

2024 New Voices Award Adjudication

01.04.2024.

The New Voices award brought in so much good writing and has been a pleasure to read. It's wonderful to have the opportunity to expand our list and we were really keen to find two manuscripts taking some creative risks. We are always searching for books where the prose of poetry sings off the page, where the care taken with language and structure shines and where all of this is done with an elegance that doesn't call attention to itself. That's a big ask but it's wonderful to see how writers rise to the challenge in so many ways. The range of forms and genres can make adjudicating difficult, and of course there is always a subjective element in looking for new work that we feel is not only brilliant but will also be a good fit with Cinnamon Press, so we want to recognise the long and shortlisted submissions for coming so close and giving us so much good reading.

And we want to encourage you to go on writing and go on knocking at doors. There are a lot of people writing and small presses have small lists, but there are lots of small presses and we really believe that commitment goes a long way to getting your work into the world. You've already made it further than most by completing a full collection of poetry or stories, a complete piece of non-fiction, a novel or novella. Keep showing up for your work, keep pushing your boundaries. Writing is a wonderful way to engage with the world.

A huge thank you to everyone who entered. It means a lot and we take your trust in us seriously. This competition in particular is a huge support for our 20th anniversary year in 2025.

If you made it to the long list, congratulations. These works hooked us and made us keep reading. We were taken with the voice and able to immerse in the world you were creating for your readers. We hope you will send us more work in future.

If you made it to the short list you really had our deep attention. The manuscripts in this group were confident and beautifully achieved. We met characters we believed, found phrases that delighted us with their freshness and lucidity and had our perspectives widened. These manuscripts went beyond solid crafting to invite us into whole new ways of seeing. They surprised us and made us care.

The longlist:

Karon Alderman *Chocolate Medal*

Nikki Ali *Mira's Story*

Alex Barr *Nutcracker*

Carol Baxendale *White Space*

Sylvia Bluck *The Accidental Time Traveller*

Mark Carson *I still have my fingers*

Stephanie Cotsirilos *Expiration Date*

Vuyelwa Carlin *Holy Island*
Jenny Epstein *This I Have Done For You*
Rachel Fenton *Polecat*
Karina Fiorini *Stretchmarks*
Jacqueline Haskell *Caldera*
Jacqueline Haskell *Takotsubo*
Karen Howard *The Search Identity Thieves*
Athanasia Hughes *Night Studio*
Camilla Lambert *The Hovering Past*
Sue Lee *The Bellagio Secret*
Julie Leoni *Farmotherlands*
Neal Mason *False Reports*
Fokkina McDonnell, *getting to know my native country*
Claire Mitchell *Felled*
Lisa Morriss-Andrews *Ariel's Robes*
Christine Nevin *Metanoias*
Christopher North *The Lone Swimmer*
Tom Proverbs-Garbett *The Adept*
Anne Rath *Rhizomes of Memory*
Clare Reddaway *Mouthy*
Ellie Rees *Snap*
Emily Richards *Bloodstone*
Finola Scott *The Trembling Earth*
Adam Somerset *The Wall Within*
Gerry Stewart *Invocation Against Winter*
Joanna Swingler *Before the Silence*
Paul Simei-Barton *From the Hollow of a Sling*
James Tan, *Monologue of a Ghost and Other Stories*
Victor Tapner *Kalashnikov*

Jacqueline Thompson *Tadrowski Needlework*

Vivienne Tregenza *Canary in a Glass House*

Sue Wallace-Shaddad *Changing Expectations*

Marjory Woodfield *As We Travel*

Jonathan Wright *The Riyadh Single Malt Whisky Club*

Teffy Wrightson *Dioma*

Honing this down to a reasonably sized short list was no easy feat. Even though decisions had to be made with a lot of careful reading, we produced a 'short list' of 20 titles because we wanted to recognise the ambition and range of the writers in this group. We haven't previously had a category for memoir in our general Cinnamon Press awards, but felt we would revise this in the future due to the inventive ways in which this genre was being used, in both prose and poetry. It was refreshing to see memoir that used internal experience to make wider connections and with such vivid and honest writing. Another thread that jumped out for us was the use of place in many of these manuscripts, in ways that enriched and enlivened the experience of reading. And we were also impressed with the willingness to tackle big issues without didacticism. From the ramifications of holocaust to depression and fertility, from loss to how we embody the land we live on or that forms us, from moments of transformation to how we face mortality, these were collections, novels and memoirs that were willing to dig deep without cliché or truism. It was an honour to read the work and, to repeat ourselves, please keep writing.

