

2020 Raymond Souster Award Shortlist

***NDN Coping Mechanisms* by Billy-Ray Belcourt (House of Anansi Press)**

Billy-Ray Belcourt (he/him) is a writer and academic from the Driftpile Cree Nation. His debut book of poems, *This Wound is a World* (Frontenac House 2017), won the 2018 Griffin Poetry Prize (making him the youngest ever winner) and the 2018 Robert Kroetsch City of Edmonton Book Prize. It was also named the Most Significant Book of Poetry in English by an Emerging Indigenous Writer at the 2018 Indigenous Voices Awards. *This Wound is a World* was a finalist for the 2018 Governor General's Literary Award for Poetry, the 2018 Robert Kroetsch Award for Poetry, the 2018 Gerald Lampert Memorial Award, and the 2018 Raymond Souster Award, both of the latter via the League of Canadian Poets. It was also named by CBC Books as the best "Canadian poetry" collection of 2017. U.S. (University of Minnesota Press) and French (Groupe Nota Bene) editions of the book are now available. His sophomore book, *NDN Coping Mechanisms: Notes from the Field*, is out now with House of Anansi Press.

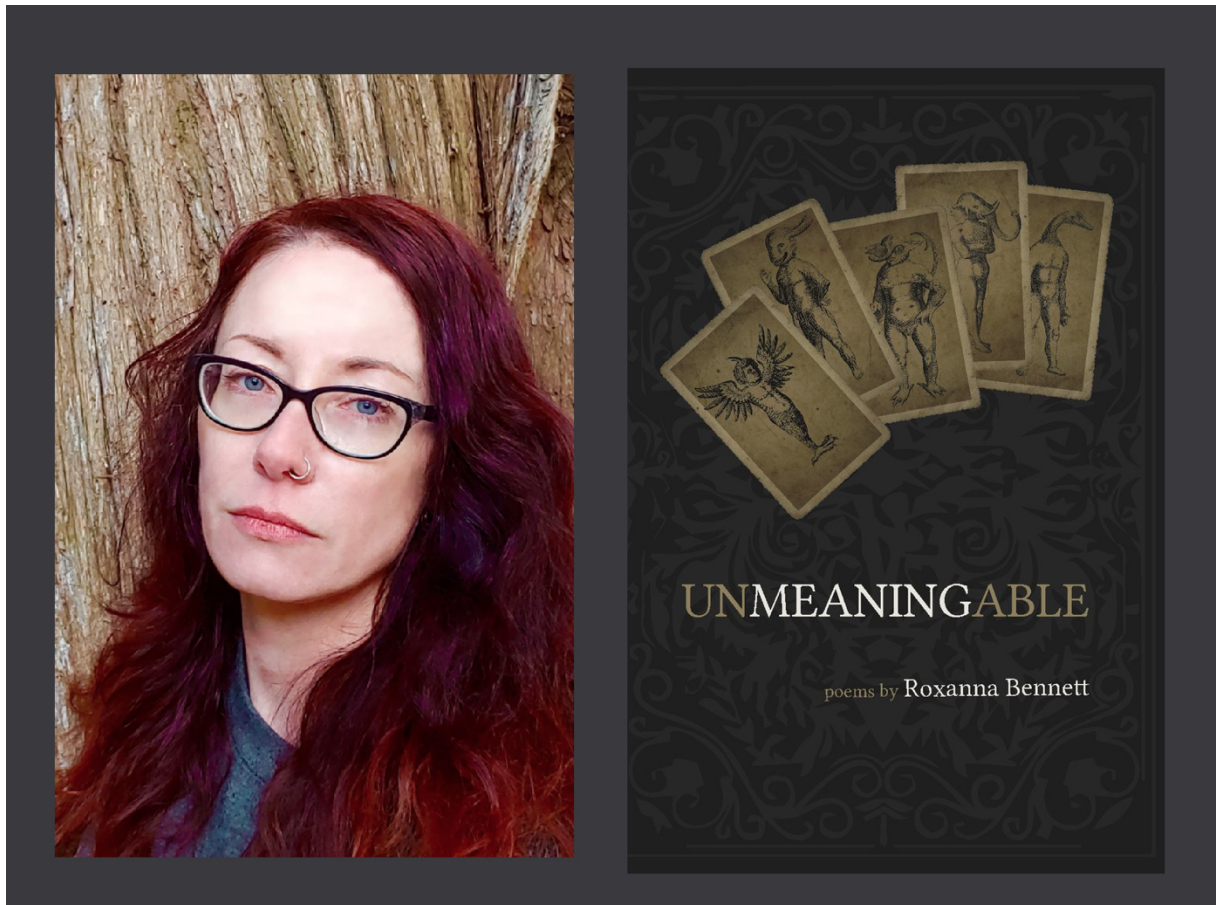


Author Photo: Tenille Campbell

From the Jurors: Billy-Ray Belcourt's *NDN Coping Mechanisms* employs a wide variety of strategies—theoretical, linguistic, typographical—to bend, stretch, and twist language and its ability to mean, without ever abandoning the poetic medium from which it's made. Throughout, Belcourt's language moves ever forward with a force and energy that is elemental, insisting on space and place for Indigeneity (specifically queer Indigeneity) to be spoken, heard, and celebrated. An outstanding follow-up to one of the nation's most lauded debuts.

