



## THE PROVERSE AUTUMN RECEPTION 2020

Proverse Hong Kong held their twelfth annual International Proverse Prize Award and book launch on 19 November 2020, the 25th Proverse Prize event held at the Helena May, Central Hong Kong.

As well as the launching authors, guests included members of the Diplomatic Corps, Proverse friends and editors, friends and family of launching authors, and book-lovers.

Dr Verner Bickley, MBE (Founder of the Proverse Prizes with his wife, Dr Gillian Bickley) welcomed everyone in a pre-recorded video.

Introduced by Dr Gillian Bickley, brief opening remarks were then given by Mr Jeff Nankivell, Consul General of Canada in Hong Kong and Macao, followed by Mr Peter Sidorko, Hong Kong University Librarian, one of the panel of Honorary Advisors to the Proverse Prizes. Each was presented with a copy of Gillian Bickley's collected poems, selected by her husband, Verner Bickley, *Over the Years*, as a gesture of appreciation.

Again by pre-recorded video, Dr Verner Bickley then gave a brief history of the two International Proverse Prizes, remarking that the International Proverse Prizes are special in that they are open to everyone, at least 18 years old at the time of submitting their entry, irrespective of nationality, residence or citizenship. New, emerging and established writers are all welcome to enter.

THE PROVERSE PRIZE FOR A BOOK-LENGTH WORK OF FICTION, NON-FICTION OR POETRY was announced in 2008 and is in its twelfth year of competition. We are grateful for support, this year (i.e. 2019/2020), for the Proverse Prize (book-length works) from Hong Kong Arts Development Council.

The year 2020 is the fifth year that THE PROVERSE POETRY PRIZE FOR SINGLE POEMS has been offered.

The international Proverse Poetry Prize is for poems of any genre or style, generally no more than 30 lines long. The topic may be chosen by entrants or they may choose the subject set by the administrators. In the past few years, the topics have been, in turn, "The Environment"; "Happiness"; "Refuge"; "Plastic"; and "Hunger". In 2021, the topic will be "Shielding", interpreted in any way each entrant likes.

Dr Verner Bickley announced winners of third, second and first-prizes and those specially mentioned in the 2020 Proverse Poetry Prize.

Third Prize winners of the Proverse Poetry Prize with a place in the 2020 Anthology are:  
Jack Mayer, 'False Labor' (USA);  
Maya Mitova (Митова), 'Notesheet from the Dawn of the Light' (Bulgaria);  
Hayley Solomon, 'Tell me and I will Try' (New Zealand);  
George Watt, 'Blackbirds of Cooper Place' (Australia).

The Second Prize Winner:

Carol Flake Chapman, 'Sequestered Sunday' (USA)

The First Prize Winner: Anne Casey (Australia)

Special mentions: In view of the high standard of entries, for the second time, the judges recommended some entries to be designated as, "Special mention".

Those specially mentioned:

KB Chan (Hong Kong), Natalie Nera (Czech Republic), Lynda McKinney Lambert (USA).

Following these announcements, Verner introduced those present, all Hong Kong residents, among the many more who have won places in the Proverse Prize Anthology 2020:

Liam Blackford, Paola Caronni, Sadie Kaye, Jun Pan, Luisa Ternau.

The names of all those who have won one or more places in the Proverse Poetry Prize Anthology 2020 are now set out below:

