



Book Awards 2021

Gerald Lampert Memorial Award
for a debut book of poetry

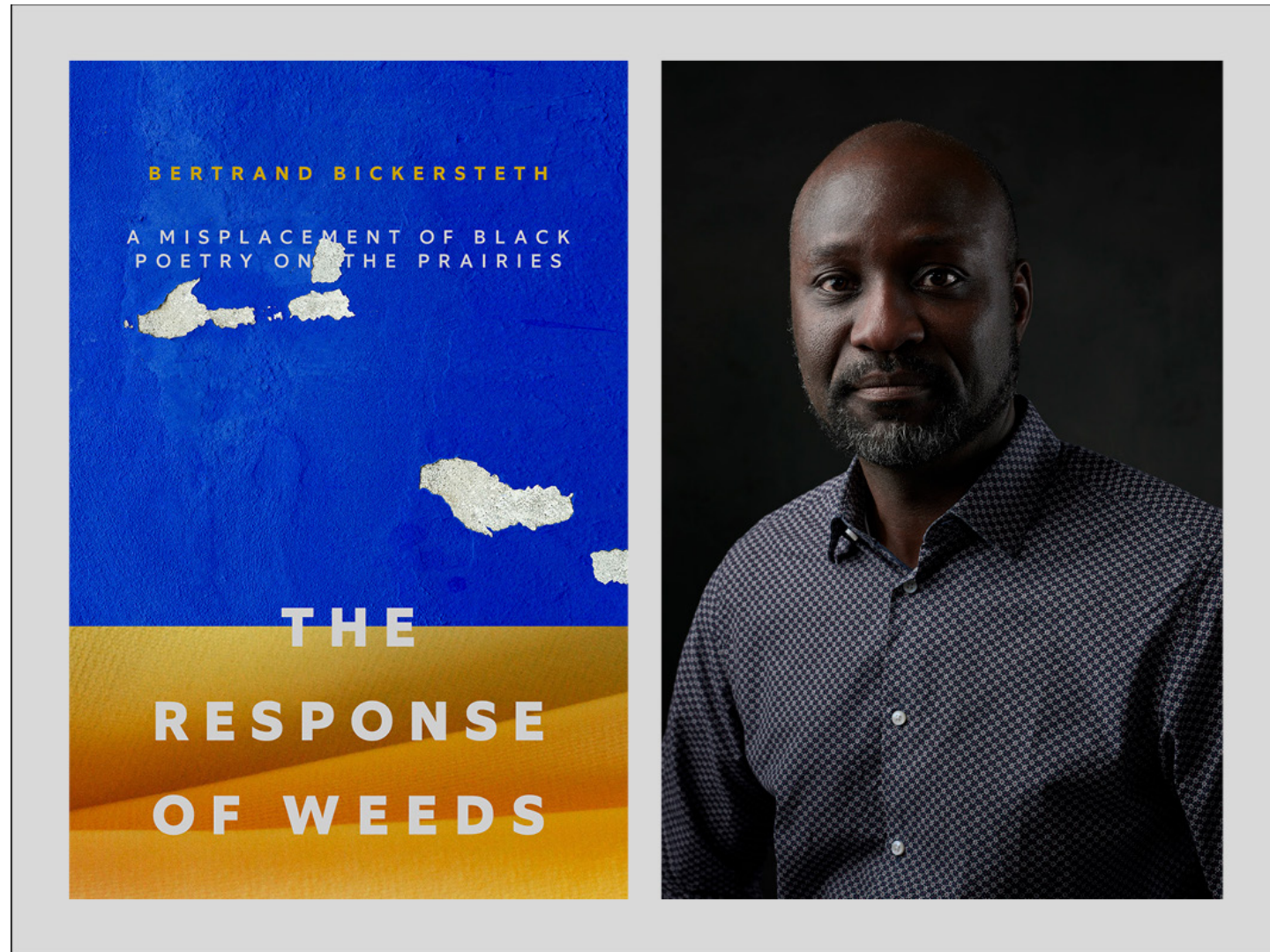
Shortlist

Awarded annually since 1981, the Gerald Lampert Memorial Award is given in the memory of Gerald Lampert, an arts administrator who organized author tours and took a particular interest in the work of new writers. The award recognizes a first book of poetry published by a Canadian writer in the preceding year. The award carries a \$2000 prize and is sponsored by the LCP.

