

## 2022 Cinnamon Literature Award Adjudication

Each year, the literature award draws in more entries, making the reading more delightful and decisions more complicated. As we whittled down from 'mentions with honours' a longer longlist of manuscripts that displayed originality and ambition, to the 'long-list' we found ourselves reading passages aloud to each other and debating our judgements. How do you judge between a fast paced thriller and exquisitely realised eco-poetry? How do you weigh up the merits of a short story collection that experiments with language beside a poetry collection that pushes form while delivering fresh imagery? Inevitably there is a large element of the subjective, but there are always key features that shine though:

- The lack of cliché and freshness of concepts, language and imagery
- Knowing what not to say as much as what to say (so many manuscripts that almost made the lists veered into over-writing just enough to snag us)
- A sense of energy in the writing that kept us reading
- Above all, writing that conveys something authentic, whatever the genre or subject

We were impressed with how many poetry collections and novels hit these targets and how much of the writing showed original and ambitious. And we were impressed across the board with the commitment that so many people are making to their writing. Even if you are not on this list, keep writing. To write a whole novel or produce a whole collection of poetry or short stories is to be celebrated. So thank you to everyone who entered. It's a great for supporting Cinnamon Press and we are honoured to be entrusted with your work.

If you made it to the longlist, congratulations. These works hooded our attention, were distinctive and well-written and in other years many would have reached the shortlist. The **longlist** was:

Jase Luttrell *To Reach the Clouds*

Jane McLaughlin *Out of Nowhere*

Jane McLaughlin *Iceway*

Jacqueline Thompson *Needlework*

Roger Griffin *The Unrespectable Woman*

Maurice Carlin *In a Quare Country*

Phil Madden *In Other Words*

Andrea Turner *Small Wood*

Roger White *Deception*

Linda Collins *Say,*

Sue Wallace-Shaddad *A Family of Portraits*

Diana Powell *Salt Sister*

Pete Armstrong *Even the Darkest Night will End and the Sun will Rise*

Rachel Davies *A Bee Bomb in the Garden of my Anger*

Hélène Demetriades *Seven Swallowings*

Robert Walton *Three Rivers*

Sylvia Bluck *The Ministry of Time*

Christopher M James *Trespassing*

Marjory Woodfield *I Know the Constellations*

Mark Wagstaff *Mascara*

Mark Wagstaff *Hard Bitten*

Mark Wagstaff *No Style*

Caroline Moir *Jemillia*

Sighle Meehan *Silver Jackdaws*

Stephen Ford *Walking Out of this World*

Brian Kirk *Riverrun*

Sophie Neville *Love is for the Brave*

Elaine Briggs *Undercuts*

Elaine Briggs *The Hidden Part*

Barbara Lamplugh *Flying Blind*

Roger Grant *Gray Matter*

Annia Lekka *Lydia's Letters*

Wendy Sacks-Jones *The Candidate's Husband*

Kate Carne *Places from a Vanishing Life*

Tony Chapman *In the City a Short Time Ago*

Thomas Ball *What the Mountains Remember*

John Lee Grenfell *The Southern Cross*

Gina Challen *That which is Woven*

Eliza Mood *The Volcano Letters*

Abigail Ardelle Zammit *Her Ears Flapping Gravely to the Beat of Human Voices*

Dorothy Judd *Behind the Shutters*

Judith Field *The Sound of Gematria*

Andrew Dutton *Remember a Child, Remember Love, Remember War*

Sarah Macleod *World of horology*

Yvonne Baker *Love haunts in shades of blue*

David Burrige *Ramblings of a Gentle Pragmatist*

Honing this down to a reasonably sized shortlist was no easy feat, but decisions had to be made with a lot of careful reading and rereading to reach a short list.

The titles on the **shortlist** (which is fuller than in other years because of the high quality of the entries) are extremely strong and it was a privilege to read these manuscripts:

Clio Gray *The Jugglers Box*

Jacqueline Thompson *Needlework*

Andrea Turner *Small Wood*

Diana Powell *Salt Sister*

Rachel Davies *A Bee Bomb in the Garden of my Anger*

Sylvia Bluck *The Ministry of Time*

Christopher M James *Trespassing*

Marjory Woodfield *I Know the Constellations*

Mark Wagstaff *Mascara*

Mark Wagstaff *No Style*

Kate Carne *Places from a Vanishing Life*

Thomas Ball *What the Mountains Remember*

John Lee Grenfell *The Southern Cross*

Abigail Ardelle Zammit *Her Ears Flapping Gravely to the Beat of Human Voices*

Judith Field *The Sound of Gematria*

Andrew Dutton *Remember a Child, Remember Love, Remember War*

Sarah Macleod *World of horology*

Yvonne Baker *Love haunts in shades of blue*

David Burrige *Ramblings of a Gentle Pragmatist*

The manuscripts on this shortlist had us laughing out loud or close to tears, in awe at a beautiful phrase or eager to know what happened next. They took us around the globe and showed us humanity in so many guises in a range of prose and poetry that was observant, precise and had all its senses open. Every one of these manuscripts deserves to be published and find readers, but we still had to go on making choices.