***Unmeaningable* by Roxanna Bennett (Gordon Hill Press)**

Roxanna Bennett is a disabled poet gratefully living on the traditional territories of the Mississaugas of Scugog Island First Nation which is covered under the Williams Treaties. She is the author of *unseen garden* (chapbook, knife | fork | book, 2018), *The Uncertainty Principle* (Tightrope Books, 2014) and *Unmeaningable*, available from Gordon Hill Press.



From the Jurors: Where and how is meaning made in a body that interferes with its own lines of communication? Roxanna Bennett's *Unmeaningable* is a powerful example of embodied cognition. Crafted with rigorous precision, Bennett's poems bore into a linguistic system that assumes an able-bodied subjectivity. Yet she writes through limitation to reveal the mot juste at every turn. To be sure, the poems transmute physical and psychic agony with deep compassion and incisive accuracy. From the very first line, meaning is enabled as Bennett maps a poetic reckoning.

***Sonnet's Shakespeare* by Sonnet L'Abbé (McClelland & Stewart)**

Sonnet L'Abbé is the author of two previous collections of poetry, *A Strange Relief* and *Killarnoe*, and, most recently, the chapbook *Anima Canadensis*, which won the 2017 bp Nichol Chapbook Award. In 2000, they won the Bronwen Wallace Memorial Award for most promising writer under 35. In 2014, they were the guest editor of *Best Canadian Poetry* in English. L'Abbé lives on Vancouver Island and is a professor of Creative Writing and English at Vancouver Island University.



Author Photo: Paul Marck

From the Jurors: In *Sonnet's Shakespeare*, Sonnet L'Abbé challenges literary and socio-cultural traditions by overwriting the poems of the English-speaking world's most famous poet. Their scrupulous reworking of 154 Shakespearean sonnets into prose poems is a formal masterwork, and contains flashes of deep insight, humour, and a spirited and poignant immediacy. Where L'Abbe's words grieve and trauma reverberates, they universalize, handing the reigns to the reader in an insistence on de-colonizing the word and reclaiming the canon.

***Drolleries* by Cassidy McFadzean (McClelland & Stewart)**

Cassidy McFadzean was born in Regina, graduated from the Iowa Writers' Workshop, and currently lives in Toronto. She is the author of *Hacker Packer* (McClelland & Stewart 2015), which won two Saskatchewan Book Awards and was a finalist for the Gerald Lampert Memorial Award, and *Drolleries* (M&S 2019). Her poems have appeared in magazines across Canada and the US, and her fiction has appeared or is forthcoming in *Hobart*, *This Magazine*, *carte blanche*, and *Prism International*, where she was first runner-up in the Jacob Zilber Prize for Short Fiction. Her work has been anthologized in *Best Canadian Poetry*, *In Fine Form 2*, and *The New Wascana Anthology*, and she has been shortlisted for the CBC Poetry Prize, *The Walrus* Poetry Prize, and the Canadian Authors Association's Emerging Writer Award.

