



Book Awards 2021

Pat Lowther Memorial Award

for a book of poetry by a woman

Shortlist

Open to Canadian women, the Pat Lowther Memorial Award has been awarded annually since 1981 for a book of poetry published in the preceding year. This prize is in memory of the late Pat Lowther, whose career was cut short by her untimely death in 1975. The award carries a \$2000 prize, and is sponsored by the LCP.

**Thank you to the jurors for the 2021 Pat Lowther Memorial Award:
Puneet Dutt, Doyali Islam and Cassidy McFadzean**

Burning Sugar by Cicely Belle Blain

Arsenal Pulp Press



From the jurors: Gorgeous and thematically sweeping, Cicely Belle Blain's *Burning Sugar* (Arsenal Pulp Press, 2020) is an intricately-woven book by a Black/mixed, queer femme narrator, both mournful and hopeful, painting vibrant scenes, scents, and sounds of "searching for Black joy / and / drowning in Black pain." It asks us to contemplate the legacy of violence, colonial history, and the continuation of trauma on Black bodies. Searing, honest, and unsettling, *Burning Sugar* showcases power through vulnerability.

Cicely Belle Blain is a Black, multi-racial, queer writer from London, UK. Cicely Belle is noted for founding Black Lives Matter Vancouver and subsequently being listed as one of Vancouver's 50 most powerful people by *Vancouver Magazine* twice, *BC Business's* 30 under 30, and one of *Refinery29's* Powerhouses of 2020. Cicely Belle is also an instructor in Executive Leadership at Simon Fraser University and the Editorial Director of *Ripple of Change Magazine*. They are the author of *Burning Sugar* (Arsenal Pulp Press and VS Books) which has been featured on CBC Books, Autostraddle, Indigo and *Essence Mag*. Their debut book also garnered them spots at some of Canada's top literary festivals including Vancouver Writer's Festival, Word of the Street Toronto, FOLD and more.

sick by Jody Chan

Black Lawrence Press

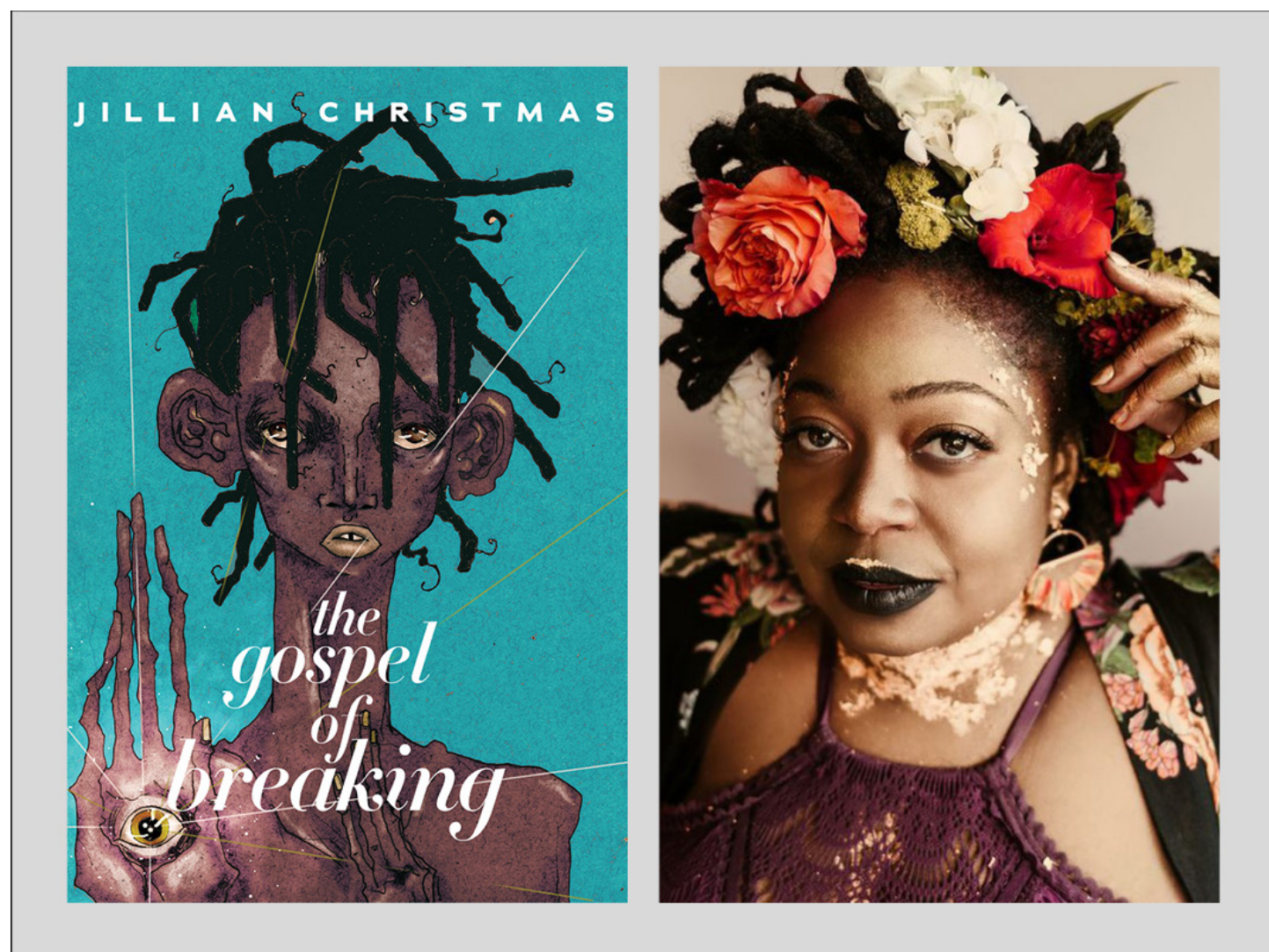


From the jurors: Jody Chan's *sick* (Black Lawrence Press, 2020) exposes patterns of the mind and navigates complexities of family, history, sexuality, absence, and identity. Sharp lines like "I was born homesick in my own body" and "I've mistaken your voice for intuition" pierce the heart. Through strong imagery that lingers long after reading, Chan explores the tender ache of grief. These poems reflect the perils of living.