Vinita Agrawal, Joy Al-Sofi, Shikha Bansal, Alan Bern, Thea Biesheuvel, Liam Blackford, Maria Elena Blanco, Gavin Bourke, Lawrence Bridges, Paul Brooke, Lina Buividaviciute, Shiela Cancino, Paola Caronni, Vincent Casaregola, Anne Casey, Ian Chambers, Jose Chambers, Krishna Chamling, Jessica Chan, Kwan Ee Chan, KB Chan, Carol Flake Chapman, Tim Tim Cheng, Annie Christain, William Leo Coakley, Suzanne Cottrell, Neil Douglas, Gayathri Durairaj, Ahmed Elbeshlawy, Fetūolemoana Elisara, Rayn Epremian, David Evans, Adele Evershed, Ryan Fenton, Daniela Fischerová, Lincoln Greenhaw, Casey Hampton, matthew harris, Kate Hawkins, Ching Yee Ho, Kathy Hoa, Carrie Hooper, Joshua Ip, Kathy Jiang, Allegra Jostad Silberstein, Sadie Kaye, Robert Keeler, Ho Cheung LEE, J P Linstroth, Iris Litt, S. Ludan, K B Ryan Joshua Mahindapala, Carmina Masoliver, Wayne Mattingly, Jack Mayer, Lynda McKinney Lambert, Maya Mitova (Митова), Natalie Nera, Helen Oliver, Rena Ong, Jun Pan, Danny Dylan Poon, Joanna Radwańska-Williams, Coolimuttam Neelakandan Rajalakshmi, Colin Rampton, kerry rawlinson, Melissa Reed, Vinni Relwani, Angelo Rizzi, Halil Suat Saraç, Ralf Schrader, José Manuel Sevilla, Wesley Sims, Hayley Solomon, Dong Sun, Robin Susanto, Luisa Ternau, Edward Tiesse, Bibiana Tsang ("T."), Roger Uren, Rod Usher, Peter Verbica, Sarah Vetter, Renee Wade, Victoria Walvis, Anson Wang, Bruce Arlen Wasserman, George Watt, Mocco Wollert, Elizabeth Wong, Joyce Wu, Wing Chit Yung

The Anthology, "Mingled Voices 5", is scheduled to be launched on Thursday, 22 April 2021 at the Proverse Spring Reception. We hope to see many of the poets then.

**All poets were congratulated.**

Next, the SEMI-FINALISTS FOR THE 2020 PROVERSE PRIZE were announced by Dr Gillian Bickley, co-founder of the Proverse Prizes. Remarking that, as always, competition had been keen, she reported that ten entries had been selected as semi-finalists. Five of the semi-finalists live in Hong Kong -- a somewhat unusual result, four being present. -- Each of these four were presented with a copy of *Three Wishes in Bardo* by Feng Chi-shun, winner of the Proverse Prize 2017, as a token of their achievement from one of the distinguished guests of the evening; two from Consul-General for Canada in Hong Kong and Macao, Mr Jeff Nankivell and two from the Director of the British Council, Hong Kong, Mr Jeff Streeter.

The semi-finalists present (all Hong Kong residents) were:  
Liam Blackford, Paola Caronni, Chris(topher) Maden, Jun Pan, Janice:

Apologies had been received from Vishal Nandi, also a Hong Kong resident.

The other five semi-finalists do not live in Hong Kong; understandably, they were unable to be present. They are:

Aiden Heung (Shanghai); Alan Westphall (Denmark and Shenzhen); Bruce Wasserman (USA); George Watt (Australia); Hayley Solomon (New Zealand)

**All entrants were congratulated for their submissions.**

At this point, Ride Fund Chairman, Mr John Strickland, GBS, JP, was invited to introduce the Ride Fund, publication sponsor of one of the books being launched.

Again by pre-recorded video, Dr Verner Bickley then introduced the books being launched and gave the results of the Proverse Prize 2019 competition.

Three entries for the 2019 Proverse Prize have been awarded as winners of supplementary -- publication -- prizes. One, NICHOLAS BINGE, had his science-fiction novel, *Professor Everywhere*, launched at the online April 2020 Reception, before returning to the UK to teach there. Two more finalists were launched at the 19 November 2020 Reception.

JOHN ASOME is the author of *Coolie Ships of the Chinese Diaspora (1846-1874)*. JOHN was born in Hong Kong and attended St Joseph's College, just up the road from the Reception venue. He now lives in Australia after a working life spent mainly at sea. He was represented by his sister, Patricia Yung.

An expert in the subject, Walton Look Lai, has written this of John Asome's book, "*Coolie Ships of the Chinese Diaspora* fills an enormous gap in our knowledge of the Chinese coolie trade. John Asome has enabled readers and future scholars to distinguish fact from myth, reality from exaggeration, in the understanding of this vast and complex experience. All will be inspired by this brave project, all the more so because it is the result of one man's single-minded devotion over the years, rather than the work of a collective body."

Patricia Yung, representing her brother John Asome, received a copy of John Asome's book, *Coolie Ships of the Chinese Diaspora (1846-1874)*, from Mr Jeff Nankivell, Consul-General for Canada in Hong Kong and Macao.

