

2019 Gerald Lampert Memorial Award Shortlist

***Ekke* by Klara du Plessis (Palimpsest Press)**

Klara du Plessis is a poet residing in Montreal. Her debut collection, *Ekke*, was released from Palimpsest Press in 2018; and her chapbook, *Wax Lyrical*—shortlisted for the bpNichol Chapbook Award—was published by Anstruther Press in 2015. Klara is the editor for *carte blanche* magazine, a PhD English Literature student at Concordia University, and currently expanding her curatorial practice to include experimental Deep Curation poetry reading events. Follow her @ToMakePoesis.



From the Jurors: In *Ekke*, Klara Du Plessis explores the shifting nature of language with examples from Afrikaans, English, French and German. *Ekke* is a study of lines using art, the physicality of writing, nature and the body to contemplate meaning's discrepancies, camouflage, deformation, estrangement, erasure, and secrets. *Ekke* is the self, an emphasis, an unsafe mirror, an unbelonging. A poem is an untouched cow. Hunt stands adjacent to hurt. Words are sounds that sometimes pretend to have meaning. These visual and visceral long poems reveal the gap between signifier and signified, self and self-perception.

Quarry by Tanis Franco (University of Calgary Press)

Tanis Franco is a queer & non-binary writer & archivist living in Toronto. Their first poetry book *Quarry* (University of Calgary Press) was published in early 2018. They have had recent writing published in *Lemon Hound*, *The Best American Experimental Writing 2018*, and forthcoming in *Carousel* and the League's LGBTQI2S Chapbook. They are currently working on a second poetry manuscript.



From the Jurors: In *Quarry*, Tanis Franco writes of the body in transition as holding place. They ask to what extent the body is aware of its intentions. A quarry is abandoned, and almost slated for housing development, and a bay is used as a dumping ground where rare blue bottles and old horse bones are unearthed. Franco writes of permanence, hazards and depths. Through sustained imagery drawn from nature and humanity, Franco draws parallels between abandoned and changing landscapes and the body, its scars and the possibility of healing. In *Quarry* Franco searches for connection in queer spaces, depicts touch as resistance, and movingly articulates vulnerability. Franco offers a navigation of the queer and transgender body through nothingness and materiality with images of air and smoke, fire, light, ice, and stone. *Quarry* causes the reader to think about identity and its connection to the body and to other bodies, to the land and to history. *Hope is the slowest emotion, but it is tireless.*

***Unstable Neighbourhood Rabbit* by Mikko Harvey (House of Anansi Press)**

Mikko Harvey is the author of *Unstable Neighbourhood Rabbit* (House of Anansi, 2018) and his poems appear in places such as *Iowa Review*, *Kenyon Review*, *Lemon Hound*, and *Maisonneuve*. In 2017, he received the RBC/PEN Canada New Voices Award. He currently serves as an associate poetry editor for *Fairy Tale Review*, and lives in Ithaca, New York.



From the Jurors: Mikko Harvey's *Unstable Neighbourhood Rabbit*'s exorbitantly dark-hearted conception of masculinity encourages a series of strange and haunting episodes. His casual, flippant, almost anecdotal observations turn at the end into violence or expand their edges into the ridiculous. Harvey's men are brooding automations and violent impassives, and the adventures he sets upon them are wild technicolor nightmares. The book is at home in the Canadian surrealist tradition but unique for just how goddamned punishing it is towards its subjects and speakers. *Unstable Neighbourhood Rabbit* is--in the best sense--a vicious work, pitched to the register of a horror film. Its effects are lasting and profound.

***Dividing the Wayside* by Jenny Haysom (Palimpsest Press)**

Jenny Haysom was born in England and raised in Nova Scotia. She completed a Master's degree in English Literature at the University of Ottawa in the 90s, and has since worked for independent booksellers and the Ottawa Public Library. *Dividing the Wayside*, her debut collection of poems, was published by Palimpsest Press in September 2018. Her work has appeared in various literary journals as well as in chapbook form (*Blinding Afternoons*, Anstruther Press, 2017). Jenny was on the board of directors for *Arc Poetry Magazine* for several years, guest-edited a special issue of children's poetry (2012) and was prose editor from 2014-16. She lives with her family in Ottawa.