So the (not very) short list:

Karon Alderman *Chocolate Medal*

Nikki Ali *Mira's Story*

Carol Baxendale *White Space*

Sylvia Bluck *The Accidental Time Traveller*

Jenny Epstein *This I Have Done For You*

Jacqueline Haskell *Caldera*

Jacqueline Haskell *Takotsubo*

Karen Howard *The Search Identity Thieves*

Athanasia Hughes *Night Studio*

Julie Leoni *Farmotherlands*

Fokkina McDonnell, *getting to know my native country*

Christine Nevin *Metanoias*

Anne Rath *Rhizomes of Memory*

Ellie Rees *Snap*

Emily Richards *Bloodstone*

Adam Somerset *The Wall Within*

Gerry Stewart *Invocation Against Winter*

Paul Simei-Barton *From the Hollow of a Sling*

Victor Tapner *Kalashnikov*

Vivienne Tregenza *Canary in a Glass House*

Having a longer short list always makes choosing finalists even harder, but it felt right that these were difficult decisions—the books submitted deserved the attention and pondering. The titles on this list really shone for us. It's so good to find ourselves wanting to read on and on or to be stopping to read lines aloud to others nearby. We hope each of these manuscripts will find its home and we would be delighted to see them again as they continue the search. Our five finalists are:

Nikki Ali *Mira's Story*

Jacqueline Haskell *Takotsubo* (we should also say that we went back and forth on which of Jacqueline's manuscripts should be in this group as both were excellent)

Julie Leoni *Farmotherlands*

Emily Richards *Bloodstone*

Paul Simei-Barton *From the Hollow of a Sling*

And then we had to make the hard decision. If we had endless time and resources we would have scooped up all five of these excellent manuscripts. And this is why we loved them:

Nikki Ali *Mira's Story*

Mira's story oozes sensuality and delves deep into sexuality. Hispanic-American, married to Andre and in polyamorous relationships with Paloma and Araceli, Mira is also a young New Yorker with Cystic Fibrosis whose story plays out against the backdrop of an impoverished childhood with an unstable, drug-dependent mother who goes on throwing challenges into her Mira's adult life. Dense, complex, incisive, and never shying away from the ever-present obstacles of ableism and racism, it's a novel that is as spiritual as it is sexy, as political as it is deeply empathic. Mira took our breath away and had us in tears, made us laugh out loud and get angry on her behalf. And all without an ounce of didacticism. Mira's life is glorious, messy, joyous, and heart-breaking.

Jacqueline Haskell *Takotsubo*

The heart is perhaps the most widely used symbol in poetry—ubiquitous and cross-cultural, the heart is an organ of perception, one of the body's brains as well as an image of romantic love, joy and despair. Setting out to explore 'the flesh and blood of the organ' Jacqueline Haskell also excavates the metaphor with intelligence and skill. Ranging from science to the heart as an organ of memory, passion and so much

more, the poetry in this collection uses formally inventive lyric verse and prose poetry across sections that shift our perspective, layering fact and emotion, folklore and ritual, mortality and metaphor. The result is a collection that is at once fascinating and deeply moving, assisted by the precision and suppleness of the language as well as the use of white space to craft every piece.

Julie Leoni *Farmotherlands*

From the dexterity of the title to the vividness of every phrase, this collection impresses and engages. The pressure with which narrative arcs weave together is superb. *Farmotherlands* explores memory and land, the enormous changes in how food is produced and what this means for people and soil, the nature of time and the loss of our connectedness to all life, whilst holding out the hope of regaining it. And it does so with a cohesiveness that makes this a deeply satisfying collection, crafting prose, non-fiction, poetry, narrative and memoir together with aplomb.

Emily Richards *Bloodstone*

We were delighted to read so much fresh and creative memoir writing in this competition, but Emily Richards' *Bloodstone* sang off the page. The story is an extraordinary one, centring on Emily and her wife leaving behind their city life to live in an unlikely, decaying yet luxurious castle on the remote island of Rùm for two years. The brutality and beauty of the environment and weather, the strangeness of a tiny community (the island has a population of 40) and the isolation are extreme, but there are added challenges as Emily immerses in what it means to be fertile and whether this will involve having a child, as deep depression threatens her survival and as life is stripped back in every way. Raw, honest and written in lucid prose, this is a narrative that is both unique and universal—in reaching into the depths of her own story, Emily Richards asks us all what we mean by fertility and how we discern our path in life.

Paul Simei-Barton *From the Hollow of a Sling*,

(this novel was also short listed in our literature prize and I've reprised the summary which still stands)

Paul Simei-Barton's novel is as impressive as it is ambitious. Taking two historical figures, the brilliant philosopher of science, Karl Popper, the equally impressive thinker, Gershom Scholem, a pioneering Zionist who looked to forgotten traditions of Jewish mysticism to suggest ways of co-existing with the Palestinian people, the novel moves from Vienna in 1918, to the Weimar Republic in Berlin between the Wars, where Popper's sister Hanya becomes a cabaret dancer after the breakdown of a relationship and from there to New Zealand, where Popper takes refuge as an academic after becoming disillusioned with the socialist utopian politics that he has seen brutally repressed. This is a novel of huge passions: passion for ground-breaking, scientific thinking; for esoteric Kabbalah; for Zionism; for the arguments between these positions and the passion between Hanya and her lover, Max, whose relationship is made and broken and made again as the Gestapo close in and flight becomes increasingly perilous. Written in supply prose, there is an immediacy here that holds attention, that makes the reader hold their breath as the stakes are raised and hard decisions are made. A love story, a novel that resonates deeply with contemporary political polarisation and suffering, and a story of huge intelligence and range, *From the Hollow of a Sling* is a significant achievement.

We had a period of going around in ever-decreasing circles trying to make the final decision. But a decision had to be made. We are thrilled to announce that we will be publishing Nikki Ali's *Mira's Story*, and Jacqueline Haskell's *Takotsubo* during our 20th anniversary year of 2025.

A huge thanks to everyone who entered and massive congratulations to Nikki and Jacqueline.