**Thank you to the jurors for the 2021 Gerald Lampert Memorial Award:
DA Lockhart, Nisha Patel and Phoebe Wang**

The Response of Weeds by Bertrand Bickersteth

NeWest Press

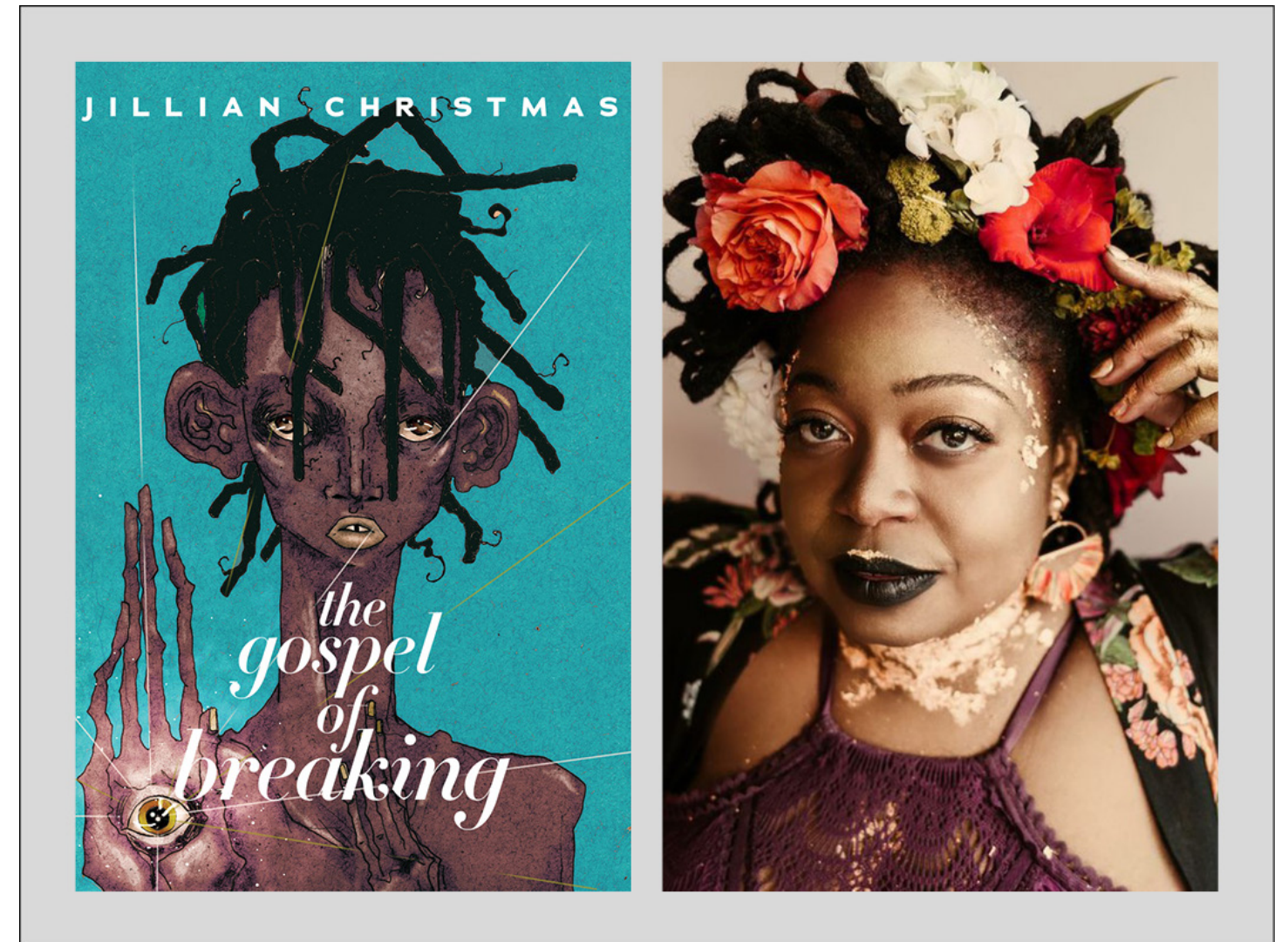


From the jurors: Bickersteth's vision powerfully highlights the erasure of Black communities in the Prairies and claims those histories and presences in the movements of land. *The Response of Weeds* is a work of research of a stunning range, occupying a powerful space in Canadian poetry. It reveals through its polyvocality and song-like lyricism the stories that no one else can tell but that generously involve and include the reader. Bickersteth's work re-inserts the presence of Black subjectivity into "an easing confluence/ that confuses complaint in this country" that makes us realize what we lose by not attending to these dramatis personae of invisible men and women, made visible by his vivid figuration.

