

## 12th Annual Fred Cogswell Award For Excellence in Poetry

### *Judge's statement*

It's been my honour to judge the Cogswell Award for Excellence in Poetry. All ten books selected for the longlist are intensive and enduring works—many with pockets of levity, revelation, and wit that ain't easy to come by. Wrangling entropy with refined craft and purpose, the three finalists especially gripped my heart and have left me still marvelling at the work involved. In these worrisome everydays it is no small feat for a book of poetry to carry the reader away for a while.

### **3<sup>RD</sup> PLACE** *Precedented Parroting* by Barbara Tran (Anstruther Books|Palimpsest Press)

In the poem "Teetering Under Telos" in *Precedented Parroting* Barbara Tran unfolds,

*In the beak  
of a bird  
is a sunflower*

*seed weight  
or energy? Effort  
in flight*

*increases with increases  
in load Light  
as a bent*

*feather  
Refraction refers  
to the bending*

*that occurs  
between one medium  
and another*

Mesmerizingly, it goes on. This whole book manages a swooping arc of familial and avian narratives, suffering, touching—shining, singing with many slight decisions reinforcing emphasis and syntax. I was swept up in the cadence. "What would it be without birds" Dionne Brand [contextualises unforgettably](#). Tran's considered poems extend such attention and reverence. For the winged, and with careful accounting in the aftermath of viruses, I find myself grateful for the insight of Tran's *Precedented Parroting*.

**2<sup>nd</sup> PLACE MIDWAY** By Kayla Czaga (House of Anansi Press)

There is nothing about Kayla Czaga's poems that are nonchalant. How the poet manages to land this cool tonality and irreverent and disarming kind of charm in the face of grief, nonetheless, is a feat. Given the work of surviving and still loving, and the presence of critical chops required to interrupt normative thinking at the level of the line, constantly, MIDWAY operates in persistent revolution. What this poet is able to observe and render, deepens with a layering of horrific, absurdist (honest), and stunning detail. This collection is a triumph, from a poet of remarkable poise and wit.

*DEAR BRENDA* (excerpt)

*In the bottle that washed up on the beach  
instead of a note I found  
my father's false teeth*

*smashed into pieces  
like pills for me to swallow.*

*They fell from the bottle single file,  
shiny airplane passengers  
evacuating via the emergency slide*

*and I scattered them in the sand for seagulls  
to pick at like popcorn kernels.*

*The sky was grey. The sand was darker grey.  
The sea was darker still  
with flecks of green between its teeth.*

**1<sup>st</sup> PLACE – *The Flesh of Ice* by Garry Gottfriedson (Caitlin Press)**

I have struggled to put into words my reflections on Garry Gottfriedson's *The Flesh of Ice*. I cannot separate the work out from its generational knowledge as these poem's profound dedication to *le estcwiwéy'* (the missing) require a reader to honour such enduring relations.

In "My Body as Storyteller" the poet, "breaks / elegantly / 215 times / repeatedly / infinitely" (p26).

What to do with such strength and generosity. After "The River" and "Water is Life", comes "Granny" and "Mom" and twenty-eight stories/poems of experience, witness, and account. Then "When Yellow Leaves Detach" and "Dad". Then thirty more stories/poems, until "Garry". And Garry is adjacent, intelligentsia, conviction onto "The Vatican" ('fathers' and 'sisters')—"God's Shame." Eventually the poet facilitates a portal, opening to "...Us" "You" "I" and "We". Understand, this is just the table of contents.

The work is difficult,

**Texting Dead Loves (excerpt)**

*dull headspace  
fixated and full  
of compunction*

*logic  
doesn't thrive  
in the heart*

*a mouth full  
of strawberry love  
spat out*

—pp27-28

the poems persist,

**The Flesh of Ice (excerpt)**

*river's frozen face  
gnarled and jammed  
thick ice skin  
clear and sharp  
reflections  
stagnant in winter  
crisp  
crunching  
snow  
echoing footsteps*

*215 times  
tromping  
deceptive intentions  
from the dorms to the river*

—p37

This book holds the careworn recollections of survivors and descendants; each devoted poem crafted to suit a narrative that has been shared for this purpose. Each page is a place for a reader to pause and reflect.

**Joanne**

*your name  
will be  
spoken  
by people  
who don't  
even know  
you  
in rooms  
that you  
will never  
go in  
becoming  
a symbol of strength  
where weakness blooms  
tattoo this  
in the hearts of girls  
following  
your name*

—p57

*The Flesh of Ice*, indeed Gottfriedson's substantial body of work, is grounded in ongoing contributions to Secwépemc language, sovereignty, and community. This book demonstrate the possibilities of poetry with humbling and galvanizing momentum. The people are steadfast, "juniper scent fills and lingers / the breath of nightfall" (p37) and in the morning, there are poems.



January 17, 2026

Cecily Nicholson