Jody Chan is a writer, drummer, organizer, and therapist based in Toronto. They are the author of *haunt* (Damaged Goods Press), *all our futures* (PANK), and *sick*, winner of the 2018 St. Lawrence Book Award. They can be found online at www.jodychan.com/ and offline in bookstores or dog parks.

the gospel of breaking by Jillian Christmas

Arsenal Pulp Press



From the jurors: Jillian Christmas's *the gospel of breaking* (Arsenal Pulp Press, 2020) is lyrical and bold, with an urgency and intensity that crosses forms. Powerful verses abound, from the opening interrogation of "what is a body" and "who is family enough / to hold it" to "no one should be chained to the darkest / parts of themselves" to "one day I will say goodbye so hard that my whole / body will blossom into a field of poppies." Through solid technique, Christmas shows her capacity for vulnerability and humour, and the sacredness of wholistic care-centred intelligence. What more could you want from a book whose last word is "love"?

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.

Body Count by Kyla Jamieson

Nightwood Editions



From the jurors: In *Body Count* (Nightwood Editions, 2020), Kyla Jamieson offers readers a wonderfully self-aware voice, youthful and wise at once. Jamieson's work discloses what it is to be confined to a human category in the current screenshotted, Google searched, and over-texted zeitgeist, to be lonely – asking questions to Siri, where emotions and feelings are explained via emojis. The narrator speaks of what it is to live with an invisible illness and disability, being under the cis-male gaze, and questions smartly without didacticism of being in constant negotiation with climate change, capitalism, and consumerism, and the shifting dynamics of politics. Ultimately the book asks, is there such a thing as free will, or are we all just victims living in a gruesome and artificial gimmick, where bodies are only viewed by levels of profit-making ability.

Kyla Jamieson is a disabled poet who lives and relies on the unceded traditional territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh Nations, in the city currently known as Vancouver. She is the author of the poetry collection *Body Count* (Nightwood Editions, 2020) and the chapbook *Kind of Animal* (Rahila's Ghost Press, 2019). Her work reimagines time, embodiment, care, and intimacy in the aftermath of a brain injury. It has been shortlisted for the Arc Poem of the Year Award, twice longlisted for the CBC Poetry Prize, and published widely. In 2019, CA Conrad and Anne Boyer selected an early draft of *Body Count* as the third-place winner in the Metatron Prize for Rising Authors. www.kylajamieson.com

Waking Ground by shalan joudry

Gaspereau Press



From the jurors: With understated imagery and clarity of thought, shalan joudry's *Waking Ground* (Gaspereau Press, 2020) traces the devastating effects of colonialism while centering the Mi'kmaq language and the interconnectedness of all beings to the environment. joudry's poems move like streams; her lines eschew punctuation and capitalization in favour of musical precision and resonant, intuitive sense of rhythm. joudry is a perceptive and wise speaker, addressing the everyday and the extraordinary with equal care. These are memorable poems that observe a shifting experience of insomnia, the resiliency of the Mi'kmaq through generations, and the way that "trees rise / though they have been damaged."

shalan joudry is a mother and narrative artist working in many mediums. She is a poet, playwright, podcast producer, oral storyteller and actor, as well as a cultural interpreter. Her first book of poetry, *Generations Re-merging*, was published by Gaspereau Press (2014) and her second book, *Elapultiiek*, was published by Pottersfield Press (2019). Her second collection of poetry, *Waking Ground*, is also published by Gaspereau Press (fall 2020). shalan has shared her poetry, oral storytelling and drum singing with numerous stages, events, schools and organizations for over two decades. shalan also facilitates cultural and ecological professional development workshops. Most recently shalan's poem Kmitknu was featured at Nocturne (Halifax) as an audio installation in the Halifax Public Gardens. shalan lives in her home territory of Kespukwitk (southwest Nova Scotia) with her family in their community of L'sətkuk (Bear River First Nation).

Washes, Prays by Noor Naga

McClelland & Stewart



From the jurors: Noor Naga's *Washes, Prays* (McClelland & Stewart, 2020) is technically flawless – and thus achingly full of what it means to be human. In this striking novel-in-verse, Naga's keen attention to every aspect of language shows readers-listeners what poetry can do – how capaciously it can operate. Rich with wit and empathy, these poems feel wholly welcoming. Naga captures both the joy and humour of a protagonist in an affair, as well as the despair and desperation of longing. Centring jewel-like poems in the voice of the protagonist's friend, this collection shares meditations on desire, love, God, and friendship in a skillful lyric voice. These brilliant poems absolutely sing. Here is a poet who has already mastered her craft.

Noor Naga is an Alexandrian writer who was born in Philadelphia, raised in Dubai, studied in Toronto, and now lives in Cairo. Her verse-novel *Washes, Prays* was published by McClelland & Stewart in 2020. She is winner of the 2017 Bronwen Wallace Award, the 2019 RBC/PEN Canada Award, the 2019 Disquiet Fiction Prize, and the 2019 Graywolf Press Africa Prize. Her debut novel is forthcoming from Graywolf Press in April 2022.