From the Jurors: Just as a “wayside” is a liminal strip that divides the highway from the surrounding land, a natural space meant to coexist with the velocity of traffic, so too does Jenny Haysom’s *Dividing the Wayside* navigate a host of territories “in between”—between lust and suffering, wisdom and innocence—with lines and stanzas both precise and sonorous, delicately crafted and unforgivingly complex. This is a poet whose cultivated voice and ear for language are deftly heard, and whose verses leave their mark in the mind even as they traverse the differing terrains of metaphor and allusion, humour and death. Haysom’s words evoke a more traditional approach to poetic diction, what with its Edwardian airs and almost gothic sensibility at turns, as when we are introduced to policemen and pathologists, burning books and daguerrotypes. *Dividing the Wayside* is a book lightly dusted over with a “puff of Victorian soot” that in turn lets its enlightening turns—and technical shimmers of genius—shine that much more brightly. A compelling read, at times tender and tragic, yet memorable throughout, requiring our undivided attention.

***Obits.* by Tess Liem (Coach House Books)**

Tess Liem lives in Tio'tia:ke/Mooniyaang—unceded Haudenosaunee and Anishinabe territories (Montreal QC). Her writing appears in *The Puritan*, *Plenitude*, *Cosmonauts Avenue*, *THIS* and elsewhere. Her debut collection of poetry, *Obits.* (Coach House 2018), was shortlisted for a Lambda Literary award.



From the Jurors: Tess Liem's *Obits.* is a rare success for any book, let alone a debut. Namely, it manages to create what feels like an entire intellectual world: whole ethics, aesthetics, aspirations, fears, and philosophies, line by line and trope by trope. The book takes real risks dangling over the edge of amateurism with its emotive openers and its centre-alignment, and relies on nothing but prosody and guts to win a skeptical reader back. It contains one of the most complete treatments of depression in Canadian poetry and an expansive, challenging, new approach to the idea of mourning. Most importantly, Liem's ability to manage the collection itself as a gestalt object, tying images to one another across pages and reusing titles, sounds, and lines, is downright symphonic. It feels like someone's life's work.

***Port of Being* by Shazia Hafiz Ramji (Invisible Publishing)**

Shazia Hafiz Ramji's first book, *Port of Being* (Invisible Publishing), received the Robert Kroetsch Award for Innovative Poetry and was chosen by CBC as one of the best Canadian poetry books of 2018. Her fiction and criticism have appeared in *The Humber Literary Review* and *Quill & Quire*, respectively. She lives on unceded Coast Salish land (Vancouver) where she began the Intersections Reading Group and where she works as a publishing consultant and editor for various presses across Canada.



From the Jurors: Employing subtexts of surveillance and voyeurism, *Port of Being* ultimately opens us to a world where intimacy and connection are the only viable doors to meaning in an increasingly discordant world. In this debut collection by Shazia Hafiz Ramji, poems double as their own ports of understanding the self as a private as well as public entity. Just as a door is an aperture, the body is a way of understanding global affairs, a means of weaving history with the present. So too is *Port of Being* a poetry of witness, challenging in its honesty, startling in its imagery, and unafraid to exhume the vulnerability at the heart of the modern experience—the condition of being in a world where human beings are both united and separated by the embodied effects of capitalism and addiction, migration and war, as well as the everyday violence of living with (and at times, reliving of) trauma. With a gaze at once intimate and engaged, tense and vigilant, *Port of Being* is a book that refreshingly politicizes the path of the flâneuse, the lyric subject trying to exist alongside the technological objects that mediate our every move and interaction. It is an important book that crucially explores how the self gets entangled in the world and vice-versa, amidst the agential possibilities inherent in speech and signals, keeping secrets and listening for the truth.