Born in Sierra Leone, raised in Alberta, and formerly resided in the U.K. and the U.S., **Bertrand Bickersteth** is an educator who also writes plays and poems. In 2018, he was longlisted for the CBC Poetry Prize. His debut collection of poetry, *The Response of Weeds*, was published in 2020 and was named one of CBC's best books of poetry for the year. He was also named one of CBC's six Black writers to watch for in 2021. His poetry has appeared in several publications, including *The Antigonish Review*, *Cosmonauts Avenue*, and his nonfiction is forthcoming in *Prairie Fire* (2021). He lives in Calgary, teaches at Olds College, and often (always, actually) writes about Black identity on the Prairies.

the gospel of breaking by Jillian Christmas

Arsenal Pulp Press



From the jurors: Christmas' gifts as a storyteller and distinct vision are evident in her poetry that is full of strength, rhythmic magic, stylistic variety. *The gospel of breaking* makes abstraction sing and memory dive deep in her celebration of Black joy and femininity. She maps a topography of love and desire, and carries us along in her quest. Talking with her ancestors, Christmas shares dream anecdotes and shadow stories which teaches us how to listen to with a wider ear and with gratitude.

Jillian Christmas is the former Artistic Director of Vancouver's Verses Festival of Words. An educator, organizer, and advocate in the arts community, utilizing an anti-oppressive lens, Jillian has performed and facilitated workshops across North America. *The Gospel of Breaking*, a poetry collection, is her first book. She lives in Vancouver.

I Am Still Your Negro by Valerie Mason-John University of Alberta Press



From the jurors: The musicality of Mason-John’s work resounds and beats with a raw, earthly heart. *I Am Still Your Negro* presents a narrative of self-making that is necessary and that fuses together the broken fragments of “the backbone of my people”. The work’s cadenced creole inserts non-standard English into the field of Canadian poetics and enriches it immeasurably, and opens the historical catastrophe of enslavement and displacement into a site of lyric and dialogic interrogation. Mason-John’s “secret wisdom” cannot be restrained and demands broadcast.

Poet, author, and public speaker **Valerie Mason-John** (a.k.a. “Queenie”) is the author of nine books. Including co-editing the award-winning title *The Great Black North - Contemporary African Canadian Poetry*. They are also co-producer of www.blackhalifax.com ten poetic narratives from the 1700s to the present day. Her debut novel, *Borrowed Body*, won the 2006 Mind Book of the Year Award. They are currently editing an Anthology on African Wisdom - Liberation through the Black Diasporic Experience. They are one of the leading African descent voices in the field of mindfulness for addiction. They tour internationally speaking on mindfulness, trauma, addiction, and conflict transformation and integrates the poetic spoken word form in their delivery of public speaking. They live in BC. www.valeriemason-john.com

Where Things Touch by Bahar Orang Book*hug Press



From the jurors: Tapestry-like in form, Orang’s lyrical poetic essay stitches together an exploration of beauty and aesthetics that is woven with humility and relationality to other. Her immense sense of craft and confidence make for breathstopping moments, over and over, while at the same time filling the senses with powerful and piercing revelation. “Reading,” she writes, “is a kind of ecological activity” – and it is a privilege to situation yourself within Orang’s topographies of love.

Bahar Orang is a writer and physician resident living in Toronto. *Where Things Touch: A Meditation on Beauty* is her first book.