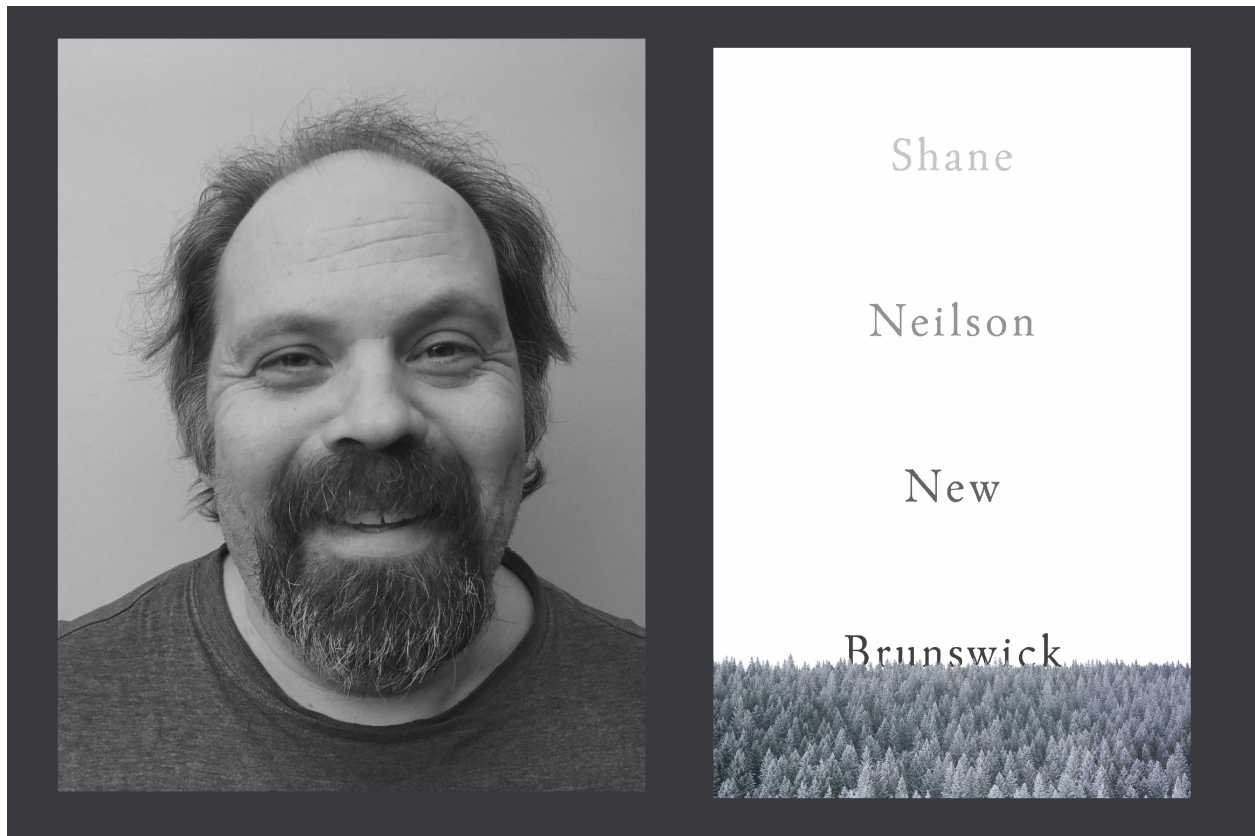


Author Photo: Sarah Bodri

From the Jurors: In *Drolleries*, Cassidy McFadzean finds beauty in both earthly monsters and the heavenly art that such beasts inspire. Nymphs, ghosts, fortune-tellers, and other fantastic characters clash in disorienting narratives that illuminate uncomfortable truths about the way history repeats itself across time and space. “I’ve been reading the news / so much it’s entered me” McFadzean writes in “Study of a Torso,” and her poems have a similar effect, drilling down with mnemonic power that will stick in reader’s minds.