So here is our list of the **five finalists**:

Yvonne Baker *Love haunts in shades of blue*

Judith Field *The Sound of Gematria*

Clio Gray *The Jugglers Box*

Mark Wagstaff *Mascara*

Abigail Ardelle Zammit *Her Ears Flapping Gravely to the Beat of Human Voices*

At this stage the choice became almost impossible and we revisited each manuscript many times. In one sense we couldn't get this wrong—all of these books should be in the world and if we had resources and time enough we could gladly have taken all five, but in the absence of such resources and time, we owe a considered decision to writers who've invested so much in their work. After a lot of thinking, talking, rereading and a couple of late nights, we thought we had it down to two, but even then we kept asking questions about all five and the problem of comparing beautifully honed poetry with vivid prose, affecting characters or a high-stakes thriller became even more acute.

What was it we loved about each of these manuscripts?

**Yvonne Baker *Love haunts in shades of blue***

The deceptive simplicity of these poems belies so much skill. The tone is ruminative, quiet, yet there is a sense of the proverbial swan who glides by in serenity but under the water is working ceaselessly. Each poem is a small jewel—in its depths is so much more than first appears and the ability to move so (seemingly) effortlessly between outer reality and an interior world is inspiring. The language is clear and precise. The images are fresh, yet as we read them they seem so apt it's as though we've always known them. And the material reaches into existential questions with an honesty and delicacy that ensures we come back to read again and again—after all, we are all haunted—by loss, by the things in the world we can't control, by the stories and rituals handed down to us, but what might have been... and, always, by love. An exquisite collection.

**Judith Field *The Sound of Gematria***

*The Sound of Gematria* is a highly original story that takes a Victorian setting and subverts it. The plot creates a path into the Victorian *fantastique* without resorting to steam-punk, making it feel like a novel of the period whilst also retaining a contemporary viewpoint on gender and religious and cultural prejudices. A unique story which suspends realism while remaining utterly believable. The characters, flawed, empathic and so real that we feel we might meet them on the street, despite the century's time difference, draw the reader into their world. We feel their losses and gains, are involved in their struggles and concerns. There is romance here, but also deeper questions of identity and always against the background of a world that is in danger so that the personal and the larger issues of the time intertwine with skill. A thoroughly immersive read.

**Clio Gray *The Jugglers Box***

The assured voice, accomplished writing and vivid, lyrical prose make this a stand-out novel from the opening line onwards. The setting is distinctive and the story structurally interesting and ambitious, with three threads that keep the reader engaged and

wondering, characters that impress themselves on us and places that are communicated with filmic clarity. The pace is fast and the intrigue of how elements of the story will come together keeps the reader completely engaged. This is also a narrative that takes us to new places – moving from Norway to The Netherlands to Germany and beyond in the early 1800s – we feel into the lives of others at once utterly different, yet with the same human concerns that weave through history.

### **Mark Wagstaff *Mascara***

There is not an ounce of complacent mimesis in *Mascara*. Self-aware and gently satirical, this is quintessentially transgressive avant-pop at its riotous best—a million miles an hour, yet always under the author’s control. In this high octane story the protagonist is pure post-modernism—how does a woman function as a killer in the business world while becoming the perfect wife and mother, especially when she actually is a contract killer? Immersed in her story, we feel we’re watching a Yakuza movie, yet this is London—the familiar defamiliarised. Loud, bright and brash on the surface, *Mascara* raises deep questions about corruption at the heart of society and the gender expectations that go along with this. Hugely entertaining and deadly serious, this is an unstoppable novel.

### **Abigail Ardelle Zammit *Her Ears Flapping Gravely to the Beat of Human Voices***

This is an ambitious collection of poetry that takes risks with form and language to superb effect. Every sense is open in these pieces which are deeply embodied and rooted in places, expanding what we might mean by identity and particularly female identity. This is poetry that challenges us to ask big questions—about our own boundaries, about our anthropocentric perceptions, about form (both bodily and literary). But it is not poetry with an ounce of didacticism. The pieces suggest, interrogate, wonder, but never lecture. The poems build into a narrative arc that invites us to a more fluid and permeable sensibility. This is an intelligent and emotionally rich collection.

We loved all these finalists with good reasons and felt bereft not to be able to publish all five. But in the end the lucid clarity and gorgeous phrases of **Yvonne Baker’s *Love haunts in shades of blue* tipped the scale** and is the **winner** of the 2022 Cinnamon Literature Award. Huge congratulations to Yvonne, whose collection will be published in Spring 2024.