

2018 Raymond Souster Award Shortlist

This Wound is a World by Billy Ray-Belcourt (Frontenac House)

Billy-Ray Belcourt (he/him) is a writer and academic from the Driftpile Cree Nation. He is a Ph.D. student in the Department of English & Film studies at the University of Alberta. There, he is writing a dissertation called “The Indigenous Paranormal,” which explores the ways in which contemporary First Nations artists, poets, and filmmakers represent the conditions under which Indigenous subjects come into being or fail to. He is a 2016 Rhodes Scholar and holds an M.St. in Women’s Studies from the University of Oxford and Wadham College. His research interests stretch from queer, trans, and feminist studies to ethics to decolonization. Billy-Ray’s debut book of poems, *This Wound is a World* (Frontenac House 2017), is a finalist for the 2018 Griffin Poetry Prize. It is also shortlisted for the 2018 Robert Kroetsch City of Edmonton Book Prize, the 2018 Gerald Lampert Memorial Award, and the 2018 Raymond Souster Award, both via the League of Canadian Poets. It was named by CBC Books as the best “Canadian poetry” collection of 2017. His sophomore book, *NDN Coping Mechanisms: Notes from the Field*, is due out in the fall of 2019 with House of Anansi Press. He is at work on a third book of non-fiction vignettes called *The Conspiracy of NDN Joy*. His creative writing is represented by Stephanie Sinclair at Transatlantic Agency.



From the Jurors: Billy-Ray Belcourt’s poetry dismantles the body politic. His metaphors flip us upside down, and inside out. “It took an ocean to break us,” he writes and then he takes us “off the edge of the world”. The longing in this poetry is our longing not because

we're all gay or young or Indigenous but because the poetry invites us to "rip and sever and split/ such that one can be rendered again. Billy-Ray Belcourt's poetry is exactly the right cure for all that is gutted in this world. This is a rejuvenating, sacrificial voice, buoyed by an achy and intelligent tone.

The Better Monsters by Puneet Dutt (Mansfield Press)

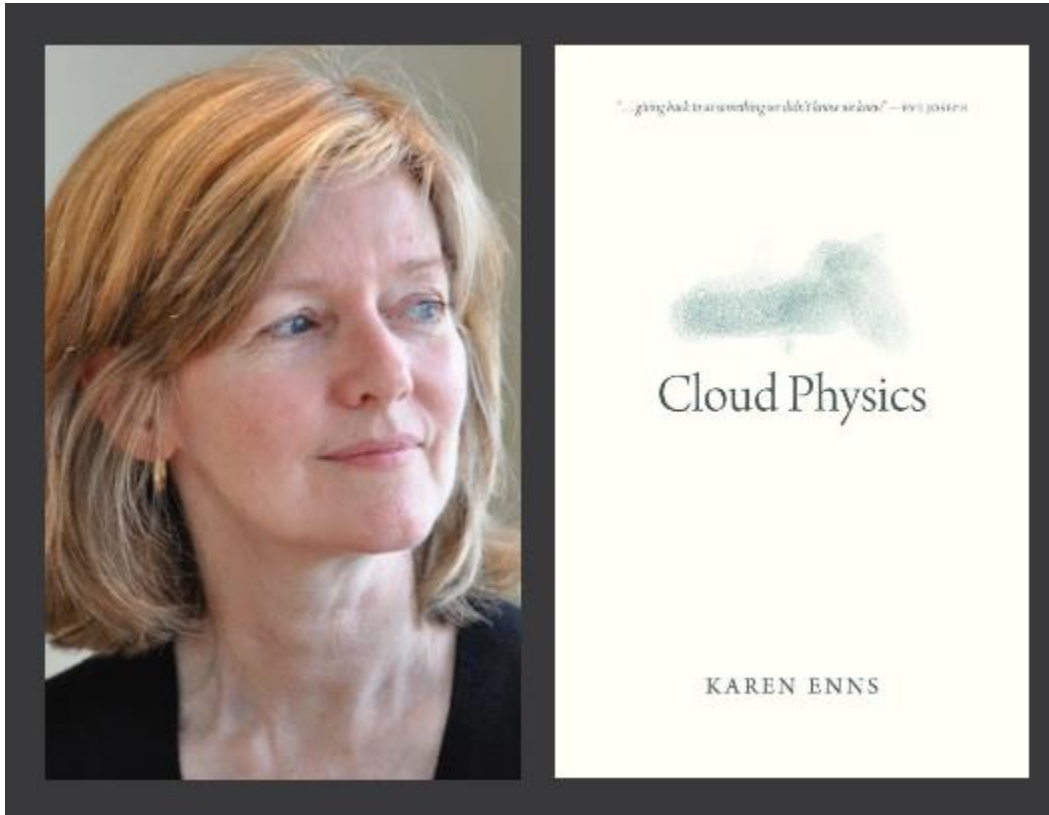
Puneet Dutt received her MA in English from Ryerson University. She is the author of the chapbook *PTSD south beach* (Grey Borders Books), which was a Finalist for the 2016 Breitling Chapbook Prize (Phantom Books). Her work has been published in a number of journals and in *Imaginarium 4: The Best Canadian Speculative Writing*. She was born in India and raised in New Jersey. She now resides in Toronto with her husband, where she is an editorial board member at *Canthius* and a creative writing workshop facilitator with the Toronto Writers Collective. She can be found online at puneetdutt.com.



