

# TRILLIUM BOOK AWARD 2026

Jury Citations



# Trillium Book Award

## OVERALL CITATION

Straddling genres – from novels and short fiction to poetry and drama to picture books and nonfiction of all kinds – and encompassing various stylistic approaches, Ontario’s writers last year provided a broad range of books on multiple subjects and from different perspectives. Pulling together a shortlist from the hundreds of titles on offer was no small feat, but the five books represented here comprise a solid cross-section of the literary talent and versatility the province has to offer. Whether providing an excoriating exposé of sexual abuse in junior hockey, a heartbreaking and urgent personal reflection on the genocide in Palestine, a quietly devastating collection of short stories, a fictionalized account of girl soldiers in Uganda, or a brilliantly entertaining identity-theft thriller, these writers exemplify the strength and vibrancy of writing in the province.

### **Suddenly Light**

**Nina Dunic**

*Invisible Publishing*

Toronto author Nina Dunic employs the same subtle, plainspoken style from her Trillium Award–winning novel *The Clarion* in this sensitive and quietly shattering collection of stories. Separation and the difficulty of making authentic connections are recurring themes here, whether between a nomadic, independent canine and the various humans who try to tame her; a divorcing couple who can’t see the value in a miniature painting, let alone in each other; or a woman who experiences a life-changing epiphany after fleeing a dinner party and falling down an embankment. These stories would be almost unbearably sad were it not for Dunic’s close attention to the noun in her book’s title: the volume is at once luminous and buoyed by an uncommonly delicate touch.

### **We, the Kindling**

**Otoniya J. Okot Biket**

*Alchemy by Knopf Canada / Penguin Random House Canada*

In *We, the Kindling*, Otoniya J. Okot Bitek writes a living novel through deliberate and evocative language that animates and awakens the voices and stories of Miriam, Helen and Maggie, three friends who, as schoolgirls, were captured by the Lord’s Resistance Army in northern Uganda. Often writing in the collective and weaving in Ugandan folklore, *We, the Kindling* reframes the literary lens and challenges colonial convention and imbues power in the voices written on the page – the voices of girls and women who have no choice but to act as witnesses to their own circumstances and who speak their own testimonies. With equal parts care and unapologetic emotional truth, *We, the Kindling* delivers a poetic exploration of the perseverance of the human spirit. It is a novel, like its protagonists, that won’t be soon forgotten.

# Trillium Book Award

## **You Will Not Kill Our Imagination: A Memoir of Palestine and Writing in Dark Times**

**Saeed Teebi**

***Simon & Schuster Canada***

*You Will Not Kill Our Imagination* is an essential work that is at once deeply personal and wide-ranging in scope. Saeed Teebi examines the intersection of Palestinian identity, creativity, and resilience amidst genocidal violence with piercing and undaunted honesty. It is a memoir about the power and necessary nature of stories and storytelling whether in the formation, shaping and conservation of one's personhood, culture and homeland or in the vital capacity of an instrument of resistance in the face of global complicity.

## **We Breed Lions: Confronting Canada's Troubled Hockey Culture**

**Rick Westhead**

***Random House Canada / Penguin Random House Canada***

Hockey occupies such a central place in Canada that it can be hard to look squarely at its darker side. This book transforms a vast body of research into a compelling narrative that exposes a well-documented pattern of harm in parts of the hockey world and gives voice to survivors. The depth of Westhead's research, and the intense clarity of his writing makes it harder to minimize what these stories reveal about ourselves as a culture. The moral force of this book is carried by writing of immaculate skill and profound courage.

## **Julie Chan Is Dead**

**Liann Zhang**

***Simon & Schuster Canada***

Somewhere between a gossip subreddit that only twenty-year-olds know about and a 19th century Gothic romance, *Julie Chan is Dead*, is a deft thriller and a comedy of manners. Zhang's adroit understanding of the immigrant experience, the new media of influencer culture, and the ongoing crises of families, makes a complex social narrative, but one which is tautly paced, compulsively readable, and often quite funny. A book this fashionable is rarely this well-written, but Zhang manages to accomplish both with much elan.

# Trillium Book Award for Poetry

## OVERALL CITATION

The polyvocal, the conceptual, and the lyric abound in these three collections of poetry. Here, Ghafoor, Lubrin, and Mirwali inundate the poetic form with their inventions and innovations. From the level of the line to the expansion of the narratives, these books build worlds, map the mundane, and investigate poetry's power. Elevating ordinary beyond and through this power, each poet presents an embodied geography, a place-based language, that shines: clearly conceived, and cohesively crafted. Each of these texts is a marvel.

### **Shadow Price**

**Farah Ghafoor**

*House of Anansi Press*

A cerebral and often circular logic encodes these poems with the same science one might happen upon as easily in an encyclopedia as a book of poetry. The comparisons and expansions made between economy and ecology collapses us into the climate crisis. Ghafoor's attention and awareness as a poet astounds and extends the reader beyond the confines of language; adopting and interrogating the jargon of legal systems, news reports, and financial analysis to shed light on the human, plant, and animal costs in a system that seeks to erase existence with capital. Sonically alive and factually rich, this is a collection grieving, and rioting, as it "still loved the world."

### **The World After Rain**

**Canisia Lubrin**

*McClelland & Stewart / Penguin Random House Canada*

Canisia Lubrin's *The World After Rain* is an expansive and oracular invitation to linger in a true life, to return anew to what we do and do not know. Lubrin's virtuosic vocabulary and visionary poetics awaken readers within the astonishment of personal and ecological grief, both current and anticipatory. The beauty of Lubrin's verse deftly broadens and disrupts the elegy and the disasters of the day, extending into a reorientation and renewal. The kaleidoscopic lens of the poem's eye anticipates the complexity of a person and responses to a complicated world, always offering otherwise ways of seeing and "call[ing] the burning world back to love."

