

Books

The best Canadian poetry of 2021

Here are CBC Books's picks for the top Canadian poetry of the year

[CBC Books](#) · Posted: Dec 14, 2021 6:21 PM EST | Last Updated: December 23, 2021

Here are the picks by [CBC Books](#) for the top Canadian poetry of 2021.

Satched by Megan Gail Coles



Satched is a poetry collection by Megan Gail Coles. (CBC, House of Anansi Press)

Named after a local word meaning "soaked through" or "weighed down," [*Satched*](#) is a poetry collection that explores intergenerational trauma, ecological grief and late-stage capitalism from the perspective of a woman of rural-remote, Northern, working class and mixed ancestry.

- [***Megan Gail Coles's Satched is a poetic look at the trauma, grief and joy of life on the East Coast***](#)

Megan Gail Coles is an author and playwright originally from Savage Cove, N.L., and currently living in Montreal where she is a PhD candidate at Concordia University. She is also the author of the short story collection [*Eating Habits of the Chronically Lonesome*](#) and the novel [*Small Game Hunting at the Local Coward Gun Club*](#) which was a finalist for the 2019 Scotiabank Giller Prize and was defended by YouTuber Alayna Fender on [*Canada Reads*](#) 2020.

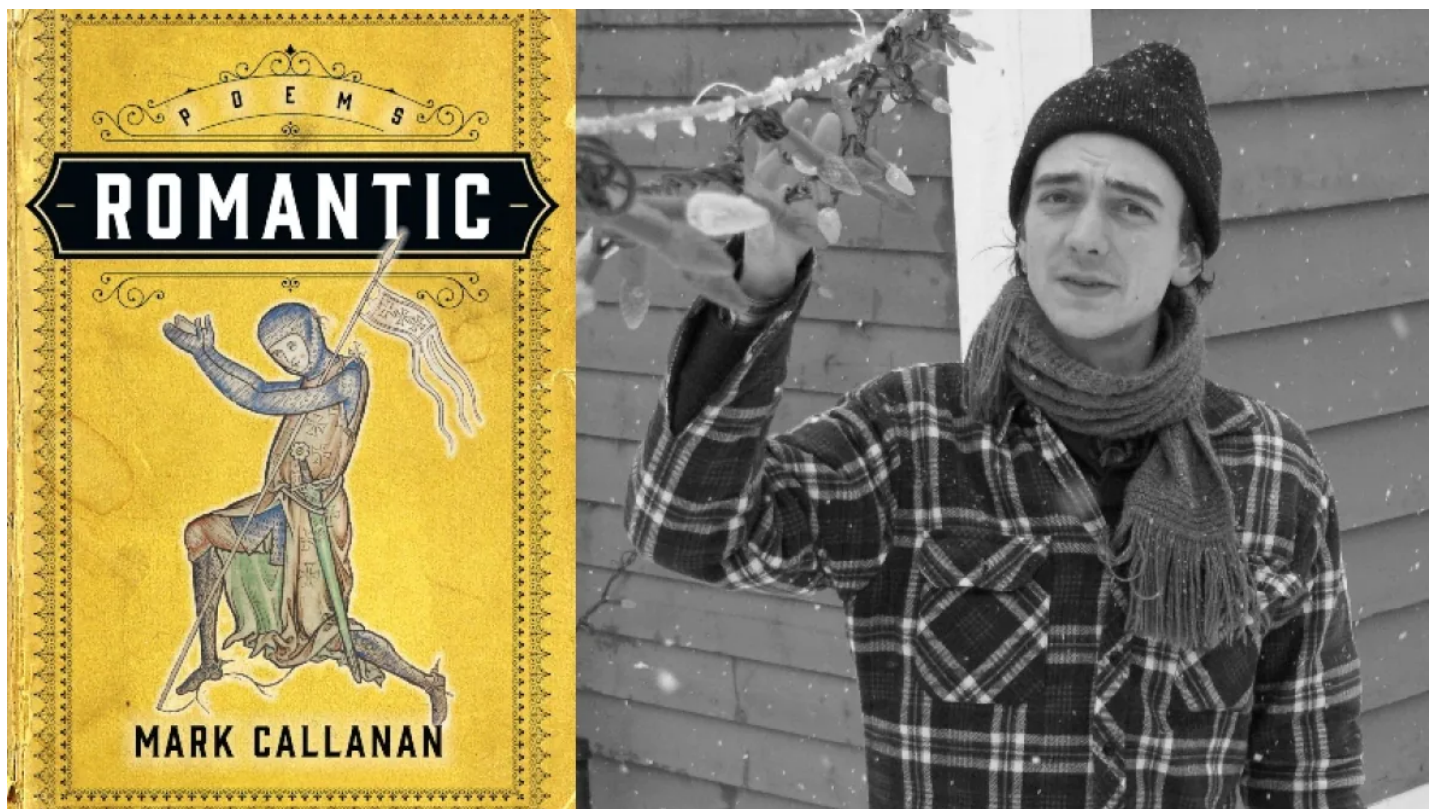


17:53

Megan Gail Coles on Satched

Megan Gail Coles talks to Shelagh Rogers about her poetry collection, Satched.

[***Romantic* by Mark Callanan**](#)



Romantic is a poetry collection by Mark Callanan. (Biblioasis, markcallanan.files.wordpress.com)

[*Romantic*](#) is a poetry collection that leverages seemingly disparate themes — including Arthurian myth, the Romantic poets, the ill-fated "Great War" efforts of the Newfoundland Regiment, modern parenthood, 16-bit video games and Major League Baseball. [*Romantic*](#) takes these topics and engages in an introspective look at western society and how we define identity and collectivism.

Mark Callanan is a St. John's poet and author of two previous poetry collections, *Gift Horse* and *Scarecrow*, as well as two poetry chapbooks, *Skylarking* and *Sea Legend*. He was a founding editor of the St. John's-based literary journal *Riddle Fence* and was the co-editor of *The Breakwater Book of Contemporary Newfoundland Poetry*.



Ideas 53:33

Writing From The Rock

At Montreal's 2012 Blue Metropolis Literary Festival, IDEAS host Paul Kennedy discusses the recent renaissance in Newfoundland writing with poet Mary Dalton, novelist Kathleen Winter, and poet Mark Callanan. Why do Newfoundland writers punch above their weight? Is it something they put in the water?

***Make the World New* by Lillian Allen, edited by Ronald Cummings**



Make the World New is a poetry collection by Lillian Allen, pictured, edited by Ronald Cummings. (lillianallen.ca, Wilfrid Laurier University Press)

Make the World New is a collection of poetry based on the most notable work of poet and author Lillian Allen. It is a selection of new and uncollected poetry and also features poems from her collections *Rhythm an' Hardtimes*, *Women Do This Everyday* and *Psychic Unrest*. Allen's poetry often focuses in on the totality of Black life and the unique experiences of those from the Black diaspora.

- ['Hold your tender, tender heart': poet d'bi.young anitafrika's stirring tribute to Black women everywhere](#)

Allen is one of the leading creative Black feminist voices in Canada, a two-time Juno award-winning recording artist, dub poet, and a professor at Toronto's OCAD University. She is also the author of *Rhythm an' Hardtimes* and *Women Do This Everyday*. Her musical work includes albums *Conditions Critical*, *Revolutionary Tea Party* and *Anxiety*.

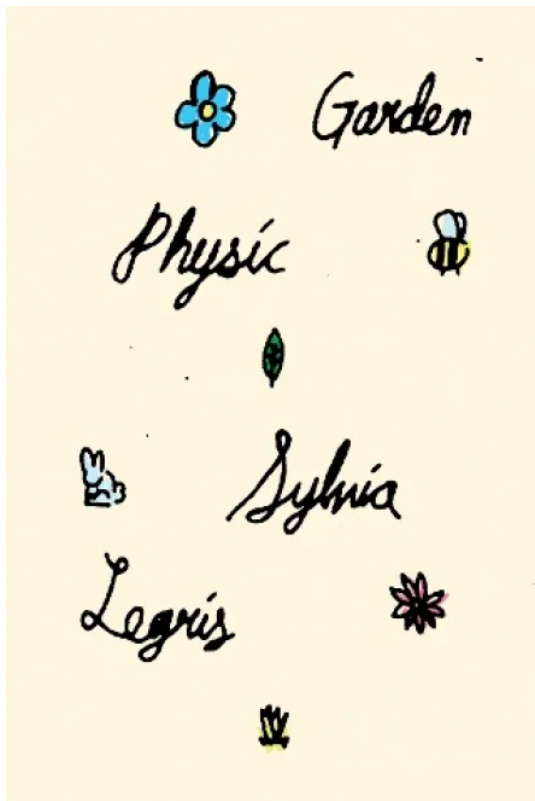


8:51

George Murray on Problematica

George Murray talks to Shelagh Rogers about his poetry collection, Problematica.

