# Bernardine Evaristo awarded Women’s Prize Outstanding Contribution Award for transforming British literature



Bernardine Evaristo’s literary journey is a testament to the fluidity of boundaries—whether they be those of genre, identity, or societal expectations. Announced recently as the recipient of the £100,000 Women’s Prize Outstanding Contribution Award, Evaristo’s influence extends far beyond her own writing, championing under-represented voices and reshaping the landscape of contemporary literature. Her eclectic oeuvre, which includes poetry, memoir, and novels, illustrates her commitment to exploring themes of identity, race, and gender, particularly through the lens of the African diaspora.

Evaristo, who achieved international acclaim with her Booker Prize-winning novel "Girl, Woman, Other," has long been a revolutionary figure in literature. This groundbreaking work is rendered as a polyphonic narrative, interweaving the lives of a dozen Black women from diverse backgrounds, ages, and experiences—a kaleidoscope of modern British life that challenges the reader's expectations at every turn. Evaristo’s artistry defies conventional storytelling methods, and she regards her style as “fusion fiction,” reflecting a commitment to pushing past traditional grammatical boundaries. "I think I have 12 full stops in the novel," she noted, highlighting the innovative spirit driving her creativity. With over a million copies sold, "Girl, Woman, Other" not only garnered literary accolades but also found a place on former President Barack Obama’s list of favourite books, testament to its broad appeal and significance.

The recognition from the Women’s Prize is a signalling of Evaristo’s transformative impact on literature. Founder Kate Mosse praised her for her "dazzling skill and imagination" and for effectively creating pathways into unfamiliar literary landscapes. Evaristo plans to utilise her prize money in a yet-to-be-announced project aimed at supporting fellow women writers, continuing her long history of mentorship and advocacy. She established the Complete Works programme, which seeks to elevate the voices of poets of colour in Britain, where at one point, less than 1% were being published. A decade later, that figure has increased to around 10%, demonstrating Evaristo’s commitment to effecting tangible change within the literary community.

Beyond mentorship, Evaristo’s own work has engaged with various periods and narratives in Black history, challenging the misconception that Black presence in Britain emerged only in the 20th century.

Her exploration into forgotten historical narratives, such as in "The Emperor's Babe," which depicts Black life in Roman Britain, underscores her mission to redefine the broader understanding of British history. Evaristo's novel, "Blonde Roots," flips the script on the enslavement of Europeans and was even nominated for a major science-fiction award, showcasing her capacity to merge genre with social commentary in uniquely thought-provoking ways.

However, Evaristo's trajectory hasn't come without challenges. Reflecting on her win of the Booker Prize alongside Margaret Atwood—an honour that made her the first Black woman to receive it—she described the experience as "bittersweet." While her win was celebrated, she remarked on the need for more diversity in literature, hoping her success would inspire other Black British women to find their voices in writing. Evaristo’s role in the literary establishment has only grown, having received the honour of being an Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) and, recently, becoming president of the Royal Society of Literature, a position she has noted comes with its own complexities, particularly regarding efforts to diversify its membership.

As Evaristo continues her work amidst changing cultural currents, she remains vigilant about the progress made, asserting the importance of maintaining momentum in the fight against racism and inequality in society. "We’ve made a lot of progress," she stated, "but we need to work hard to maintain it, especially in the current political climate where it feels as if the forces are against progress." Her words resonate as both a call to action and a reminder of the ongoing struggle for an equitable literary and societal landscape.

