) now being an emerging poet in her own right (https://magmapoetry.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/M75_Content.pdf).

Since the outset, Pavilion has published work from emerging poets as well as writers whose work may have been neglected, or who have come late to writing. Rees-Jones has discovered, helped to develop, and supported poets, currently all women, in writing innovatively about often complex, uncharted, or previously taboo material, creating readerships rather than seeking them, in an increasingly marketised poetry-publishing scene. This editorial support is driven by her research and anthologising which has identified historical patterns by which women and non-white poets are stereotyped and marginalised, and which identifies the way women 'write their gender within the potentially confining roles of "poetess" or "woman poet"' (*Consorting with Angels*, p.11). Led by Rees-Jones' intention of purposely promoting subjects and viewpoints absent in traditional presses, Pavilion poets approach poetic representations and explorations of subjectivity and find new sophisticated ways to explore gender, sexuality, age, race and class. Sarah Corbett, a mid-career poet who has now published her fourth and fifth collections with Pavilion, writes: 'I am able to take big creative risks, to explore complex ideas and experiment with forms and voice in ways that just wouldn't be possible with many other publishers'. (5.2(viii)) Debut poet Sarah Westcott has explained how 'Deryn has also helped me 'site' my own poems within the tradition of women poets writing'. (5.2(ix))

In addition to offering extensive editorial support and pre and post publication mentorship, Rees-Jones has offered Pavilion as a new space for a community of women poets who now often read and perform together (Rees, Corbett, Miller, Hollander and Hasler have, for example, received Arts Council funding to tour their work, and Corbett now directs the new Sylvia Plath poetry festival). Under the directorships of Rees-Jones and Parmar, Nuar Alsadir was supported as University of Liverpool's Centre for New and International Writing *The White Review* Writer in Residence scheme, which helped build her profile in the UK. Her book *Fourth Person Singular* was shortlisted for major prizes in the US and UK, and has offered an important critical and creative model to a wide range of notable emerging women and non-white poets. (Stephanie Burt notes Alsadir's influence on Sophie Collins here <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v41/n14/stephanie-burt/on-sophie-collins>). Mona Arshi's debut *Small Hands*, edited and published by Rees-Jones, and winner of the Forward Prize for a First Collection in 2015 (£5K),

describes both Rees-Jones' books as having 'helped me shape my thinking about writing as an enterprise undertaken as a woman, as a mother and as a brown writer and push against some of the challenges relating to some of these attributes being over emphasised and read in particular ways' (5.2(vii)). In 2020, Arshi was appointed by Liverpool University as an Honorary Professor of Law and English (3-years fixed term) to take up public engagement work. Also benefitting from the support of Rees-Jones and Pavilion, poet Bhanu Kapil won the 2020 T.S. Eliot Prize (£25K), the most prestigious poetry prize for a single volume in the UK.

Creating Platforms for Women and Minority Voices in Poetry Criticism and Reviewing

Parmar's programming expertise and her critical interventions in the field, particularly in relation to poets and critics of colour, subsequently led to her being appointed to the boards of significant artistic organisations, including the Liverpool Biennial and as chair of Ledbury Poetry Festival and consulting with national organisations on diversity initiatives including Poetry Ireland and Literature Wales on professional development programmes for BAME writers and critics. As a selector since 2017 for the Poetry Book Society (PBS)—a membership organisation founded by T.S. Eliot for the promotion of poetry—Parmar's choices have brought highly visible and unprecedented racial diversity to the PBS list, which directly impacts on book sales.

The Ledbury Poetry Critics scheme for poetry reviewers of colour was founded in 2017 by Parmar, Sarah Howe (Kings College, London) and Ledbury Poetry Festival to redress a significant absence of poetry reviewers of colour as well as a lack of reviews of books written by non-white poets. Key findings of the latest Ledbury report, 'The State of Poetry and Poetry Reviewing' found that between 2009 and 2016, British and Irish poetry magazines and newspapers published review articles by non-white critics 190 times, 4% of the total for those years. Between 2017 and 2019, the 3 years since the launch and as a consequence of the LPC scheme, critics of colour have been published on the same platforms 201 times, 9.6% of the total for these years. Coverage of poets of colour, and coverage by non-white critics, have both more than doubled in the 3 years since the launch of the Ledbury programme in 2017 (5.1). Just 8 articles by non-white critics were published in 2009 yet in 2020 there were 75, most of which were written by Ledbury Critics, a clear record high.

