



2020 Cinnamon Literature Prize Adjudication Report

Dear Writers,

This year's literature award was the most extraordinary competition we've run in 15 years, with the largest postbag on record. Perhaps it is related to a year of lockdowns and the sense of urgency we have over our creative projects in a world full of challenges, but the range of writing, as well as the sheer amount of entries, was notable this year. We were impressed with the concepts of many of the collections and novels as well as finding a huge range of writing that was ambitious, willing to take risks and full of energy. Thank you to everyone who entered, for supporting Cinnamon Press in this way, and for entrusting us with your work.

With so many entrants and such a huge range of work, across poetry and fiction and a wide range of themes, writing styles and genres, we ended up with an enormous initial longlist. We had to go back and read again (and again) to narrow this down but we wanted to mention all those that were on this initial longlist because they were manuscripts that kept us reading, that had distinctive voices, that were prepared to try something in a way that engaged us.

So the list of mentions with honours is:

Christine Aziz	Jackie Biggs	Veronica Birch
Sheena Bradley	Michael Cuglietta	Nina Cullinane
Carol Dalton	Kelsey Desmond	Julia Duke
Marie-Louise Eyres	Anne Forrest	Cliff Forshaw
Pat Francis	Teresa Godfrey	Ledlowe Guthrie
Juliette Hart	Dominic Hopkins-Powell	Nathan D Horowitz
Mark Hubbard	Malcolm Johnson	Caroline Johnstone
Wendy Jones	Dorothy Judd	Liam Keller
David Keyworth	Claire Kieffer	Kurt Knittel
Nico Mann	Carol McKay	Joanne Meek
Caroline Moir	Sue Moules	Jude O Mahony
Caroline Patten	Livia Peterkin	Sue Proffitt
Felicity Reid	Hannah Retalick	Vivien Ring
Penny Shutt	Paul Simei-Barton	Agnieszka Studzińska
Janet H Swinney	Geraldine Terry	Jean-Jacques Turkie
Nick Wakeling	Dave Wakely	Christian Wethered
Richard Wheeler	Martin Willitts Jr	Victory Witherkeigh

In any other year several of these would have made it to the longlist proper and some even to the shortlist. Thank you for letting us see your work and keep writing!

This still left us with over 40 manuscripts that really stood out so we had a lot of careful reading to do. As with the previous category in virtually any other year of this competition all of these would have been on the shortlist and all strong contenders for publication but we are a tiny team who put maximum work into each book so we knew we had to make decisions.

In the end we put these manuscripts into the extremely strong longlist:

Jane Austin	Paul Baird	Elaine Briggs
Michael Corrigan	Kerry Darbshire	Hélène Demetriades
Dimitris Dimitriadis	Andrew Dutton	Linda Ford
Mehek Goyal	John Lee Grenfell	Jessica Magee
John Maguire	Rosemary Mairs	Joan McGavin
Jane McLaughlin	Christopher North	David Olsen
Gillian Penrose	Diana Powell	Anne Rath
Ellie Rees	Johanna Spiers	Pete Taylor
Bonnie Thurston	Nicola Warwick	J S Watts
Gina Wilson		

All of these manuscripts were either already of publishable quality or well on their way. Many of these authors, we discovered once we matched up the numbers to names for the purpose of writing this report, have already invested heavily in their writing, with mentoring or previous publications. We don't think this is co-incidence – the writers whose work is convincing are those who give their craft time and power, whether they are established writers or debut authors.

And so to the shortlist. In such a strong and competitive field, these authors shone:

John Agard	Vasiliki Albedo	A C Clarke
Martin Domleo	Mick Evans	Judith Field
Dominic Fisher	Mandy Haggith	Jacqueline Haskell (x2)
Sandra Hogarth-Scott	Sonya Moor	Lynn Valentine
Sarah Watkinson	Patricia Helen Wooldridge	

Although there wasn't a single characteristic that stood out in these manuscripts, what they each exhibited was a distinctive voice. Whether that voice was wryly comic, the mythic voice of Anansi accompanying the Windrushians, the controlled anger of political poetry or intense lyricism of landscape poetry ... these were voices that eschewed cliché, wrote with a freshness and precision that was a pleasure to read and had something to say in a way that engaged. Across both prose and poetry manuscripts, long and short form, more conventional narrative or experimental prose or poetry, the attention to language, the willingness to push every word and the lucidity of these pieces was impressive.

But how to choose between a collection of short stories that marked important social history events with finesse and grace and a collection of poetry that traced lines through memory and how we relate to the earth? And so many other choices. First, we narrowed down to a finalist list:

John Agard	A C Clarke	Dominic Fisher
Jacqueline Haskell (<i>Caldera</i>)	Lynn Valentine	Sarah Watkinson

Now we were in trouble. We could have stuck a pin in a paper with the titles on it and been confident that we'd publish an excellent book, but that would be unthinkable when writers had invested so much time and trust in this process. We read and read until characters and lines were with us at mealtimes and even in dreams. Every time we almost made a decision, we would come back to "oh, but this one is so ...". We share this because it's important to writers to know that they are making such an impression. Writing can be a lonely path and to find that it resonates is vital.

It was a privilege to read all of the manuscripts on the shortlist and doubly so with these final six. These writers deserve to be celebrated.

Finally, we had to make a decision. So massive and heartfelt congratulations to Lynn Valentine, whose full length debut collection, *Life's Stink and Honey*, will be published by Cinnamon Press early in 2022.