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* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/bernardine-evaristo-london-booker-prize-african-barack-obama-b2763157.html), [[2]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/bernardine-evaristo-london-booker-prize-african-barack-obama-b2763157.html)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/bernardine-evaristo-london-booker-prize-african-barack-obama-b2763157.html), [[3]](https://www.apnews.com/arts-and-entertainment-general-news-21425c7061e946189edf2daf41d74d12), [[7]](https://www.pbs.org/newshour/arts/margaret-atwood-bernardine-evaristo-share-booker-prize)
* Paragraph 3 – [[2]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/bernardine-evaristo-london-booker-prize-african-barack-obama-b2763157.html), [[5]](https://edition.cnn.com/2023/06/09/africa/booker-prize-winning-author-bernardine-evaristo-mentoring-ghanaian-writer-ayesha-harruna-attah/index.html)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/bernardine-evaristo-london-booker-prize-african-barack-obama-b2763157.html), [[6]](https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/entertainment/news/bernardine-evaristo-being-first-black-woman-to-win-booker-is-bittersweet/38595669.html)
* Paragraph 5 – [[2]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/bernardine-evaristo-london-booker-prize-african-barack-obama-b2763157.html), [[4]](https://www.the-independent.com/arts-entertainment/books/news/booker-prize-bernardine-evaristo-bbc-margaret-atwood-girl-woman-other-a9232286.html)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/bernardine-evaristo-london-booker-prize-african-barack-obama-b2763157.html), [[6]](https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/entertainment/news/bernardine-evaristo-being-first-black-woman-to-win-booker-is-bittersweet/38595669.html)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/bernardine-evaristo-london-booker-prize-african-barack-obama-b2763157.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/bernardine-evaristo-london-booker-prize-african-barack-obama-b2763157.html> - Bernardine Evaristo, the Booker Prize-winning novelist, has been awarded the £100,000 Women's Prize Outstanding Contribution Award for her transformative impact on literature and dedication to uplifting under-represented voices. Evaristo, 66, is celebrated for her eclectic work, including the Booker-winning 'Girl, Woman, Other,' a polyphonic novel told from the perspectives of a dozen Black women. She is the first woman of African heritage to win the Booker Prize, which she shared with Margaret Atwood in 2019. Evaristo's work often challenges boundaries, blending poetry and prose, and she has been instrumental in promoting diversity in literature. She plans to use the prize money to support other women writers through an undisclosed project.
3. <https://www.apnews.com/arts-and-entertainment-general-news-21425c7061e946189edf2daf41d74d12> - Bernardine Evaristo, the first Black woman to win the Booker Prize, shared the award with Margaret Atwood for their novels 'The Testaments' and 'Girl, Woman, Other.' Evaristo, of Anglo-Nigerian heritage, expressed excitement and delight upon receiving the prize, noting it felt 'so unattainable for decades.' She hopes her win will inspire other Black British women to pursue writing. Evaristo has published seven novels exploring aspects of Black life in Britain, from Roman times to the present day. ([apnews.com](https://apnews.com/arts-and-entertainment-general-news-21425c7061e946189edf2daf41d74d12?utm_source=openai))
4. <https://www.the-independent.com/arts-entertainment/books/news/booker-prize-bernardine-evaristo-bbc-margaret-atwood-girl-woman-other-a9232286.html> - Booker Prize-winning author Bernardine Evaristo criticised the BBC for referring to her as 'another author' in a news item about the Booker Prize. Evaristo, who became the first Black woman to win the award, shared it with Margaret Atwood for their novels 'Girl, Woman, Other' and 'The Testaments.' The BBC apologised for the oversight, stating the presenter had forgotten Evaristo's name during an unscripted segment. ([the-independent.com](https://www.the-independent.com/arts-entertainment/books/news/booker-prize-bernardine-evaristo-bbc-margaret-atwood-girl-woman-other-a9232286.html?utm_source=openai))
5. <https://edition.cnn.com/2023/06/09/africa/booker-prize-winning-author-bernardine-evaristo-mentoring-ghanaian-writer-ayesha-harruna-attah/index.html> - Bernardine Evaristo, the Booker Prize-winning author, is mentoring Ghanaian writer Ayesha Harruna Attah as part of the Rolex Mentor and Protégé Arts Initiative. Evaristo chose Attah, 39, to support emerging voices from Africa, aiming to provide mentorship and networking opportunities. Attah, based in Senegal, has published five books focusing on African female narratives. Evaristo, born to a Nigerian father and white British mother, has deep ties to the continent and often explores themes related to the African diaspora in her work. ([edition.cnn.com](https://edition.cnn.com/2023/06/09/africa/booker-prize-winning-author-bernardine-evaristo-mentoring-ghanaian-writer-ayesha-harruna-attah/index.html?utm_source=openai))
6. <https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/entertainment/news/bernardine-evaristo-being-first-black-woman-to-win-booker-is-bittersweet/38595669.html> - Bernardine Evaristo described being the first Black woman to win the Booker Prize as 'bittersweet.' She shared the award with Margaret Atwood for their novels 'The Testaments' and 'Girl, Woman, Other.' Evaristo expressed that while it's great to be the first, she shouldn't be the first, highlighting the need for more diversity in literature. She hopes her win will inspire other Black British women to pursue writing. ([belfasttelegraph.co.uk](https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/entertainment/news/bernardine-evaristo-being-first-black-woman-to-win-booker-is-bittersweet/38595669.html?utm_source=openai))
7. <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/arts/margaret-atwood-bernardine-evaristo-share-booker-prize> - Margaret Atwood and Bernardine Evaristo were jointly awarded the Booker Prize for their novels 'The Testaments' and 'Girl, Woman, Other.' Evaristo, of Anglo-Nigerian heritage, is the first Black woman to win the prize. Both authors expressed delight in sharing the award, with Atwood noting it would have been embarrassing to win alone at her age. Evaristo hopes her win will inspire other Black British women to pursue writing. ([pbs.org](https://www.pbs.org/newshour/arts/margaret-atwood-bernardine-evaristo-share-booker-prize?utm_source=openai))