# Trillium Book Award for Poetry

## **Revolutions**

**Hajer Mirwali**

***Talonbooks***

Every aspect of Hajer Mirwali's *Revolutions*—from its urgent treatment of the mundane to its conceptual grounding—is carefully and artfully considered. The book's reckoning with womanhood, pleasure, and sexuality is beautiful and courageous, especially in speaking to the complex cultural pressures categorizing actions as shameful or acceptable. These poems know themselves without self-consciousness and invite us in, extending trust to the reader, in part through the way the poems work with and beyond the self. Engaging with repetition and circularity through expansive and surprising turns ("I become motherly / I become emptier every day"), *Revolutions* coalesces into a striking achievement of ekphrasis, visual poetics, and the lyric "I."

# Trillium Book Award in the French Language

## OVERALL CITATION

This year's finalists showcase the diversity of French Ontario's literary landscape through their variety of forms and voices. Together, they form a patchwork quilt whose colours and patterns come together in unexpected and magnificent ways: the equation of death, before the night of silences and whispers of *maman bleue*, visited by the faces of Rembrandt...

The works stand out for their refined sensibility, vibrant singularity and ability to transition from the intimate to the universal. Page by page, we feel both at home, warm under the covers, and as though we are travelling the world—from Quebec to Cameroon, the Netherlands to the Congo, Belgium to Ontario. Mediums and materials intertwine to create threads that lash, move and comfort us.

### **Mes morts jeune**

**Sylvie Bérard**

*Prise de parole*

The concept of death and the experience of death shape a life, and death itself is the main protagonist of this book. The tenderness the author feels for those she has lost—members of her biological and chosen families—allows her to explore her relationship with death and give substance to the ephemeral. These experiences play an essential role in anchoring her life in a deeply human, queer narrative that transcends the boundaries of identity and the notion of loss.

### **Des silences et des murmures**

**Maeva Guedjeu**

*Éditions L'Interligne*

This collection sees opposites coexist: violence and vulnerability, brutality and beauty. The author gives a voice to the voiceless—to those who are silenced because no one wants to hear them, and to those who are killed every day with impunity. The silences are deafening. The whispers pierce the eardrums. Portraits of resilience that break our hearts while giving us hope that things can change. This collection is a call to listen—and to act.

# Trillium Book Award in the French Language

## **Les visages de Rembrandt**

**Alain Bernard Marchand**

*Les éditions du passage*

This erudite and exquisite meditation on the act of looking considers the self, others and art. It triumphantly combines ekphrasis with mise en abyme. It is the kind of book that makes you want to immerse yourself in the painter's world, see his canvases "in person," and then view them again through the poet's words. Ultimately, you find yourself wondering whose portraits you have really seen.

## **Maman bleue**

**Sarah Migneron**

*Prise de parole*

Every motherhood carries within it the seeds of depression. On the one hand, there is the pure courage of a mother facing an overwhelming force that threatens to engulf everything. Then there is the courage of her eldest daughter, however small she may be, as she wraps her little arms around her brother and mother to stop her world from falling apart. This is an original and moving work of fiction, where form and content complement each other to create a surprisingly realistic portrayal of the fragmentation of family life.

## **L'équation avant la nuit**

**Blaise Ndala**

*Mémoire d'encrier*

This cosmopolitan historical novel will transport you around the world from the comfort of your favourite reading chair. It is a universally resonant story set against the backdrop of the lingering spectre of colonization. It is an adventure that reconstructs a past that we would have liked to be simple, but which grows more complex the more we rediscover. The more culprits we search for, the more we find, until we begin to wonder if we ourselves are guilty of crimes we never committed.

# Trillium Book Award for Poetry in the French Language

## OVERALL CITATION

This year's finalists show that feminism remains a powerful force in French-speaking Ontario. These three poets have strong, unique voices and messages. One wants to smash everything, one wants to dream and one wants to heal. However, these three women share a common mission: to effect change through poetry so that violence may cease, the world may soften and life may prevail. All three works bear witness to the power of words and their ability to influence us and inspire us to take action.

### **Haus**

**Lisa L'Heureux**

*Prise de parole*

In this gut-wrenching collection, rage and tenderness coexist. Woman is both celebrated and exposed, without artifice. Her "I" becomes a "we." The private becomes public in order to reveal what is hidden, to denounce what goes unspoken, and demand justice for all. This is poetry that takes a stand, bearing witness to the urgency of action through words that wound us, words that wake us up and words that will us to act.

### **L'épingle filante**

**Noémie Roy**

*Les Herbes rouges*

A clear-eyed mother feels the weight of the world's problems, but when she thinks of her unborn child, when she looks at him, the spark of hope is rekindled. All is not lost. One day, her child's eyes will learn to see beauty in the rubble. This is poetry that pricks gently, that reaches us before we realize it, that leaves a subtle but indelible mark.

### **En terrain miné**

**Véronique Sylvain**

*Prise de parole*

This is an intimate account of a fiercely determined woman whose body is in revolt, threatening to explode at any moment like a time bomb. The oppressive whiteness of hospital corridors, endless waiting, gnawing illness. How not to explode? It is hard for the sunshine girl to find her place when she can no longer trust her own mind and risks losing control of her limbs at any moment and when the light threatens to go out.