POETRY PAMPHLET AWARD 2025

The poetry pamphlet award is a highlight of the Cinnamon Press year. This year we had a bumper crop of manuscripts and we're grateful to everyone who supported the competition. It's not an easy thing to send your work into the world. Always, we look for voices that stand out, ways of presenting the world that are fresh and vivid. Surprise in poetry doesn't have to be about fireworks, but it needs to communicate lucidly while shifting something in the reader. We look for work that loves language, is open to all the senses, feels deeply and is also beautifully crafted — a sense of sound a rhythm, lines that turn easily, white space that speaks as much as the words. Above all we look for an encounter.

Once again the 'long list' is long. These are the 54 pamphlets on the long list, which is just over 10% of the entries so if you made it this far, congratulations. The competition was strong and the long list was exceptionally strong — full of imagery that was innovative, but accessible and able to hold us in its spell.

If your work doesn't appear on the list, keep writing. Read as much poetry as you can, keep crafting and knocking on doors. There were so many manuscripts that were only a whisper away from the long list.

The long list:

Jason Arnold, *Under it all*

Emma Baines, *I listen through my boots*

Sarah Barr, *Walking through Snow*

Anne Bateman, *Unravelling Light*

David Batten, *Paris Light*

Christopher Beck, *Return to Lanteglo*

Pratibha Castle, *No Small Things*

GW Colkitto, *If you want to know her*

GW Colkitto, *When all the white birds die*

Kerry Darbishire, *The Water Between my Father and Me*

Susan G Duncan, *Genealogy*

Anne Dunford, *Reflections*

Sam Egelstaff, Our Valley is a Sea

Ellis Elliot, *I Come From Peculiar*

Mick Evans, *Voicings*

Lucy Forrester, *When there was sun*

Maggie Freeman, *The Language of Leaves*

Susanna Harding, *Moon Woman*

Andrew Hoaen, *The Slow Bones*

Finn Keegan, *Zeptosecond zugwang*

Charlie Kennedy, *Echo*

David Keyworth, *Death and Taxis*

Frances Anne King, *Navigator*

Wendy Klein, *Back when I used to be American*

Toby Litt, *A glow in the dark skeleton*

Simon Marchant-Lewis, *Grave-digging*

Jane McKie, *Love Thy*

Jane McLaughlin, *The Art House*

Jenny McRobert, *All of my lost children*

Christina Moran, *Ghost*

Mary Mulholland, *Sister, Sister*

Kate Noakes & Annie Brechin, *Bird in the Ribcage*

Jennie Owen, *Myths over Pendle*

Melanie Pennycate, *Wings*

Sue Proffitt, *Alive Among Others*

David Punter, *Recognitions*

Ellie Rees, *The Days in Between*

Marg Roberts, *Three Blue Tents in a City*

Timothy Roland, *Kittiwake*

Laura Seymour, *Jupiter is Shrinking*

Judith Shaw, *Final Shot*

Victoria Spires, *Self Mountain*

Hugo Sullivan, *Reclaiming the Future*

Bonnie Thurston, *Darkness*

Patricia Thompson, *Elavations*

Gail Webb, *Homecoming*

Jane Wheeler, *The Trouble with Wren*

Gwen Williams, Arriving Barefooted

Helen May Williams, *What I meant to say was*

Robin Lindsay Wilson, *A Personal Guide to the Lochs of Scotland*

Martin Willitts Jr, *First Snow*

Alison Winch, *Haunt*

Marjory Woodfield, *She Sews the Stars*

Angela Wye, *In Common*

And then we had to whittle this list down. And what a task! We want to be hooked when we read poetry — that feeling that is akin to breathing in perfume — something potent that fills us till the senses have to rest before they can go on, the catch of the breath as a phrase so fresh and lucid lodges somewhere in the body as we read. And the unmistakable knowledge that we are encountering another creature in the poems we're reading — whether the persona is a dolphin or clearly the confessional voice of the person writing, there's the sense that it matters.

It's not about subject — a rock or a wooden spoon can be as engaging as a profound epiphany in the right hands. The tone can be melancholy or playful, dark or sparkling with wit, as long as the writer brings observations that engage all the senses, immerse us in the spell of the piece without resorting to cliché or generalisations. Vivid phrases (which can be in the simplest language); precise, concrete, fresh details — these keep us reading.

This doesn't mean that the poetry has to be all about the world out there — interior landscapes can also engage us — but they need to be grounded and lucid, not littered with abstractions.

What doesn't work is poetry that is trying to explain itself or hammer home a point (just in case we didn't already get it from the images and metaphors) — poems are an experience, not a lecture.

If you want examples from a Cinnamon poet, read Yvonne Baker's collection *Love Haunts in Shades of Blue* or her pamphlet *Tree Light*, Patricia Helen Wooldridge's prize-winning *Out in the Field*, Jacqueline Haskell's *Takotsubo*; Jane McKie's *Mine*, to name a few that have won previous competitions.

The best poems allow meaning emerges organically from observation. Of course there is always an element of telling us something — not all great poems are all show and no tell, but all great poems earn those moments of reflection or epiphany. Read Mary Oliver, read Mosab Abu Toha for very different poets who understand this.