JAN PEARSON is an Australian who lived in Hong Kong in her girlhood. At the Reception, we launched *Blue Dragon Spring*, the fourth in her series of thrillers set in Hong Kong.

William Wadsworth, in the *Sunday Morning Post*, described an earlier book in the series, *Tiger Autumn*, as, "one of the best Hong Kong novels in years."

As for *Blue Dragon Spring*, Joe Darlington in the *Manchester Review of Books*, calls it, "A hell of a page-turner."

**THIS YEAR TWO WRITERS WERE AWARDED AS WINNERS OF THE INTERNATIONAL PROVERSE PRIZE 2019.** Each received the prize of publication and they share the cash prize.

They are JACK MAYER OF VERMONT, USA, with his first poetry collection (but by no means his first book), *Poems from the Wilderness*,  
and

J. P. LINSTROTH OF PALM SPRINGS, FLORIDA, USA, with his second work of poetry, *Epochal Reckonings*.

It is the first time that two poetry collections have shared the Proverse Prize.

J.P. Linstroth's *Epochal Reckonings* approaches large topics. He observes the impact on individuals and society of several recent catastrophic events.

In his *Poems from the Wilderness*, Jack Mayer has a more eschatological focus -- on the spiritual thoughts inspired by mountain-treking and by his work as a medical doctor.

Several advance comments and reviews have been received on these two winning books. The following are representative.

Michelle Jacobs in *The US Review of Books*, writes: “[Mayer] follows a long tradition of poets and thinkers who seek in nature the truth of the human condition.... His thoughtful, intelligent observations from the ‘cosmological wilderness’ reveal not only the invisible winds, footfalls, and crinkling dead leaves but also an understanding of desire, grace, and frailty.... This communion with nature on the trail that Mayer eloquently calls his ‘enduring house of worship’ provides wisdom and revelations and showcases the enduring bond between humans and the natural world.”

The following is one of the advance comments on J.P. Linstroth's *Epochal Rceckonings*:  
“With the finesse and erudition of a classicist, and yet the clarion urgency of a contemporary activist, J.P. Linstroth ably chronicles the struggles of those whose tales are both sung and unsung. While his lyrical invocations speak of historical and contemporary oppression, the varied sufferings of marginalised peoples and more widespread catastrophes around the globe, he infuses his verse with cultural richness, resilience and human indomitability.”  
—Akin Jeje, author of *Smoked Pearl: Poems of Hong Kong and Beyond*, Proverse 2010.

**Congratulations to all these winners!**

Three other books were launched, published as part of the regular Proverse publishing programme and not as winners in the Proverse Prize competition.

GERARD BREISSAN was born in France. He is a Canadian citizen and has lived in China for the past fifteen years. His narrative, *No Boundaries for Lucifer*, is a Vietnam War prisoner-escape narrative. It has stories within stories, tales of military experience, and descriptions of diabolical interference in the human world.

JON NG, born in Canada and now living in Hong Kong, describes *Hong Kong: Growing Pains*, his first poetry collection, as an exploration of the city of Hong Kong, as well as the translation of emotions felt during the tumultuous second half of 2019.

GILLIAN BICKLEY has lived mainly in Hong Kong since 1970. She writes both detailed books on historical topics and short poems. *Grandfather's Robin* is her sixth poetry collection.

Various advance comments have been received.

Jack Mayer writes from Vermont, USA, “So many reasons to enjoy Gillian Bickley’s luminous poetry – humor, depth and wisdom. ... Lovely and evocative, Bickley’s powers of observation and precise, selective description lend many of these poems the power of fine portraiture, a sepia photograph, where we see into the eyes, where we discover essence.”

**Mary-Jane Newton** writes from Oxford, UK. “In this work, Gillian Bickley affords us a glimpse into her perspective. She invites us to reflect on the rich tapestry of life and our shared human experience. Why should you read this collection? Because there is no greater privilege than intimacy.”