[**Garden Physic by Sylvia Legris**](#)



Garden Physic is a poetry collection by Sylvia Legris. (New Directions, Submitted by Sylvia Legris)

[*Garden Physic*](#) is a poetry collection dedicated to the joy of tending to one's garden. Using florid language and poetic verse, [*Garden Physic*](#) revels in the pleasures of nature, weather and colour — and how the garden functions as a place of growth and healing.

Sylvia Legris is a Saskatoon poet and author originally from Winnipeg. She has published several volumes of poetry, including *The Hideous Hidden* and *Nerve Squall*, which won the 2006 Griffin Poetry Prize and the Pat Lowther Award.

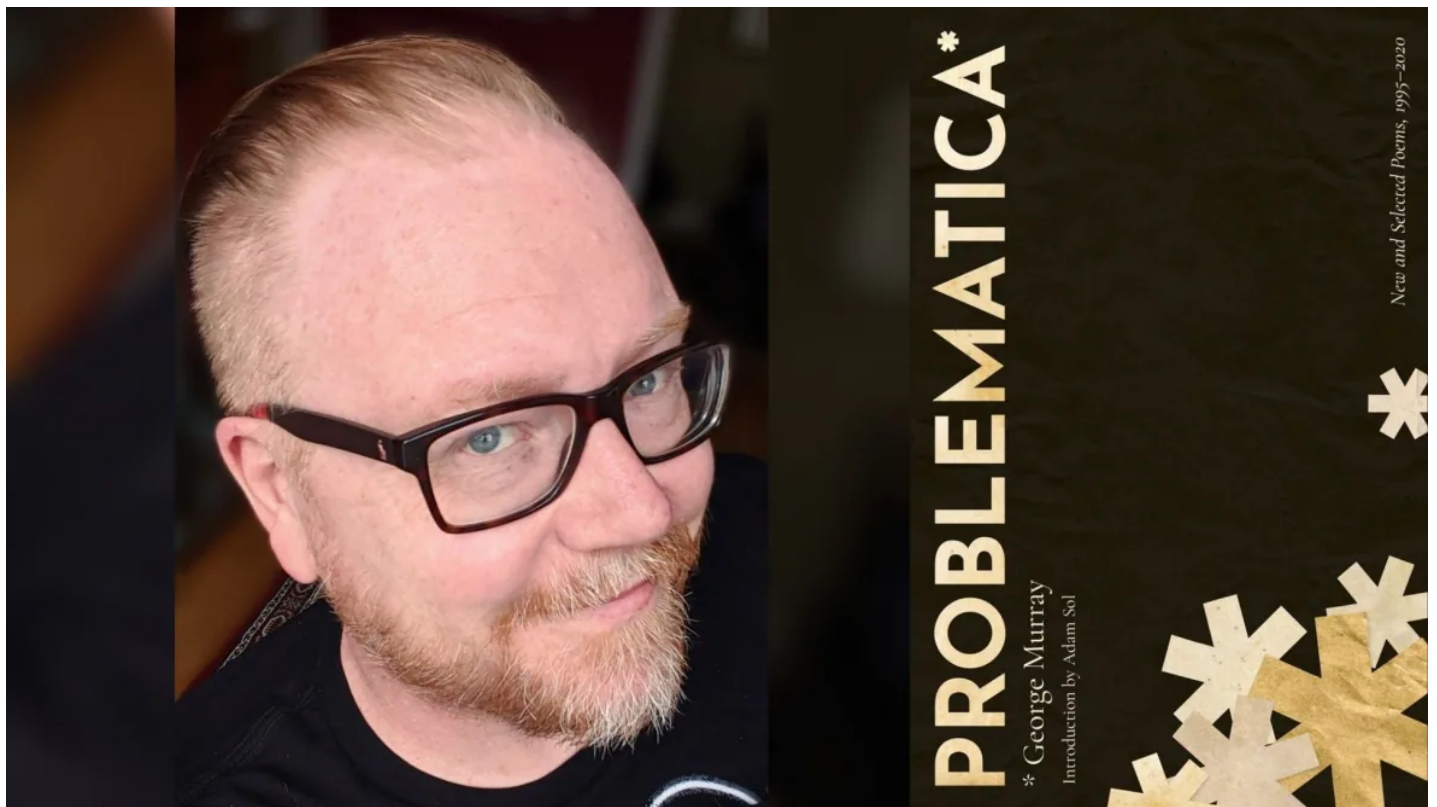


The Next Chapter 16:33

Louise B. Halfe Sky Dancer on awâsis — kinky and dishevelled

The Cree poet Louise Bernice Halfe Skydancer, who was recently appointed Canada's ninth parliamentary poet laureate, talks to Shelagh Rogers about her latest collection, *awâsis — kinky and dishevelled*.

[***Problematica*** by George Murray](#)



Problematica is a poetry collection by George Murray. (Elisabeth de Mariaffi, ECW Press)

[*Problematica*](#) is a collection of poems, both new and previously published, from George Murray's 25-year writing career. The collection includes everything from early narrative poems to lyrical explorations of the metaphysical to investigations of the colloquial and contemporary.

- [**George Murray looks back at 25 years of writing poetry with *Problematica***](#)

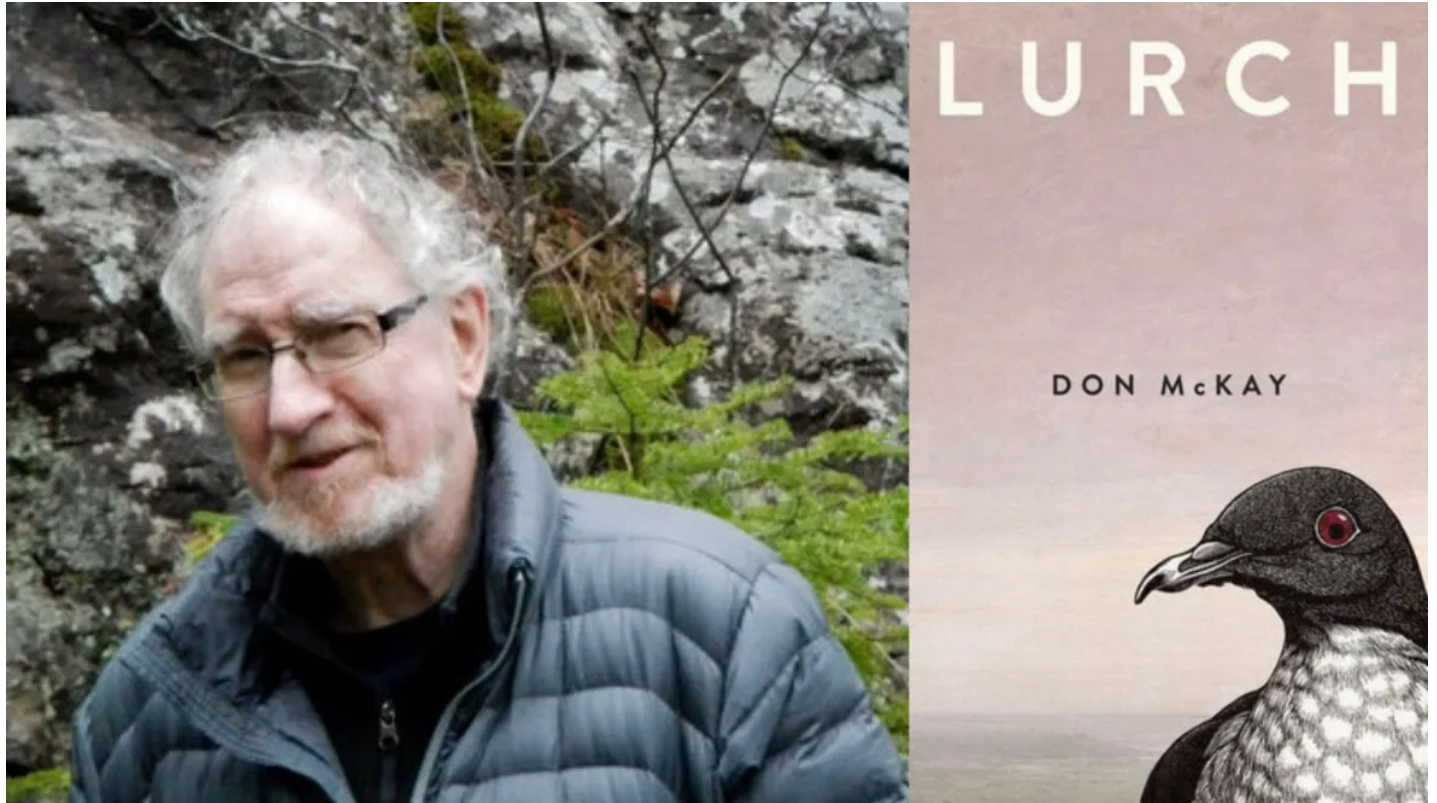
Murray is a poet who has published eight books of poetry. He is a former poetry editor for the Literary Review of Canada and was the poet laureate of St. John's in 2014. He is currently the editor of NewPoetry.ca and lives in St. John's.