Crafting also matters — not in the sense of turning in pieces that are workshopped to within a millimetre of their line turns or following formulas, but all art has its techniques to riff on them, you need to know them first. Consider the shapes on the page, how the stanzas are arranged and why, how the white space relates to the whole, how the sounds match the content. Read It aloud — listen for rhythm and the marriage of tone and subject. Take a look at Mario Petrucci's *Afterlove*, Anne-Marie Wells' *Mother (v)* or Jane Monson's exquisite prose poetry collection, *The Chalk Butterfly*. In all of these form and content work together. Listen to the audio extracts from Omar Sabbagh's *For Echo* and *Morning Lit: Portals After Alia*, and from the pamphlet *RIP: Poems After Gaza & Words After Waddah.*

Think about time. You can change tense if the poem demands it, but only if you take the reader with you and we know where we are in time.

Surprise us. This doesn't mean bells and whistles or having your reader sit with a dictionary. It doesn't have to mean complexity, but it does mean making us think or feel moved or shaken. And it does mean using fresh images, making language work hard. Read Ted Hughes 'Wind' — the suppleness of language remains fresh and suprising — fields quiver, the skyline is a grimace…

And to repeat what I've written before — dreate the container. I don't know if I read this or was told it, but it's attributed to George Szirtes, an exceptional poet. *Get in quickly, get out lightly.* In other words, make your beginnings and endings count. No long scene setting — take us straight in. No lingering at the end to make sure the reader got the message — make if bold and true and trust it.

Finally and vitally read as much poetry as possible from as many voices as possible. Read the magazines or publishers you are sending work to. Read poetry that has persisted across time and poetry that is brand new (the Poetry Book Society is a great place to start). Read poetry in translation. Read poetry that explores different forms—open field, concrete, sonnets, free verse, language poetry, haiku… Keep reading poetry.

And so to the short list. These 16 collections convinced us that they came from poets who are hitting most or all of the things we are searching for in poetry. If you made it this far your work deserves to be out in the world—keep knocking on as many doors as you can. If we unlimited resources we'd want all of these works on our list.

Anne Bateman, *Unravelling Light*

David Batten, *Paris Light*

GW Colkitto, *If you want to know her*

Ellis Elliot, *I Come From Peculiar*

Mick Evans, *Voicings*

Charlie Kennedy, *Echo*

Toby Litt, *A glow in the dark skeleton*

Jane McKie, *Love Thy*

Jenny McRobert, *All of my lost children*

Kate Noakes & Annie Brechin, *Bird in the Ribcage*

Laura Seymour, *Jupiter is Shrinking*

Victoria Spires, *Self Mountain*

Bonnie Thurston, *Darkness*

Helen May Williams, *What I meant to say was*

Robin Lindsay Wilson, *A Personal Guide to the Lochs of Scotland*

Martin Willitts Jr, *First Snow*

We always aim to narrow the shortlist down to 5 finalists and this year managed it after much discussion and back and forth:

GW Colkitto, *If you want to know her*

Ellis Elliot, *I Come From Peculiar*

Mick Evans, *Voicings*

Jane McKie, *Love Thy*

GW Colkitto, If you want to know her

More than once reading this pamphlet, tears welled. Grief is on every page, but not a maudlin word. The language is clear and vivid, the memories are accessible and despite the emotional weight of loss explored, there is light and joy here, gratitude and not a whiff of projection. The control of form and line, the ability to say only what is needed and no more, the spaces that allow the reader to immerse and feel but to leave with grace, make this an outstanding collection — poignant and true.

Ellis Eliot, *I Come from Peculiar*

Ellis Eliot is a poet with a profound understanding of voice, place and how story is handed down. It's a beautiful combination and entering her world, the spell held all the way. Inspired by the memoir of Daniel Ellis, which in turn inspired Daniel Frazier's *Cold Mountain*, *I Come from Peculiar* takes up the less-heard voices of women conditions in Civil War Appalachia. The characters are distinctive, the poetic forms carefully chosen and skilfully deployed, the language compelling. But most of all every piece is immersive, embodied, brimming with senses we recognise, so that for a moment we live alongside these extraordinary ordinary women.

Mick Evans, *Voicings*

The range of reference in this collection is inspiring, but what makes it a stand-out submission is the lightness with which references are woven in — not self-conscious cleverness, but riches that we are invited to share, a depth of insight that emerges as easy as breath. Marry this to exquisite observations and a gift for internal reflection that is sharp and unstinting and the result is a pamphlet as humane as it is accomplished.

Jane McKie, *Love Thy*

Love Thy is full of lucid observation, heart-stopping details, compassion and wit. From a rotary airer to gnomes in the garden, from the neighbour sitting in his care before he goes into the house to the willow tree as influencer, there is a tenderness here that is never sentimental, but a clear-eyed that sees our flaws and absurdities and loves anyway, a view that contains layers of meaning so that the poems invite us back in, to find the spirit of place in ‘a cat-scratched bedpost’, to delight in an anonymous gift of strawberries despite the thought ‘they might be poisoned’, to glory in ‘The garden,/ vibrant through glass; her pallor, a reflection.’

Bonnie Thurston, *Darkness*

To interrogate darkness at this moment in history is not only timely, but vital and Bonnie Thurston does it with an honesty and precision that holds our attention. From the darkness of a melancholy disposition to darkness that shelters us safely, from sleepless nights and their moons to trusting in the return of the light on the darkest day and longest night, these pieces are poised, precise, full of sensory details, insightful and shot through with hope. There is fear and grief here, but it does not have the last word.

Getting these down to two winners was incredibly difficult, but we are delighted to announce that the winning pamphlets, to be published next Spring, are:

GW Colkitto, *If you want to know her*

Bonnie Thurston, *Darkness*