From the Jurors: Canadian poetry often receives a reputation for being too backward looking, too insular. Certainly not in *The Better Monsters*, where Puneet Dutt presents a language as knowingly awash in the intrigue of international relations as it is in the immediacy of personal experience. Utilizing a sparse form, Dutt's words breathe throughout the entirety of the page, allowing the odd, ugly, and beautiful contradictions of modern life to resonate. Whether examining war, racism, or the complexity of place, *The Better Monsters* is a book that sits squarely in the contemporary world, where the differences across the street can often eclipse the differences between borders.

Cloud Physics by Karen Enns (University of Regina Press)

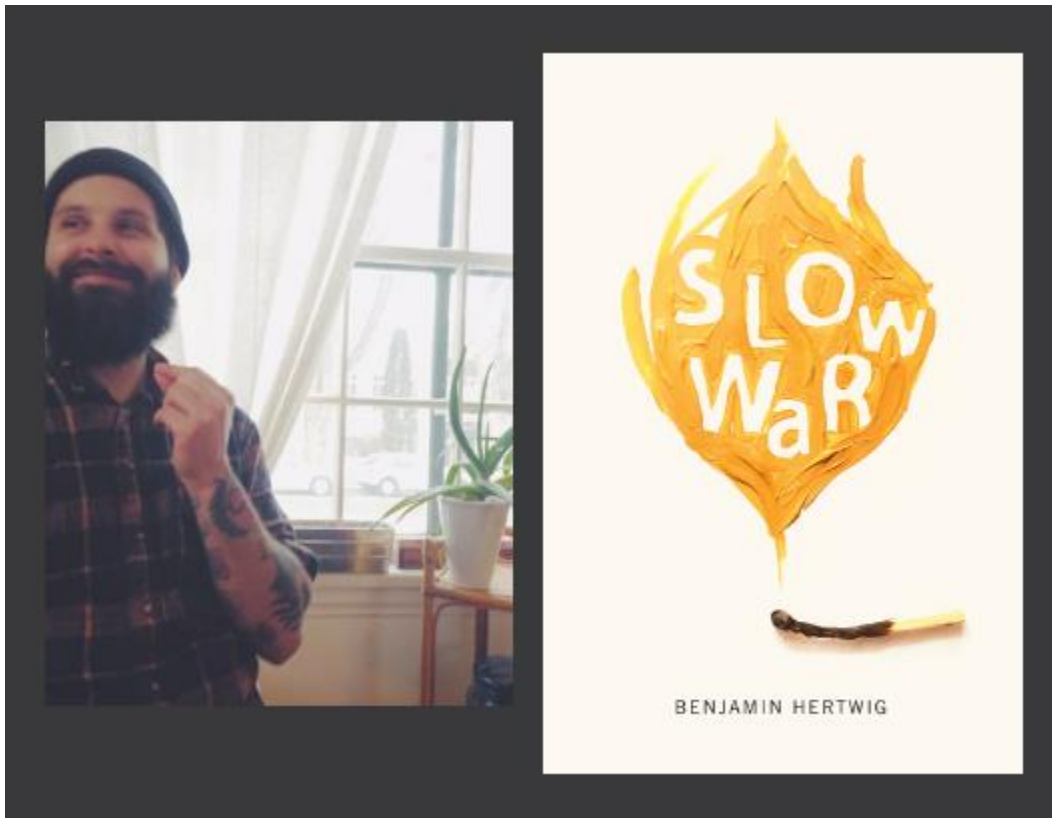
Karen Enns is the author of three collections of poetry: *Cloud Physics*, *Ordinary Hours*, and *That Other Beauty*, shortlisted for the Gerald Lampert Memorial Award. Her poems have appeared in many literary journals including *The Malahat Review*, *Prairie Fire*, *The New Quarterly*, *Grain*, and *The Antigone Review*. A native of Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario, she studied music and worked as a classical pianist before publishing her first writing. She lives in Victoria, BC.