13:04

Olive Senior on Pandemic Poems: First Wave

***Lurch* by Don McKay**



Lurch is a poetry collection by Don McKay. (Marlene Creates, McClelland & Stewart)

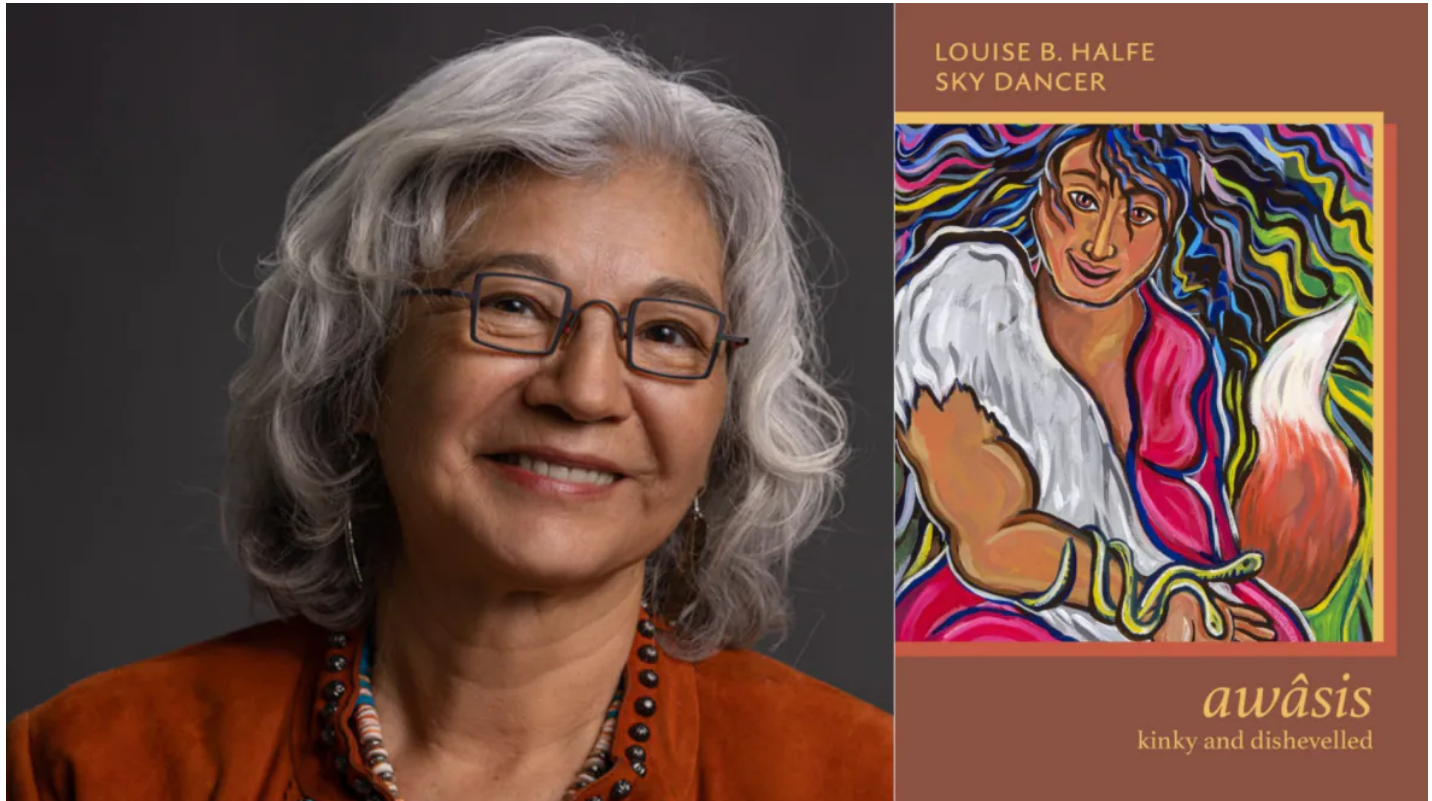
Don McKay invokes "the profane wonders of the wilderness" in his poetry, exploring the awe-inspiring, often "unsayable" natural wonders of the world — from rivers and trees to lichen and birdsong. The poetry lurches with complexity, astonishment and worry, as he contemplates the human complicity in mass extinction.

- **[45 Canadian poetry collections to watch for in fall 2021](#)**

Don McKay is the author of 14 books of poetry, including *Strike/Slip*, which won the Griffin Poetry Prize, *Camber*, *Selected Poems* and *Angular*

Unconformity. McKay has taught poetry in universities across Canada. He currently lives in St. John's.

***awâsis — kinky and dishevelled* by Louise Bernice Halfe**



awâsis — kinky and dishevelled is a poetry collection by Louise B. Halfe. The cover art was created by artist Sherry Farrell Racette. (Sherry Farrell Racette, Brick Books)

Louise Bernice Halfe's latest poetry collection, [*awâsis — kinky and dishevelled*](#), explores stories of resistance, rebellion and laughter by way of *awâsis*, a gender-fluid trickster character who takes readers on a humorous journey of mystery and spirituality.

- **[The advice Louise Bernice Halfe would give to her younger self](#)**

Halfe is a poet from Saskatchewan, who served as the province's first Indigenous poet laureate. Her other poetry collections include *Bear Bones &*

Feathers, *Blue Marrow*, *The Crooked Good* and [*Burning in this Midnight Dream*](#). In 2021, Halfe, whose Cree name is Sky Dancer, [became Canada's ninth parliamentary poet laureate](#).

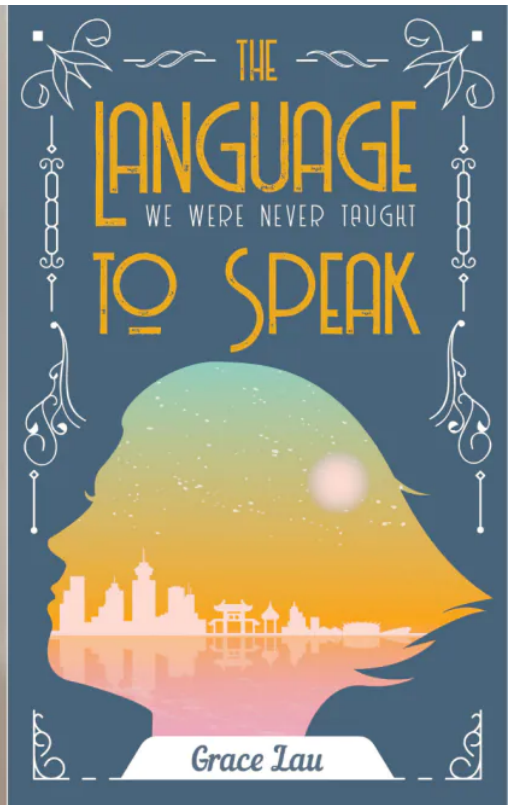


Q 10:54

Hasan Namir on Umbilical Cord and the importance of queer family literature

Award-winning Canadian author and poet Hasan Namir joined Tom Power to discuss his new poetry book, *Umbilical Cord*, inspired by his first year of parenthood.

[*The Language We Were Never Taught To Speak*](#) by Grace Lau



The Language We Were Never Taught to Speak is a poetry collection by Grace Lau. (Guernica Editions)

The poems in [*The Language We Were Never Taught To Speak*](#) are a form of therapy that, according to Lau, few Chinese Canadians ever get to

experience. It delves into the shapes that love and apologies take: the eternal debt one takes on knowing they'll never be able to repay their parents, the coming out journey in a traditional household and the never ending task of trying to better understand the perspectives of your elders.

- [How recounting the past in poetry form helps Grace Lau find peace with her family and identity](#)

Grace Lau was raised in Vancouver and currently lives in Toronto. [*The Language We Were Never Taught to Speak*](#) is her first poetry collection.

[***Pandemic Poems by Olive Senior***](#)



Olive Senior is a Jamaican poet, novelist, short story and nonfiction writer based in Toronto. (Olive Senior)

[*Pandemic Poems*](#) was inspired in 2020, when the pandemic first hit the news cycle and changed society forever. Jamaican Canadian author and poet [Olive Senior](#) paid close attention to the words and phrases that

became part of the everyday lexicon. [*Pandemic Poems*](#) is a collection of poems that capture the profound transformation brought about by COVID-19, words that she initially shared on social media.