***New Brunswick* by Shane Neilson (Biblioasis)**

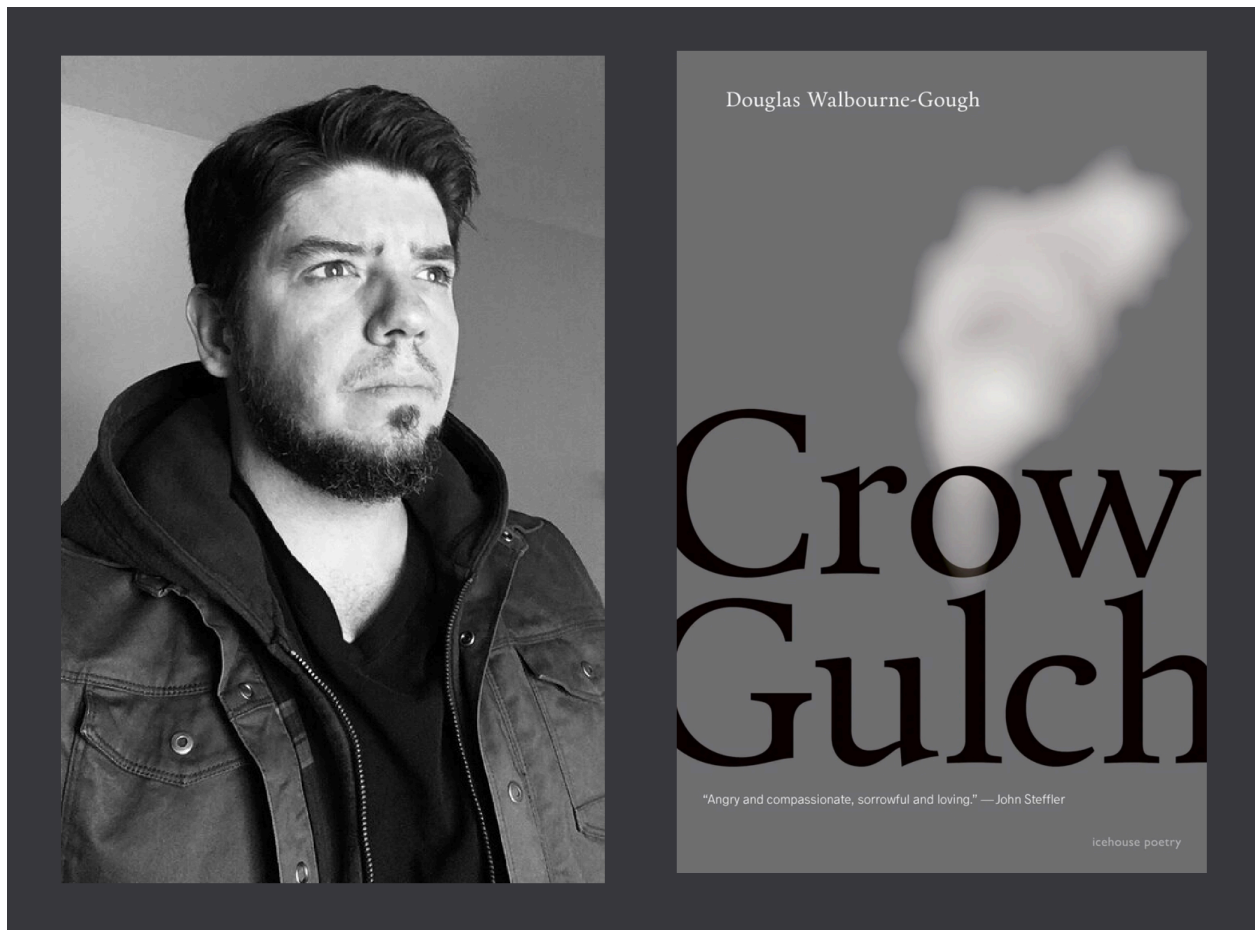
Shane Neilson is a disabled poet, physician, and critic. He lives in Oakville, Ontario. He completed his PhD in English and Cultural Studies at McMaster University in 2018. A previous book, *Dysphoria* (PQL, 2017) was awarded the Hamilton Literary Award for Poetry in 2018. In 2019, Shane received the Governor General's Gold Medal for his dissertation work in disability studies and the Regional Dean's Award for Excellence in Medical Education which was bestowed for Shane's championing of disability in McMaster's medical faculty. His poems appeared in *Poetry Magazine* in April of this year. Work from his latest book, *New Brunswick*, has appeared on Verse Daily.



From the Jurors: A testament to the way place shapes identity, *New Brunswick* crackles with civic pride. Throughout, Neilson's poems are emotional palimpsests that provide an unvarnished look at his home province, delving deep into the history that shaped his family. This is most acute in "Broken Crown on the Neilson Family Table," an astonishing corona that explores inheritance and the healing power of grief. Both deeply personal and patently political, *New Brunswick* is a compelling look at a "seasonal nation asleep at the cockcrow."

***Crow Gulch* by Douglas Walbourne-Gough (Goose Lane Editions)**

Douglas Walbourne-Gough is a member of the Qalipu Mi'kmaq First Nation from Corner Brook, Newfoundland. His poetry has appeared/is forthcoming in *Best Canadian Poetry*, *Canadian Literature*, *The Capilano Review*, *CV2*, *Forget Magazine*, *Grain*, *GUEST*, *Newfoundland Quarterly*, *Poetry In Voice*, *Prairie Fire*, *QWERTY*, and *Riddle Fence*. His reviews and essays appear in *CV2* and *Newfoundland Quarterly* and he's recently become associate poetry editor for *Riddle Fence* and editorial assistant for *The Fiddlehead*. His first collection, *Crow Gulch*, was published with Goose Lane's icehouse poetry imprint (now in its second print run). He holds an MFA in Creative Writing (UBC Okanagan) and is pursuing a PhD in Creative Writing (UNB Fredericton).



From the Jurors: Douglas Walbourne-Gough's debut is a poetic documentary, and as with any successful documentary, viewers / readers come to know the place and its people—the sights, sounds, smells, and voices of Crow Gulch—intimately. This is a place and people on the margins, marginalized, and Walbourne-Gough details, in precise language and image, what Canada often refuses to acknowledge. Memorializing and celebrating and *taking place* as a genealogy, *Crow Gulch* is a hard won collection of poems brimming with the "brutal fusion of Earth's work."