

SCREEN TIME

A still from Allie Esiri's (inset) interactive poetry app, iF Poems



POETRY

Rhyme and reason

Poetry in the 21st century wears different hats. *Vogue* meets three women leading new ways for old words.

By SHAHNAZ SIGANPORIA

Blake to Lewis Carroll, the poems are categorised by age, mood and theme. But the best part is listening to the likes of actors Helena Bonham Carter and Bill Nighy read the poetry. You can join the celebrity voices by recording yourself, too. Available in 39 countries, the app makes poetry accessible to adults as well, and does away with the idea that verse is the domain of the literati. “People are moved by words, and I think people like poetry more than they think they do,” she says. “My apps will help them understand this.” Esiri isn’t finished yet, though—she’s currently working on the launch of her next app, *The Love Book*, which incorporates poetry and love letters for lovers, the lovesick and the broken-hearted.

THE DIGITAL REVIVALIST ALLIE ESIRI

“Sometimes you reach a point where you rewind to what you first loved doing. A few months ago, I reached that point,” says London-based Allie Esiri, 45. “As a child, I had this massive anthology of classic poems that I read and re-read. While I was introspecting, I was gifted an iPad, and realised how brilliant this little piece of technology is. I knew I had to marry my passion for poetry with this newfound love to bring the writing to life for the next generation.”

She soon found a way. Esiri and Rachel Kelly, a staff writer at the *Times*, pooled their parenting know-how (they have eight children between them) and came up with iF Poems, a children’s poetry app like none other.

After studying French and Spanish literature at the University of Cambridge, Esiri worked in theatre and television. On stage, she was with the English Shakespeare Company, and on TV she was seen in *Poirot* and *Men Behaving Badly*. She soon went from reading lines to writing them, and moved to New York where she worked for a number of publications including *US Vogue*. After a while, she returned to London, where she started work on iF Poems.

In an interactive anthology, with a collection of 270 poems by writers ranging from William

PAGE TURNER

Shripriya Mahesh (below) trans-creates poetry into short films such as *The Color Of Time* (bottom), starring James Franco and Jessica Chastain



THE VERSE SCREENER SHRIPRIYA MAHESH

In her final year of the Graduate Film program at NYU, the energetic Shripriya Mahesh, 39, signed up for a class called Directing Poetry. Twelve writer/directors would be shortlisted, and each would work on adapting a poem into a short film. She was picked to begin her tutelage under Hollywood’s intellectual heartthrob James Franco, who was leading the study group. And that’s how Mahesh began working on her short film, *The Color Of Time*, starring Franco and Jessica Chastain, among others.

Poetry was nowhere on the horizon for this Chennai-born-and-raised woman—in school, she was obsessed with her camera and thought she >



PHOTO: NEIL GAVIN (ESIRI); ILLUSTRATION: NATASHA LAW/BREEDLONDON.COM; STYLIST: SOPHIE GOODWIN; HAIR AND MAKE-UP: RACHEL JONES/TERRI MANDUCA