- [**Olive Senior explores hope in a world beset by COVID-19 in poetry collection *Pandemic Poems***](#)

[Senior](#) is the author of 18 books of poetry, fiction, non-fiction and children's literature. She has won the Commonwealth Writers Prize and the [OCM Bocas Prize for Caribbean Literature](#). Her collection *Over the Roofs of the World* was shortlisted for the 2005 Governor General's Literary Award for poetry. In 2019, [Senior delivered the prestigious Margaret Laurence Lecture](#).



11:54

Billeh Nickerson on Duct-Taped Roses

Billeh Nickerson talks to Shelagh Rogers about his poetry collection, Duct-Taped Roses.

[***Sulphurtongue* by Rebecca Salazar**](#)



Sulphur Tongue is a poetry collection by Rebecca Salazar. (Sam Evans, McClelland & Stewart)

[*Sulphur Tongue*](#) is the debut poetry collection by Rebecca Salazar. The wide array of poems explores how we create our identities and how they collide with and complicate each other. They take on the relationships to family, desire, religion, the land, politics, trauma and the natural world — and how these things shape who we are.

Sulphur Tongue was on [the shortlist for the 2021 Governor General's Literary Award for poetry](#).

- [**Writers' Trust of Canada launches program to support books by BIPOC writers launched during pandemic**](#)

Salazar is a writer, editor and community organizer from New Brunswick. They edit the publications The Fiddlehead and Plenitude.



Toronto's poet laureate marks one-year anniversary of COVID-19 pandemic

2 years ago | 2:24

Thursday marks the one-year anniversary since the World Health Organization declared the COVID-19 pandemic. As a tribute to the past year, A.F. Moritz, Toronto's poet laureate, presented a poem during Toronto City Council on Wednesday. "Exactly Here the Marvel Spoke Memorial of a Plague Year: March 2020 – March 2021" not only remembers those we lost, but also highlights the need for hope as we move forward. Take a look. (Photos courtesy of Evan Mitsui & Michael Wilson/CBC, Frank Gunn & Chris Young/The Canadian Press)

The Junta of Happenstance by Tolu Oloruntoba



Tolu Oloruntoba
the JUNTA *of*
HAPPENSTANCE



The Junta of Happenstance is a poetry collection by Tolu Oloruntoba. (Franctal Studio, Palimpsest Press)

[*The Junta of Happenstance*](#) is the first poetry collection from Nigerian Canadian writer Tolu Oloruntoba. [*The Junta of Happenstance*](#) is an exploration of disease, both medical and emotional. It explores family dynamics, social injustice, the immigrant experience, economic anxiety and the nature of suffering.

[*The Junta of Happenstance*](#) won [the 2021 Governor General's Literary Award for poetry](#).

- [**The finalists for the 2021 Governor General's Literary Award for poetry**](#)

Oloruntoba is a writer from Nigeria who now lives in Surrey, B.C. He practiced medicine for six years, and has harboured a love for writing poetry since he was 16. His first chapbook, *Manubrium*, was shortlisted for the

2020 bpNichol Chapbook Award. He's also the founder of the literary magazine Klorofyl.

***The Untranslatable I* by Roxanna Bennett**



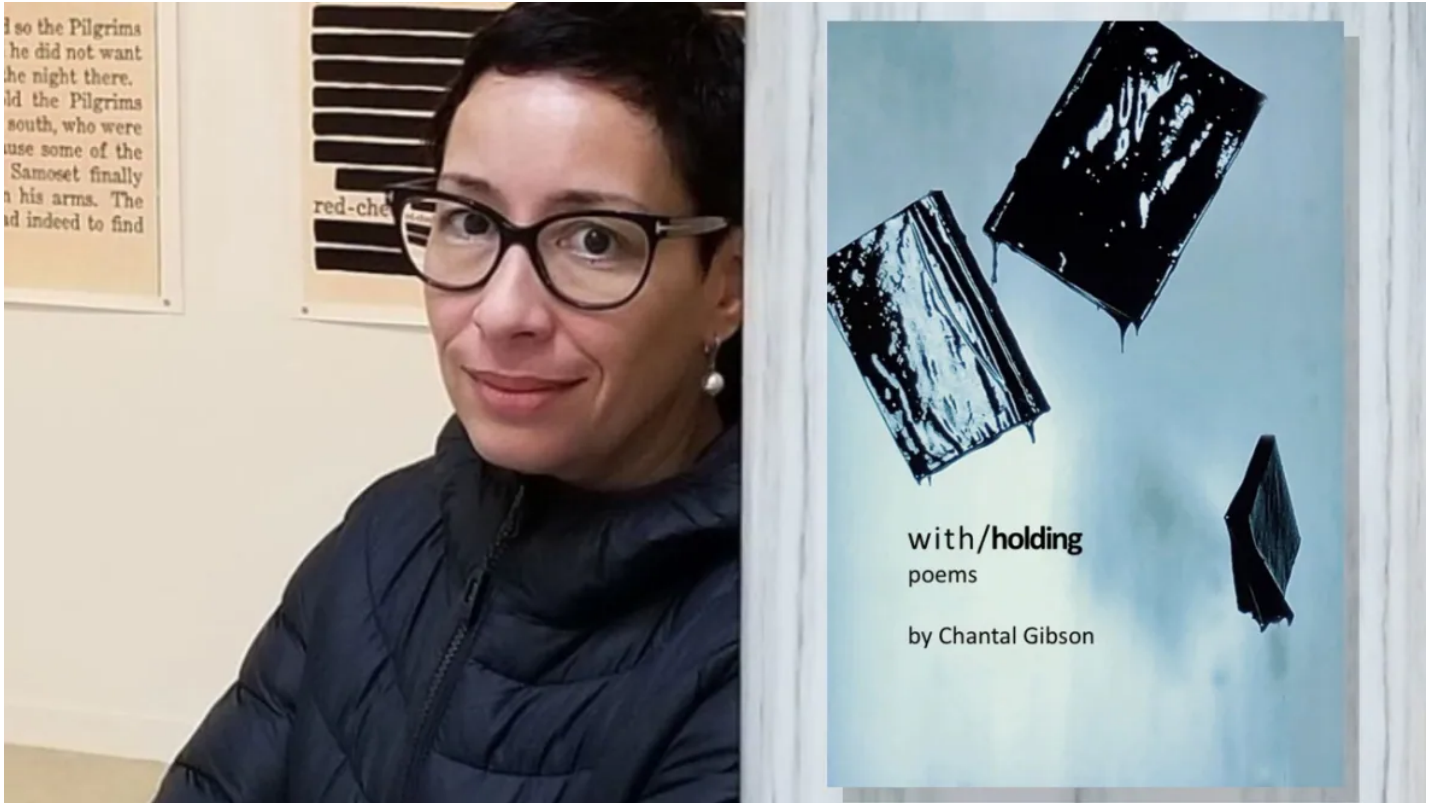
The Untranslatable I is a poetry collection by Roxanna Bennett. (Gordon Hill Press)

Roxanna Bennett is a queer poet living with a disability, and explores both these identities in their work. [*The Untranslatable I*](#) continues this tradition as Bennett reflects on how their lived experiences have shaped them.

[*The Untranslatable I*](#) was on [the shortlist for the 2021 Governor General's Literary Award for poetry](#).

Bennett is a poet from Whitby, Ont. Their other poetry collections include *Unmeaningable* and *The Uncertainty Principle*. *Unmeaningable* won the 2020 Raymond Souster Award from the League of Canadian Poets and the 2020 Trillium Book Award for poetry.