Bones by Tyler Pennock

Brick Books

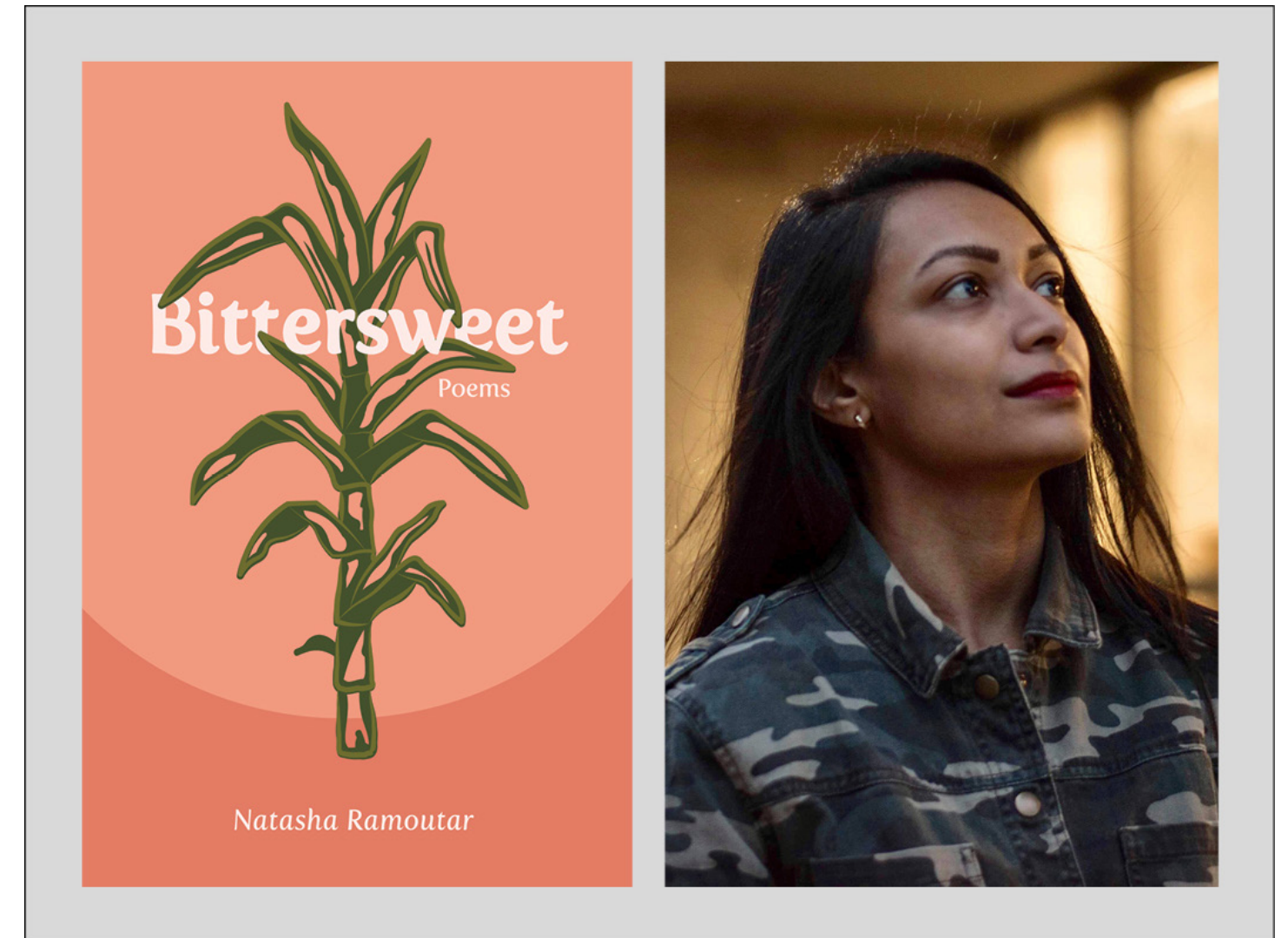


From the jurors: Pennock's shifting, expansive book-length poem luminously reflects the scattered fragments of memory with language that fluidly mixes abstraction, reflection and recurrent imagery. *Bones* gradually unveils the pain and trauma that seeps through time and relations, in a way that mimics the heart's unveiling itself. His touchstones of Indigenous ceremony and ritual grounds the collection in a way that navigates the reader through a rich archeology of bones that are not merely relics, but oracles.

Tyler Pennock is a Two-Spirit Cree person from northern Alberta. They've been in Toronto for over twenty-five years, trying just about everything as a job or a hobby. They are a graduate of Guelph's Creative Writing MFA program.

bittersweet by Natasha Ramoutar

Mawenzi House



From the jurors: *bittersweet* is a full palate of experiences where Ramoutar, with intelligent, nuance, depth and sensitivity, offers us poems of a stylistic range and flavourful variation. She presents us a diasporic and immigrant experience that has many notes, with the notion of what is bittersweet highlighting the paradoxes of belonging and avoids oversimplification. Ramoutar's tastebuds are delicate and fierce, and she makes us see the landscapes of Scarborough and of memory with the same encompassing capacity.

Natasha Ramoutar is an Indo-Guyanese writer by way of Scarborough (Ganatsekwyagon) at the east side of Toronto. Her work has been included in multimedia projects by Diaspora Dialogues, Scarborough Arts, and Nuit Blanche Toronto and has been published in *The Unpublished City II*, *PRISM International*, *Room Magazine*, *Augur Magazine* and more. She is the Social Media Assistant at the Festival of Literary Diversity and the Fiction Editor of *FEEL WAYS*, an anthology of Scarborough writing. Her first book of poetry *Bittersweet* was published in 2020 by Mawenzi House.