From the Jurors: With Karen Enns’s poetry in *Cloud Physics* one gets the sense we are in the presence of some kind of sacred, fictional universe. There is a stark landscape in the collection and perhaps this vapor or fog or cloud is her intention. The central trajectory of these poems is an imploring wisdom, a “flare of unraveling, / some gorgeous waft” before we arrive at a “delicate bell of clarity/opened.” We’ve always been curious about the communal voice, the choral nature of the human heart and Enns invites us to migrate together, then she strands us with others in a chorus who “mouthed old psalms in the dusk.”

Slow War by Benjamin Hertwig (McGill-Queen's University Press)

Benjamin Hertwig is a National Magazine Award winning writer, painter, and ceramicist, born and raised under big prairie skies and currently living on unceded Coast Salish territory, Vancouver. As a child, he liked sports publicly and books privately. Since graduating from high school, he has spent time as a soldier, a student, a bike courier, a treeplanter, an inner-city housing worker, and English instructor. His first book of poetry, *Slow War*, was shortlisted for a Governor General's Literary Award. Benjamin believes in the transformative power of art—visual, verbal, spiritual—and the groundedness that community provides.



From the Jurors: A superb work that uses assured language to represent remarkable correlations between the places of war and places in Canada. The war is Afghanistan, the poet a young soldier, aware, from his earlier life on the prairies, of the innate presence of violence in the desires of humankind. The thrill of killing, the rationalization of its necessity, the self-serving meaninglessness of the political explanation. How soldiering, and war, accentuate the fundamental behaviour, for ill and good, of human beings; and how it is the permanent alteration of the self, the uniform physically put away, that prevails as inescapable, that recognizes a stigmata of recurrence. And how it can be that “a Bach cantata / makes you almost / forgive / your hands.”

Trailer Park Elegy by Cornelia Hoogland (Harbour Publishing)