**Steven Schroeder, in Chicago, USA,** kindly gave permission for his artwork to be reproduced for the cover of this book. He writes:

“*Grandfather's Robin*, as Gillian Bickley notes in her brief introduction, is a *recollection*, drawing together fragments of experience since her last collection in 2012 but also from the whole of her life. Poetry “takes its origin,” as Wordsworth wrote, “from emotion recollected in tranquility.” What begins with a “spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings” ends in carefully chosen words that bring to mind what “caused them to be written down.” In ‘Soft’ (24), describing a 2013 encounter with a young waiter in Hong Kong, she writes, “Sometimes, when we speak, our lives unroll / Before those we speak to, without our knowing.” That image of our lives unrolling in our words without our knowing captures the spirit of this collection perfectly – poems as moments of tranquility in which we can encounter lives unrolling in times that (as ‘Beyond 1997’ subtly reminds us) are anything but. To make a record such as this is a good resolution indeed, and I am pleased that Gillian has chosen for the cover a moment of tranquility I painted. As Mrs. Dorothy Collins might have said (32), reflecting, as these poems do, the quietness of a life-long practice, “Very well!””

**Congratulations to these writers on the publication of their works!**

#### **AUTHORS’ PRESENTATIONS**

Pre-recorded videos by six of the launching authors (Jack Mayer, J.P. Linstroth, John Asome, Gerard Breissan, Jan Pearson and Jon Ng) were available for showing at the Reception, and were shown, except that Jon Ng, being present, gave his introduction live.

Gillian Bickley, the only launching author, who had not prepared a video, gave most of her time to pay tribute to her husband, Dr Verner Bickley. She said, “Without Verner, none of us would be here! How is this the case? Charm, energy, influence, enthusiasm, extreme conscientiousness, the ability to see what others might like to do and indirectly over time work on them to do it.

Verner and I met at the Royal Asiatic Society Hong Kong 25th anniversary event on 28 November 1985 at either the Mandarin or Furama Hotel, where a book-launch took place. Then and ever afterwards, Verner’s love of books has been apparent. It was a natural progression for a wife who likes to do what might please her husband, to become, over time, a full-time publisher and literary prize organiser after retirement!

We know Jeff Nankivell through the Royal Commonwealth Society Hong Kong, of which Verner is a Past President and Life Council member.

We know Peter Sidorko because, as founder Chairman of the English-Speaking Union Hong Kong, Verner received books from an ESU in Florida every year, with the request to donate

them appropriately. One year, Peter kindly agreed to be the recipient of the donation on behalf of the University of Hong Kong Library.

We know Jeff Streeter because Verner was part of the British Council for many years, serving in Burma, Indonesia and Japan, and he touched base with Jeff when he arrived in Hong Kong.

All others here we know from extensions of these contacts, whether at one, two, or three removes.

I hope next year, when this pandemic is contained, Verner can be with us again in the flesh!"

Gillian concluded by thanking the Helena May and the Helena May staff for their always efficient and willing support and Mr Felix Wong for his smooth technical assistance during the evening.

The formal part of the evening having concluded, guests remained at their tables for four to socialise for the remaining period of time.

## **NOTICES**

See the Proverse Autumn Reception (19 Nov 2020) pre-recorded video content here:  
<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLPHfT5TYFArf8tITmUVY2Jn5JtGQBfcu3>

Available soon on the Proverse youtube channel: An edited video of the Proverse Autumn Reception 2020 live event.

To receive notice of the above and all other new content available on the Proverse channel, subscribe at no charge: [bit.ly/YoutubeChannel\\_PVHK](https://bit.ly/YoutubeChannel_PVHK)

The next Proverse event will be the Proverse Spring Reception, scheduled for 22 April 2021 in Central Hong Kong. Those interested are urged to visit the Proverse website, [proversepublishing.com](http://proversepublishing.com), from time to time, for updates and the opening of registration for this event.

## **AVAILABILITY**

Six of the newly-launched titles are available from the website of the Proverse Hong Kong distributor, the Chinese University of Hong Kong Press:  
[https://cup.cuhk.edu.hk/index.php?route=product/category&path=59\\_68\\_171](https://cup.cuhk.edu.hk/index.php?route=product/category&path=59_68_171)

All seven can also be ordered from bookshops in Hong Kong and the United Kingdom.

All seven titles are available in paperback from international branches of amazon.

From 1 December, e-book editions of all seven titles will be available, also from regional branches of amazon, and, in due course, from other online book retailers.

Your feedback and support are welcome!

The Proverse Prize 2021 will receive entries, 7 May-30 June 2021

In the meantime, stay well and safe!