with/holding by Chantal Gibson



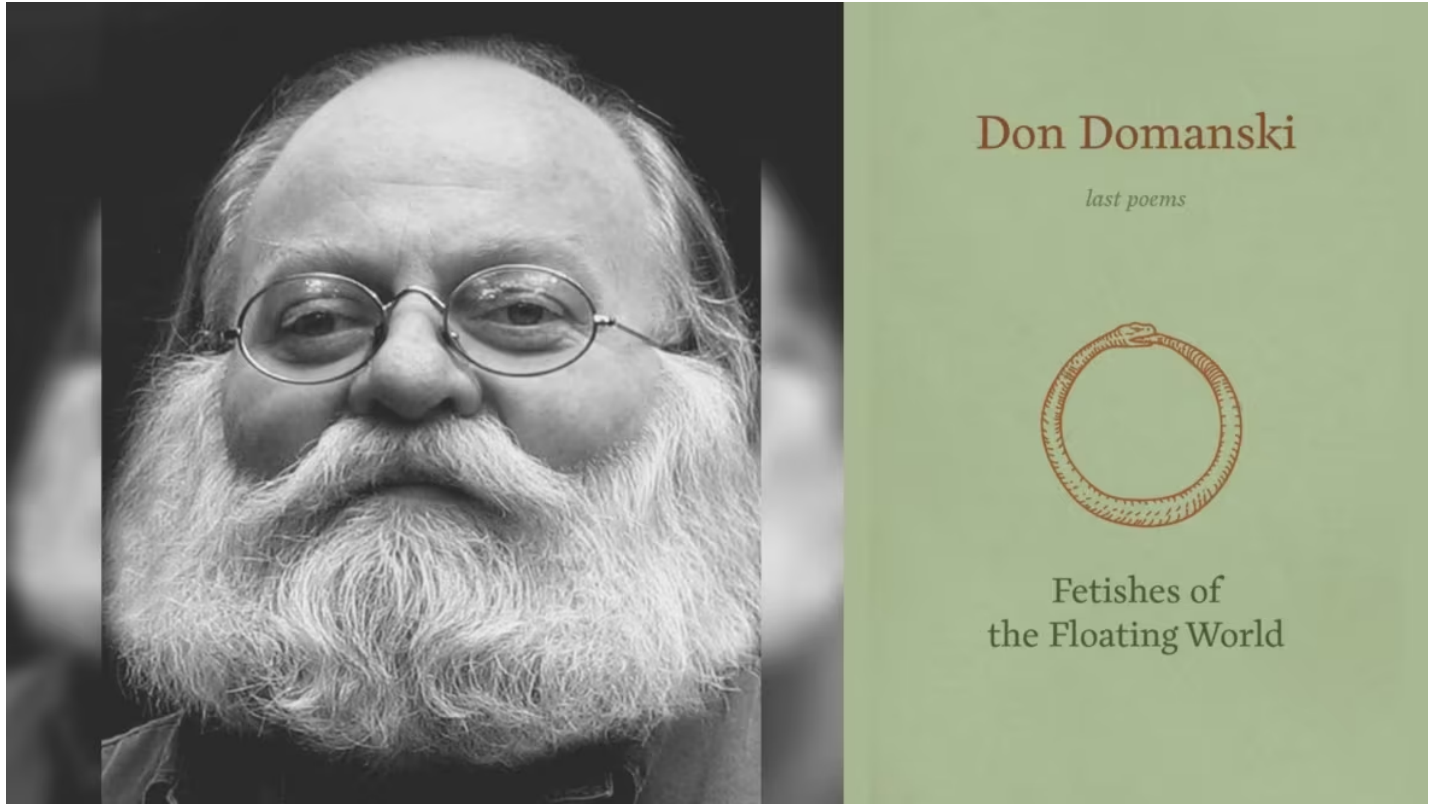
Chantal Gibson's poetry examines the representation and reproduction of Blackness across communication media and popular culture. (B. Kadonoff, Caitlin Press)

with/holding is a collection that critically examines how stories of Blackness and Black pain are consumed in ways that are relentless and dehumanizing in media and popular culture. Gibson draws on imagery from past and present to create a world where Black voices move freely and disrupt the algorithm that replays and reinforces white supremacy.

- **Chantal Gibson wants to decolonize minds through poetry**

Chantal Gibson is a writer, artist and educator based in Vancouver. Her visual art has been exhibited at the ROM and galleries across Canada. Her debut poetry collection, *How She Read*, was a finalist for the 2020 Griffin Poetry Prize. Gibson was also on the 2020 CBC Poetry Prize longlist for her poem *Three Body Problem*.

***Fetishes of the Floating World* by Don Domanski**



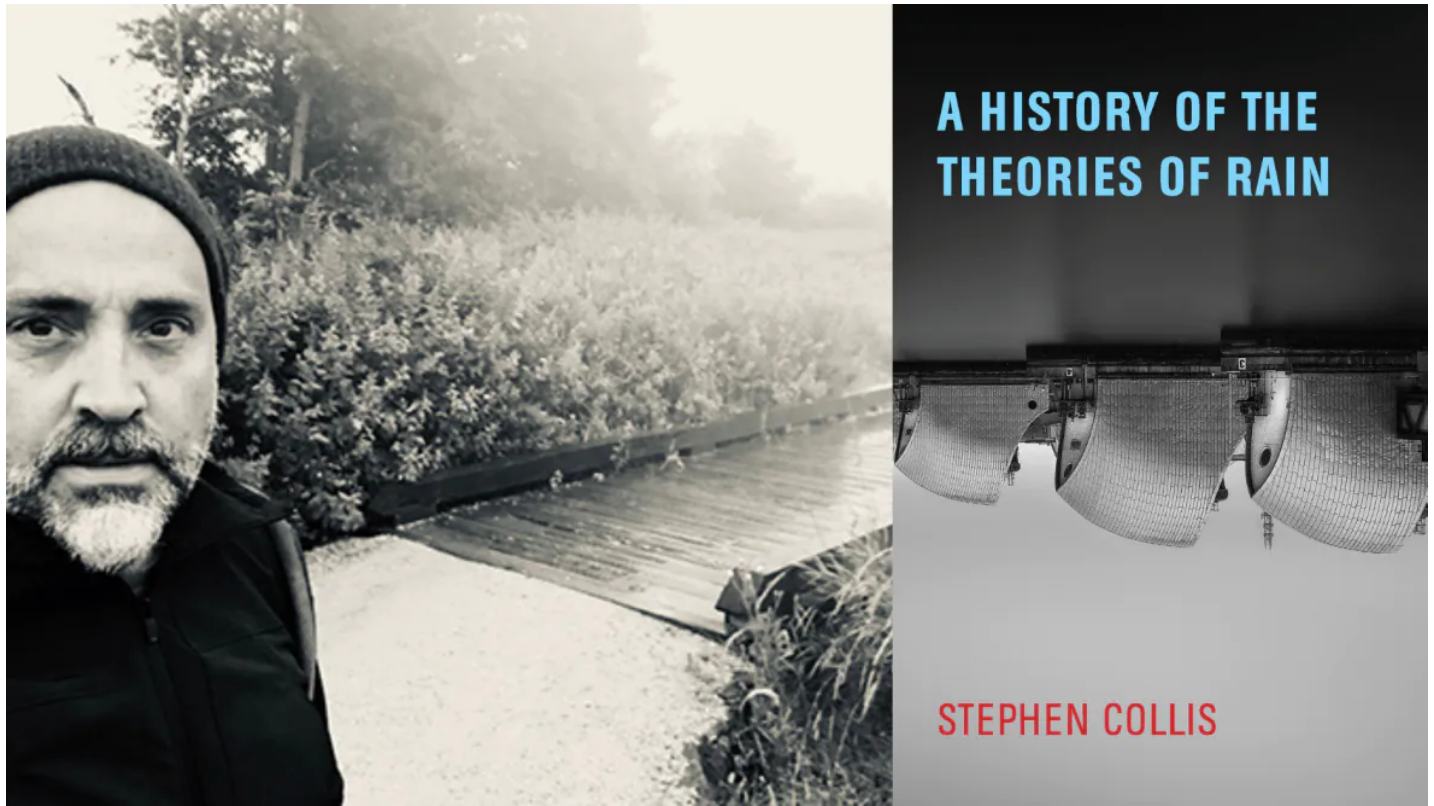
Fetishes of the Floating World is a poetry collection by Don Domanski. (Brick Books)

[*Fetishes of the Floating World*](#) is a posthumous poetry collection that shares Don Domanski's lifelong interest in mystical ecology. It's a spirituality that grapples with the peculiarities of an ever-shifting world and is underlined by an anxiety around deep time.

- **[Friends mourn death of N.S. poet Don Domanski](#)**

Domanski was born and raised in Sydney, N.S., and lived most of his life in Halifax. He is the author of nine poetry collections. Domanski mentored other poets through the Banff Centre for the Arts Wired Writing Studio and the Writers' Federation of Nova Scotia Mentorship program. [He died in 2020.](#)

[A History of the Theories of Rain by Stephen Collis](#)

