



**Alfred Fagon Award  
Speech, 2019  
Mimi Findlay: Chair of the Judges**

Hello. I'm Mimi Findlay. Welcome to the 23<sup>rd</sup> annual celebration of the Alfred Fagon Awards. I feel so incredibly honoured to be standing here as the Chair of the Judges of the award, to welcome you all. I am proud to be here, and immensely grateful as ever to the Peggy Ramsay Foundation and to the National Theatre for their continued support of the awards.

Well, *this has been a year*. Our 2019.

We are here in this room, today, because we all know that **we are still on the pathway towards achieving a fair and equitable society**. That bit might go without saying, right?

2019 has presented in itself a theme of extremities. (Maybe *that* also goes without saying...!)

In encountering the plays entered this year, there has been a feeling of immediacy throughout. We have noticed that in the Black community, there is an overwhelming responsibility to literally write – W-R-I-T-E – the wrongs of the world as we know it. And as a result we have seen stories this year that remind us that there **is** another history that craves to be told – truthfully; stories of intimate, personal experience, of the raw and unending struggle of difficult family circumstances, of oppression, of addiction, of unrelenting and brazen gentrification, of racism, of the UK's Home Office 'Hostile Environment Policy', of the lack of hope, of the immovable force of hope: of the world we live in today; terrifying, incredible, unjust and beautiful.

We're currently living within an environment that is feeling more and more polarised each day. **Why? What for?** It is exhausting, and at times we feel exhausted. For me, a certain few words come to mind and I apply them here because we need art to remind us that besides all else, hope continues to prevail:

"You may shoot me with your words,  
You may cut me with your eyes,  
You may kill me with your hatefulness,  
But still, like air, I'll rise."  
- **Maya Angelou, 'Still I Rise'**

Consider the provocation: **what if we carry on with the way things currently stand?** For the leaders in the room: does that sit well with you? Do you believe that you can do more? You as a gatekeeper, or you as a beneficiary of the system, or you as a professional, or you as a human being? If it does not, remind yourself beyond today that you came here, you witnessed and you participated. Therefore, you have participated. Now, carry the message forward.

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More importantly, consider, in your roles, that when writers approach you, or you consider who to commission and who to produce, what message you are sending with every move. **We, are, all, IMPERMANENT**, and we have a duty to create and deliver a world in which ensures that everyone – *every single one of us* – has unhindered access to FREEDOM.

Could you imagine?: a world in which Black writers get to just write – *without guilt and an overbearing sense of responsibility* – about adventure, about nature, about friendship, about the future, about love. When they get to do this – *completely and utterly, truly, freely* – well... wouldn't that be awesome?

**We know** that we can achieve a compassionate, incredible, vibrant, gorgeous world; but **only** if we all choose to progress together.

Recognise that this award is not just about money and profile: recognise that it is, crucially, a movement. In some people's eyes it is a controversial one. Make no mistake – it *is* a movement that seeks to create a platform for stories and truths to be told – freely, passionately, and without censorship.

Remember and remind yourselves that sometimes these are stories of which history has previously attempted to silence, or erase altogether. Individuals and communities in which the world is imminently trying to banish, hide or make disappear. That this continues to take place to this day: in our 2019.

What we do is important if we want to create a wonderful society. That, you know.

But what the winning play does is remind us that sometimes we can inch our way towards that wonderful society; if we put our heads together, and we truly walk, move, progress and create.

**Together.**

So on behalf of the Trustees and Judges of the Alfred Fagon Award, I thank you for joining us today, I thank the National Theatre for their incredible and unending support in hosting us, the Peggy Ramsay Foundation for ensuring the continued success of the award, and above all I thank the writers: champions and warriors (!) who put forward their plays.

To all of you, please carry forward the message: a fair, equitable, just society, with freedom.

**The freedom to create.**