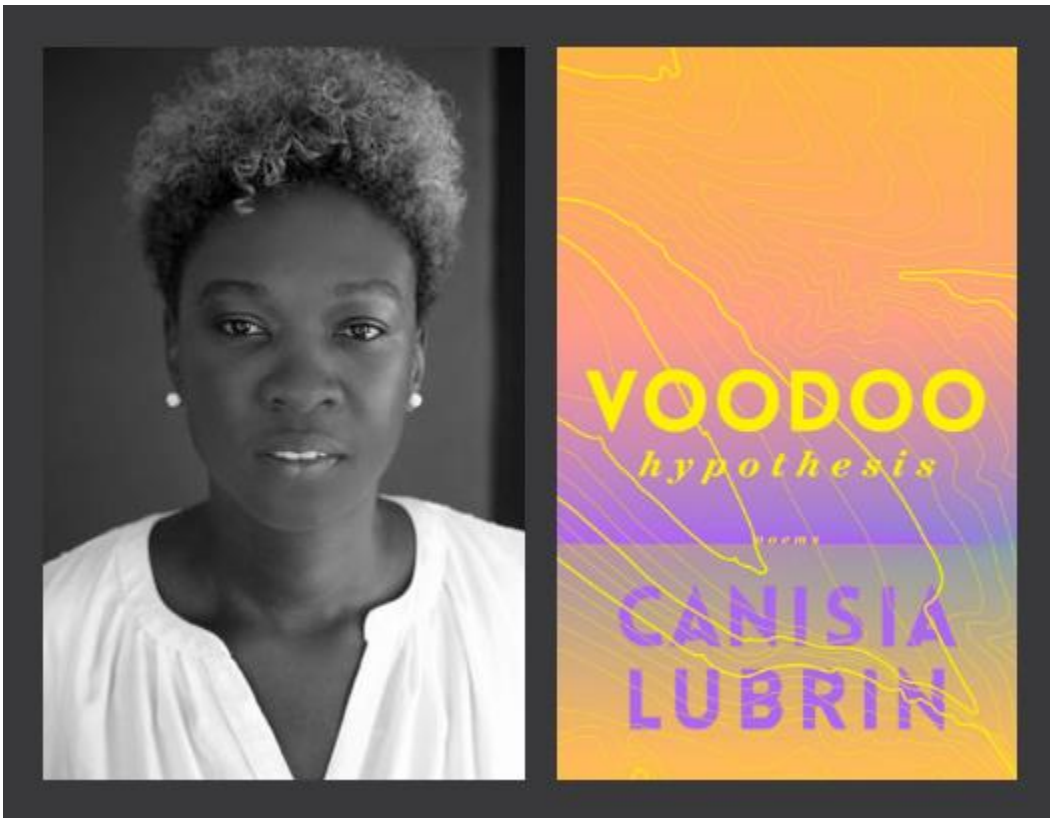
Cornelia Hoogland's *Woods Wolf Girl* (Wolsak and Wynn, 2011) was a finalist for the ReLit Award for Poetry. Her story "Sea Level" was shortlisted for the 2012 CBC Creative Nonfiction Prize. Cornelia serves on national and international literary boards, and was the founder and artistic director of Poetry London and, most recently, of Poetry* Hornby Island, on the BC Gulf Island she calls home. *Trailer Park Elegy* is her seventh book.



From the Jurors: A long poem that makes good use of that structure. And is moving as well. The elegiac mood for the death of the poet's brother, related in a manner that relies on the actualities of the event and their analogies in the world that remains, is established immediately in the opening lines, and is well sustained through the book, in which time is moved into immediacy, into suspension, and into recollection—while landscapes recalled as if rediscovered, and the seascape, seen from the trailer park, is sometimes transmuted, is sometimes united as life with death, in the counterpoint of the contemplation of the narrator.

Voodoo Hypothesis by Canisia Lubrin (Wolsak & Wynn)

Canisia Lubrin was born in St. Lucia. She has had work published in literary journals including *Room*, the *Puritan*, *This Magazine*, *Arc*, *CV2* and *The City Series #3: Toronto Anthology*. She has been an arts administrator and community advocate for close to two decades. Lubrin has contributed to the podcast *On The Line*, hosted by Kate Sutherland for The Rusty Toque. She studied at York University where she won the President's Prize in poetry and the Sylvia Ellen Hirsch Memorial Award in creative writing. Lubrin holds an MFA from the University of Guelph and teaches at Humber College. She lives in Whitby, Ontario.



From the Jurors: A debut of stunning scope, Canisia Lubrin's *Voodoo Hypothesis* exists as a series of dense, haunting lines that beat back against the colonial mindset. Whether she's skilfully mixing Creole with the dictions of science, pop-culture, and newspaper reportage, or staring down the spectres of mythology and poetic reference; Lubrin seizes language that ranges across the dynamics of power, creating a liberating expression that refuses to have its history told for it. With *Voodoo Hypothesis*, Lubrin doesn't just set herself apart as one of Canada's great emerging poets, she distinguishes herself as an author whose time is so clearly and unquestionably now.