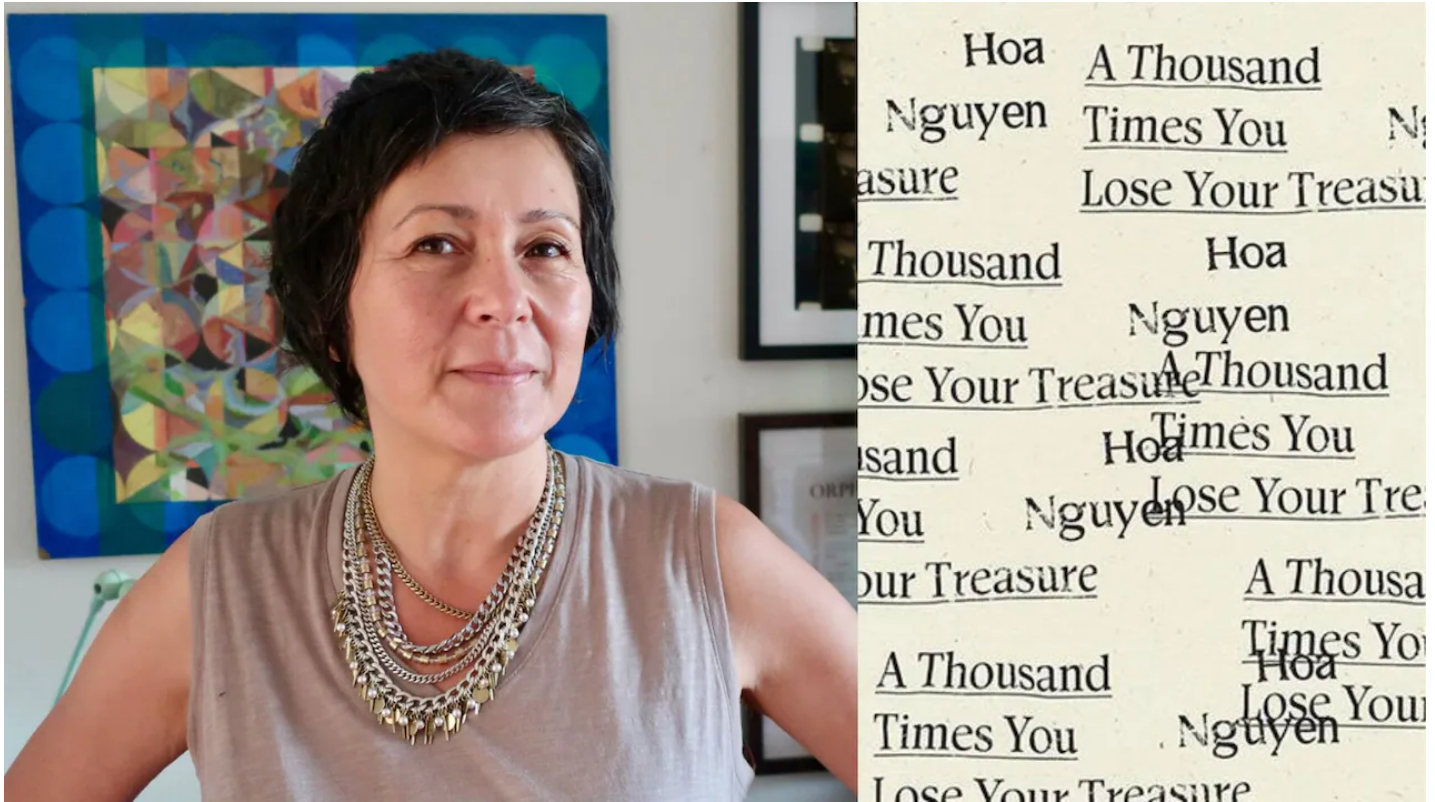


A History of the Theories of Rain is a poetry collection by Stephen Collis. (Talonbooks)

[A History of the Theories of Rain](#) is a poetry collection that explores our current state of anxiety and sense of impending doom, using a mixture of lyrics, speculation and philosophy.

Collis is the author of a dozen books of poetry and prose, including *The Commons*, *On the Material*, *Once in Blockadia* and *Almost Islands: Phyllis Webb and the Pursuit of the Unwritten*. In 2019, [he was awarded the Latner Writers' Trust Poetry Prize, which honours a poet for their body of work](#). He lives near Vancouver and teaches poetry and poetics at Simon Fraser University.

[A Thousand Times You Lose Your Treasure](#) by Hoa Nguyen



A Thousand Times You Lose Your Treasure is a poetry collection by Hoa Nguyen. (Submitted by author, Wave Books)

Hoa Nguyen takes on the extraordinary task of telling her mother's life story in [A Thousand Times You Lose Your Treasure](#), a verse biography. The poet's mother, Diệp Anh Nguyễn, was a stunt motorcyclist who soared with an all-women's Vietnamese circus troupe. Throughout her mother's narrative, Nguyen weaves in poetic dispatches from pre and post-"Fall of Saigon" in poems like *Made by Dow* and *Napalm Notes*.

[A Thousand Times You Lose Your Treasure](#) was a [finalist for the 2021 U.S. National Book Award](#).

- [Hoa Nguyen would never use a pen name](#)

Hoa Nguyen is the author of several books of poetry, including *As Long As Trees Last* and [*Violet Energy Ingots*](#), which was a finalist for the 2017 Griffin Poetry Prize. Born in the Mekong Delta, Vietnam, Nguyen was raised and educated in the United States. She has lived in Canada since 2011.

[*Pebble Swing*](#) by Isabella Wang



Pebble Swing is a poetry collection by Isabella Wang. (Zoë Dagneault, Nightwood Editions)

[*Pebble Swing*](#) is a meditation on language loss and family history. After moving to Vancouver at the age of seven, Isabella Wang starts to lose her understanding of her mother tongue, Mandarin, but still sees its syllables bouncing back at her in the waves of the water. She reflects back on her family's history in China and the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution, exploring the enduring power of what remains unspoken.

- **[Vancouver poet makes teeny, tiny homage to local bookstore](#)**

Wang is an editor at Room magazine and lives in Port Moody, B.C. She was the youngest writer to be shortlisted twice for The New Quarterly's Edna Staebler Personal Essay Contest. Her poetry and prose have appeared in over 30 literary journals.

ORACULE by Nicole Raziya Fong

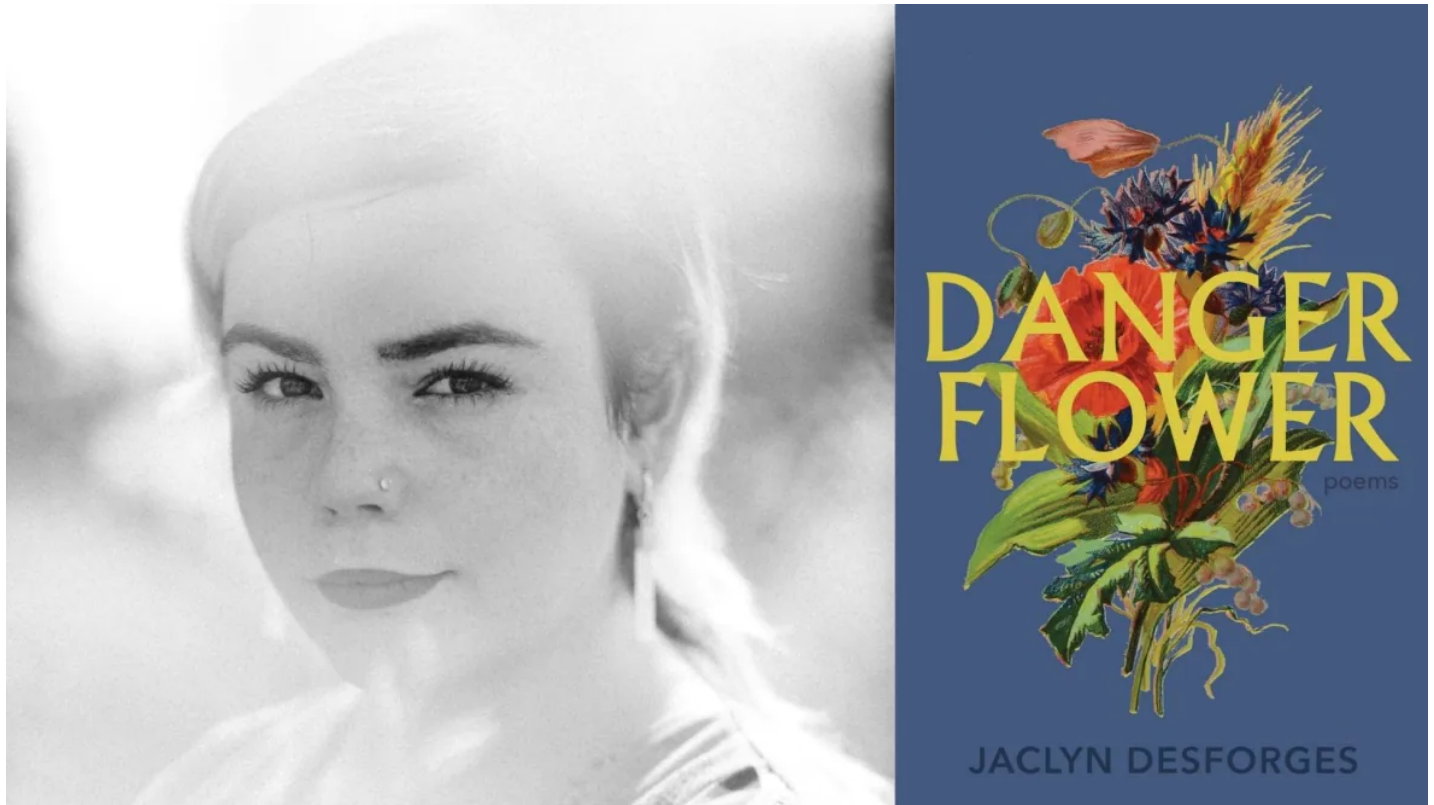


Oracle is a poetry collection by Nicole Raziya Fong. (Talonbooks)

[ORACULE](#) is a book that exists where poetry and theatre intersect. Drawing influence from Friedrich Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*, the writings of Plato, the films of Pier Paolo Pasolini and Homer's *Odyssey*, [ORACULE](#) ends up being musical and epic in nature, as its poems explore the crushing intangibles of human existence — time, identity, loss and self.