In 2017, 8 emerging non-white critics (7 of them women), selected by application, were given individual in-person mentorship, biannual critics residencies, and constant support and editorial feedback by Parmar and other experienced mentors. In 2019, 4 additional critics (all women of colour) were added to the cohort of 12 UK-based Critics. The scheme has given the LPCs access to pitching and publishing in every major newspaper and poetry magazine in the UK through exclusive links developed by Parmar with commissioning editors from *The Guardian*, *The LRB*, *The Telegraph*, *The TLS*, *The New Statesman*, *The Poetry Review* and 25 other platforms for reviewing (5.1). Some of the LPCs have since taken up editorial and prize judging roles in online and print journals (*The Times*, *Ambit*, *Oxford Poetry*, Costa Prize, Poetry School) (5.1). The successes of the programme at giving new voices access to major platforms, and offering new ways to reading work by poets of colour, have been reported by The Bookseller, BBC Radio 3 and *The Guardian* and *The TLS* (5.9). More books have been reviewed by critics of colour in the 3 years since Ledbury launched than in the previous 10 (5.1). *The LRB* (which has never published a poetry critic of colour) has already taken active steps as a result of the research: 'We're already working with Ledbury's Critics Programme on initiatives to improve the inclusivity and diversity of our commissioning and publishing practices...we are committed to ensuring that our poetry coverage over the next year – and the next decade – reflects real improvement in this area.' (5.7(ii)) - Senior editor at *The LRB*, *The Guardian*, July 2020).

Jade Cuttle, a Ledbury Poetry Critic who received Best Reviewer (Editor's Choice) prize in the 2018 Saboteur Awards, and who is now a full-time Commissioning Editor (Arts) at The Times confirms that: 'The program has provided valuable contacts that have opened doors to countless opportunities, not solely as a critic but also as a public speaker, festival performer, workshop facilitator, and now even as a paid poetry editor at one of the magazines for which the scheme first invited me to review' (5.6(i)). Other Ledbury Poetry Critics have testified that the programme

has boosted their confidence, skills and status as a reviewer (5.6(ii)), that the Ledbury scheme 'confers legitimacy' for emerging reviewers (5.6(iii)), and has offered 'validation and visibility' for their work (5.6(iv)) as well as a valuable 'community' 'for knowledge and inspiration'. (5.6(v))

The Director of The Complete Works underscores the crucial work of the Ledbury scheme thus: 'If the poetry landscape in Britain is to continue to develop to become as rich and complex as our society, then this scheme is essential' (5.5). The programme has also raised the profile of Ledbury Poetry Festival, as the Director states: 'For LPF to be making such a positive impact nationally and internationally in terms of poetry and diversity through the LPCs is incredibly positive for the Festival's reputation' (5.4). The impact has been such that arts organisations in the US have subsequently initiated a 1-year pilot scheme which is similarly mentoring 4 US reviewers from underrepresented backgrounds, the influence of Parmar's approach already positively impacting the US poetry community. LPC will launch a similar pilot scheme in Ireland in association with Poetry Ireland and Maynooth University in 2021, and in 2021 Parmar was awarded £100K from the AHRC to continue the UK-wide programme.

The extensive poetry reviewing of Rees-Jones and Parmar is also driven towards feminist reframing and decolonising British poetry across a number of platforms including *The Guardian*, *New Statesman*, the *Financial Times*, *The Independent*, the *TLS*, and *The Poetry Review*, among others (5.7).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- 5.1 Dave Coates, 'The State of Poetry and Poetry Reviewing' (3 annual Ledbury reports: 2018, 2019 and 2020). These 3 annual reports support with statistical and qualitative data the significant measurable impact on racial diversity of the Ledbury programme on reviewing and poetry culture more widely. It also provides detail on the specific achievements outlined above regarding Pavilion Poets' prominence on prize shortlists and the rising profile of women's poetry within prizes and review culture.
- 5.2 Testimonials related to Pavilion Poetry and the increased diversity in published poets and poetry (poets Mona Arshi, Sarah Wescott, Sarah Corbett and Director of Liverpool University Press Anthony Cond) on the professional and personal benefits of Rees-Jones's research and editorial work.
- 5.3 Testimonial from the Director of The Poetry Society.
- 5.4 Testimonial from Director of Ledbury Poetry Festival on how the Ledbury Poetry Critics and Parmar's work raised the profile and diversity of the festival.
- 5.5 Testimonial from Director of The Complete Works, on the rapidly changed reviewing landscape of British poetry and race as a direct result of the programme, as well as professional and personal development of the Critics as a strength of the programme.
- 5.6 Testimonials from 5 Ledbury Critics (Mary Jean Chan, Jade Cuttle, Srithi Krishnamoorthy Cavell, Sarala Estruch and Jennifer Lee Tsai) on the influence of the programme on their careers as critics, poets, and editors.
- 5.7 Guardian coverage of annual reports for LPC showing the influence of the Ledbury programme, and of Pavilion Press and poetry reviews by Rees-Jones and Parmar demonstrating their influence on decolonising and feminist reframing of poetry in the UK.
- 5.8 Parmar, Interview with the Director of the American Academy of Poets, about the need for a critics of colour programme in the US.
- 5.9 Co-authored article by Ledbury Poetry Critics Stephanie Sy-Quia and Nasser Hussain on decolonising criticism, testifying to the impact of LPC programme and Parmar's research on race and poetry and on-going efforts to decolonise and diversify poetry: 'The Uncritical Mass' in TANK magazine.