Nicole Raziya Fong is a poet living in Montreal. She is also the author of the poetry collection *Perfact*.

Danger Flower by Jaclyn Desforges



Danger Flower is a poetry collection by Jaclyn Desforges. (Jesse Valvasor, Palimpsest Press)

Danger Flower evokes the cautionary nature of fairy tales, calling upon uncanny images of lush gardens, nesting dolls and Tamagotchis, as the poems navigate gender, sex and motherhood in a dangerous and evolving world. Jaclyn Desforges infuses her poetry with sensation, sometimes painful, sometimes pleasurable and sometimes both at once.

Desforges is a poet and picture book author. She has won the 2018 RBC/PEN Canada New Voices Award and the 2020 Hamilton Emerging Artist Award for Writing. Her work has been featured in Room Magazine, The Fiddlehead and The Puritan. She lives in Hamilton, Ont.

Umbilical Cord by Hasan Namir



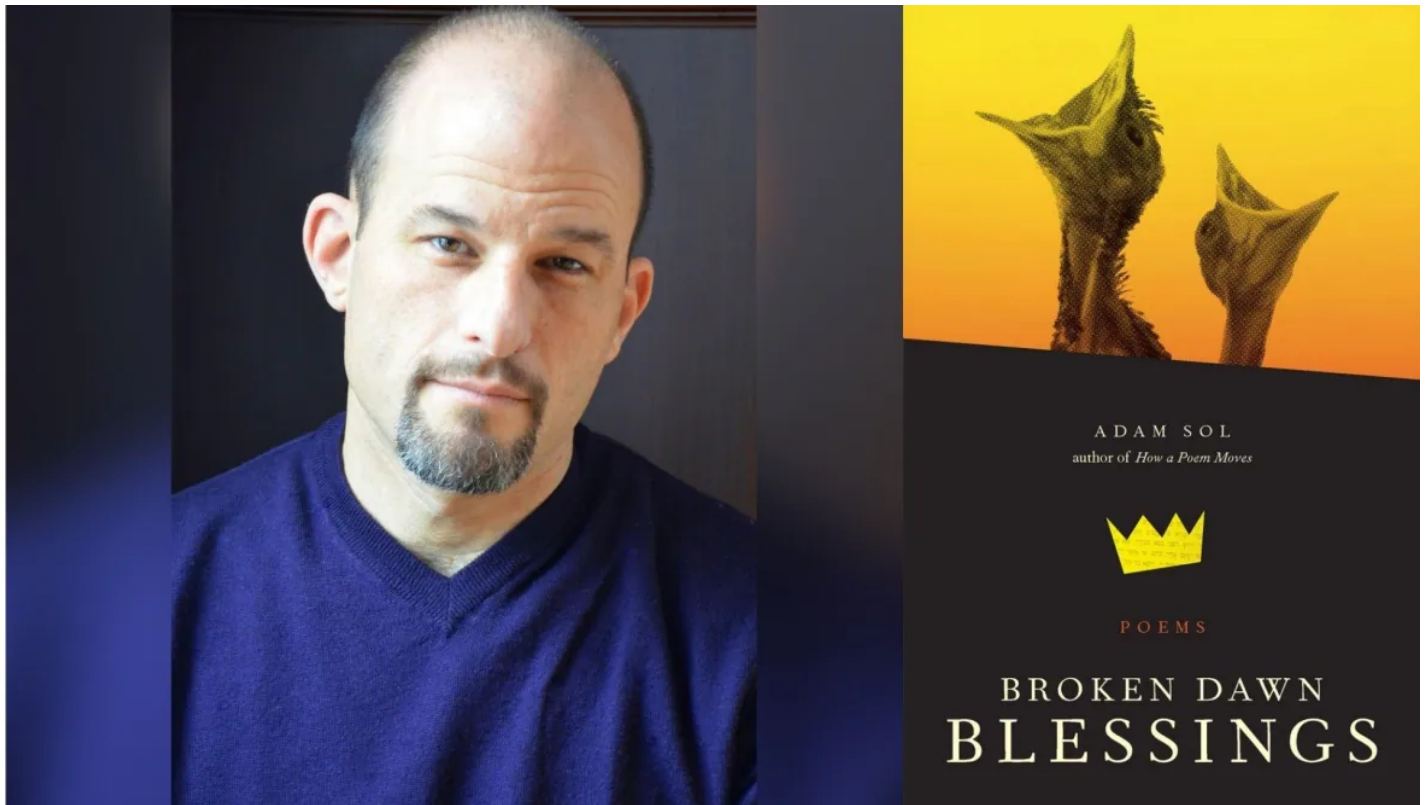
Umbilical Cord is a poetry collection by Hasan Namir. (Tarn Khare, Book*Hug Press)

[*Umbilical Cord*](#) is a collection of joyous free-verse poems that chronicle Hasan Namir's journey to fatherhood. The book is brimming with hope and love, as Namir writes love letters to his new son, recounts how he and his husband fell in love and documents the complicated process of IVF and surrogacy.

- [**How this author learned his gay and Muslim identities could coexist — and found hope in the process**](#)

Namir is an Iraqi Canadian author who currently lives in Vancouver. His other books include [*God in Pink*](#), which won the Lambda Literary Award for best gay fiction, and [*War/Torn*](#), which was a 2020 Stonewall Book Awards winner.

[*Broken Dawn Blessings by Adam Sol*](#)



Broken Dawn Blessings is a poetry collection by Adam Sol. (Mark Raynes Robert, ECW Press)

Adam Sol's newest collection, [*Broken Dawn Blessings*](#), is made up of poems that are loosely linked to the traditional Jewish morning prayers, the Birkhot haShachar (dawn blessings). The book strives to find moments of empathy and awe in the midst of personal and public pain, shame and worry.

- [**Poetry should be enjoyed — and Adam Sol wrote a book to show you how**](#)

Sol is a Canadian American poet. He is the author of four books of poetry, including [*How a Poem Moves*](#) and *Crowd of Sounds*, which won the 2004 Trillium Award for Poetry. He lives in Toronto and teaches at the University of Toronto.

[***Duct-Taped Roses* by Billeh Nickerson**](#)



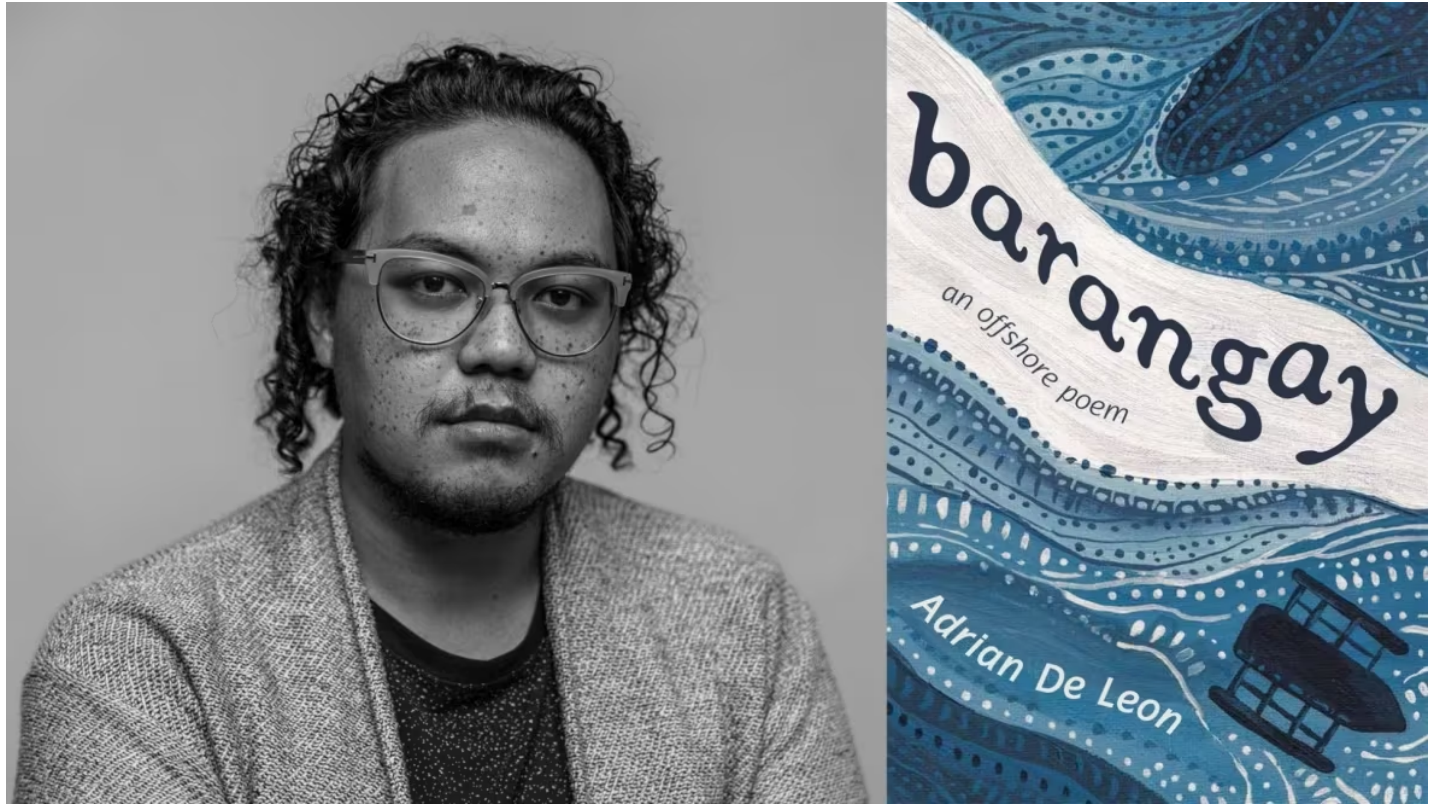
Duct-Taped Roses is a poetry collection by Billeh Nickerson. (Book*Hug Press, Kerry Dawson)

While on a flight to Cairo, Nickerson listened to The Bee Gees' 70s pop hit *How Deep is Your Love* 20 times in a row. It inspired him to write about the depth of his own love, a poem that became part of his poetry collection [*Duct-Taped Roses*](#). The book's title, which refers to how Nickerson's father would use duct-tape to keep his airplanes together, is a nod to the gentle humour and heartbreak of the poetry as it examines the resiliency of love and family.

- [**How a classic 1970s pop ballad by the Bee Gees inspired Billeh Nickerson's latest poetry collection**](#)

Nickerson is a writer from Halifax who now lives in Vancouver. His other poetry collections include *The Asthmatic Glassblower*, *McPoems*, *Impact: The Titanic Poems* and *Artificial Cherry*. He teaches creative writing at Kwantlen Polytechnic University.

***barangay* by Adrian De Leon**

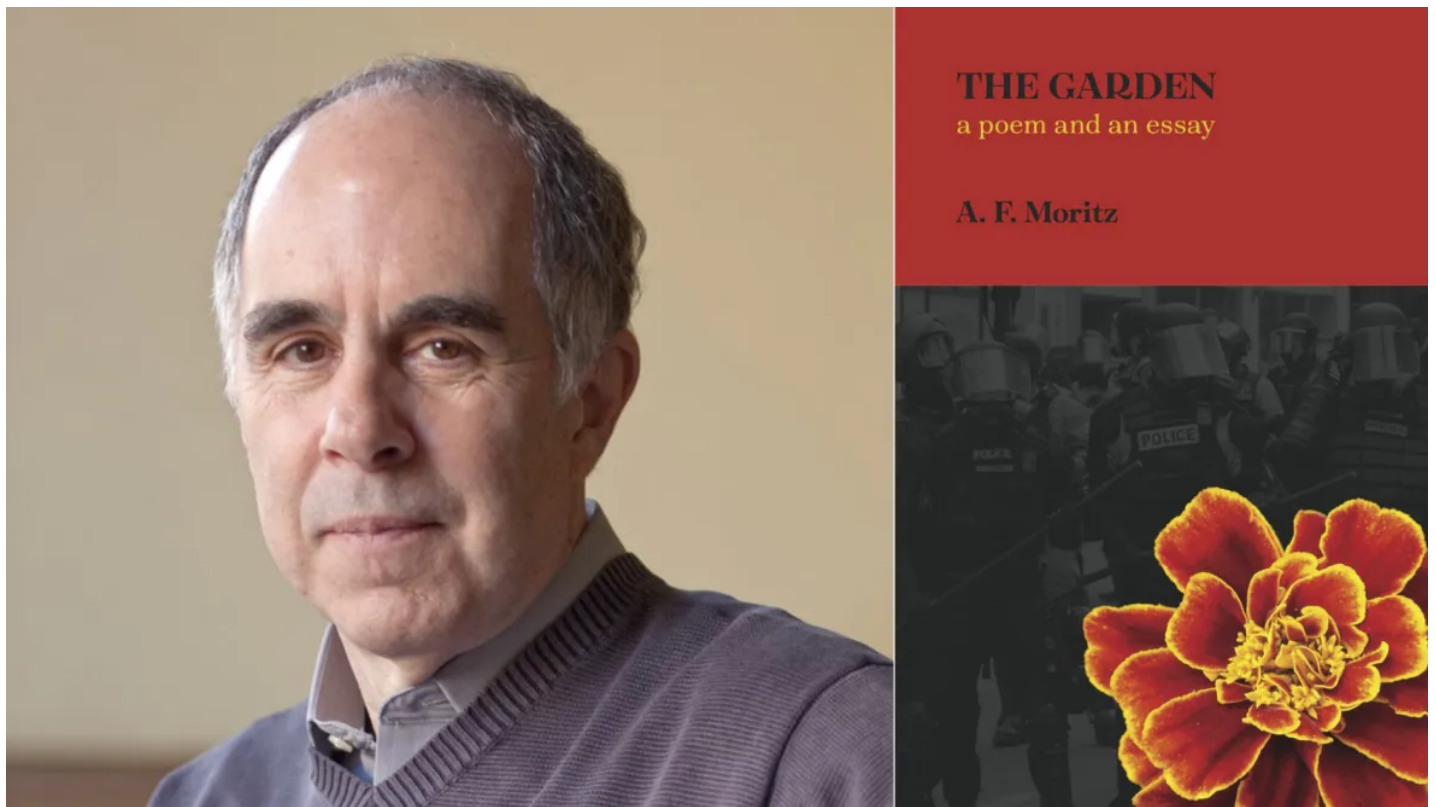


barangay: an offshore poem is a book by Adrian De Leon. (Dylan J. Locke, Wolsak & Wynn)

Adrian De Leon writes [*barangay*](#) as he mourns the loss of grandmother, a woman who "lived, loved and grieved in three languages." He sails his barangay across oceans, sharing stories of migration, colonialism and homefinding from the Filipino diaspora.

De Leon is a writer and educator from Manila by way of Scarborough, Ont. He is the author of *Rouge* and co-editor of *Feel Ways: A Scarborough Anthology*. His poetry and non-fiction have appeared in *The Puritan*, *Joyland Magazine* and *Catapult*. De Leon currently lives in Los Angeles and teaches at the University of Southern California.

***The Garden* by A. F. Moritz**



The Garden is a poetry collection by A. F. Moritz. (Steve Payne, Gordon Hill Press)

[*The Garden*](#) is a long poem, *The Garden in the Midst*, and an essay, *The Garden*, that explores police brutality against Black lives in North America. It starts with the 1992 beating of Rodney King in Los Angeles, and the protests that follow. It moves forward to 2020, with the murder of George Floyd, and back to 1968, with the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. [*The Garden*](#) was originally written in 1992, and Moritz returned to the work and reworked it in 2020.

- [**A. F. Moritz on the under-appreciation of sparrows, poetry's 'uselessness' and more**](#)

Moritz is the author of 20 poetry collections. He has won the Griffin Poetry Prize, the Bess Hokin Prize and an award in literature from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. He is currently the sixth poet laureate of Toronto.

Corrections

- This post has been updated to reflect that Isabella Wang moved to Vancouver at the age of seven.

Dec 14, 2021 9:07 PM ET



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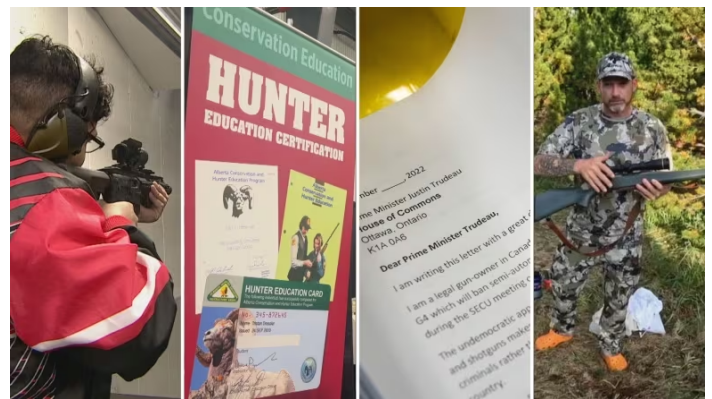
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What caused the Silicon Valley Bank failure, and what might happen next

News - Business



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Joel Dryden

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