



THE GRIFFIN TRUST
For Excellence In Poetry

Trustees:

Margaret Atwood
Carolyn Forché
Scott Griffin
Robert Hass
Michael Ondaatje
Robin Robertson
David Young

Press Release

**THE GRIFFIN POETRY PRIZE ANNOUNCES THE 2009
CANADIAN AND INTERNATIONAL SHORTLIST**

TORONTO – April 7, 2009 – Scott Griffin, founder of The Griffin Trust for Excellence in Poetry and David Young, trustee, today announced the Canadian and International shortlist for this year's prize. The C\$100,000 Griffin Poetry Prize is one of the most lucrative poetry prizes in the world, exemplifying the international spirit of the form. The prize is awarded annually for the two best books of poetry, including translations, published in English in the previous year.

Judges Saskia Hamilton, Dennis O'Driscoll and Michael Redhill each read 485 books of poetry, including 33 translations, received from 32 countries around the globe. The seven finalists – three Canadian and four International – will be invited to read in Toronto at the MacMillan Theatre on Tuesday, June 2, 2009. The winners, who each receive C\$50,000, will be announced on Wednesday, June 3, 2009, at the ninth annual Griffin Poetry Prize Awards Evening.

Canadian Shortlist

Revolver • **Kevin Connolly**
House of Anansi Press

Crabwise to the Hounds • **Jeremy Dodds**
Coach House Books

The Sentinel • **A. F. Moritz**
House of Anansi Press

International Shortlist

The Lost Leader • **Mick Imlah**
Faber and Faber

Life on Earth • **Derek Mahon**
The Gallery Press

Rising, Falling, Hovering • **C. D. Wright**
Copper Canyon Press

Primitive Mentor • **Dean Young**
University of Pittsburgh Press



THE GRIFFIN TRUST
For Excellence In Poetry

The judges for the 2009 Griffin Poetry Prize are the distinguished writers and poets Saskia Hamilton (United States), Dennis O'Driscoll (Ireland) and Michael Redhill (Canada). Each year, the Griffin Poetry Prize publishes an anthology, a selection of poems from the shortlisted books, published by House of Anansi Press. Royalties from *The Griffin Poetry Prize Anthology* are donated to UNESCO's World Poetry Day.

The Griffin Poetry Prize was launched on September 6, 2000, by trustees Margaret Atwood, Carolyn Forché, Scott Griffin, Robert Hass, Michael Ondaatje, Robin Robertson and David Young. Each year, the trustees (with the exception of Scott Griffin) are responsible for selecting the judges for the prize.

The Griffin Trust For Excellence In Poetry was created to serve and encourage poetry written in English anywhere in the world. Eligible collections of poetry, including translations, must be submitted by publishers no later than December 31 in the calendar year of their publication.

Tickets for the Readings to be held on Tuesday, June 2, 2009, at the MacMillan Theatre are available at www.griffinpoetryprize.com/tickets or by calling (905) 618-0420.

- 30 -

NOTE: The publishers mentioned in our release are those who submitted the books.

NOTE TO BOOKSELLERS: Griffin Poetry Prize posters and stickers are supplied free of charge by The Griffin Trust. To view these items and access the order form, visit our Web site, at <http://www.griffinpoetryprize.com/order.php>. Winner stickers will be available after June 3, 2009.

Media Contacts:

June Dickenson
Tel: 647 477 6000
Email: publicity@griffinpoetryprize.com

General Inquiries:

Ruth Smith, Manager
Tel: 905 618 0420
Email: info@griffinpoetryprize.com

Elana Rabinovitch
Tel: 416 934 0755
Email: press@griffinpoetryprize.com

Links:

Shortlisted Publishers' Web sites:

Coach House Books: www.chbooks.com
Copper Canyon Press: www.coppercanyonpress.org
Faber and Faber: www.faber.co.uk
Gallery Press: www.gallerypress.com
House of Anansi Press: www.anansi.ca
University of Pittsburgh Press: www.upress.pitt.edu

Marketing Collateral:

<http://www.griffinpoetryprize.com/order.php>

Downloadable photographs of the 2009 shortlisted poets:

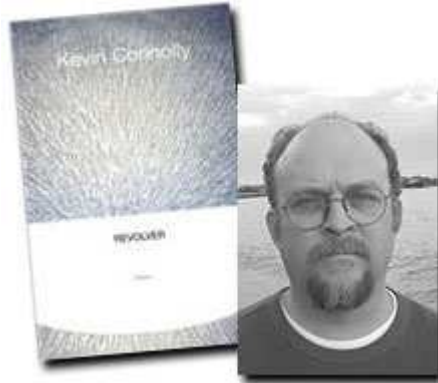
<http://www.griffinpoetryprize.com/presskit.php>



THE GRIFFIN TRUST
For Excellence In Poetry

THE 2009 GRIFFIN POETRY PRIZE SHORTLIST
CITATIONS, BIOGRAPHIES AND SUMMARIES

Canadian Shortlist



Revolver • Kevin Connolly

House of Anansi Press

Judges' Citation: "What sort of warning is being sounded in a book where the table of contents is fictional? Perhaps that the signs are not to be trusted; that you are going to have to find your own way. Such is the promise of the work of Kevin Connolly, one of Canada's most profoundly engaged and rewarding poets. *Revolver*, his fourth collection, finds him deep in the territory he has made his own: the dark place where we attempt to make sense of the noise we've been making and the sounds coming from others. Through a multiplicity of voices and attacks, maskings and menacings, Connolly conducts an existential research that only pretends to be jokey, only feints at absurdity. But this is not a light-hearted poetry of effects: it's a kind of stand-up comedy done with a flame-thrower. In *Revolver*, Connolly works subtexts of suspicion, rejecting everything received and shaking the forms to get them to reveal what there is no language for, yet. 'People like people who stand for things', he writes, suggesting it's a misplaced faith, to put your trust in anything you can define. It's a courageous poetic stance, to leave yourself and your reader painted into a corner. But there's a door behind you you won't find until you're pressed up against it, and in this superb collection, Connolly shoves you through that door and out into naked space."

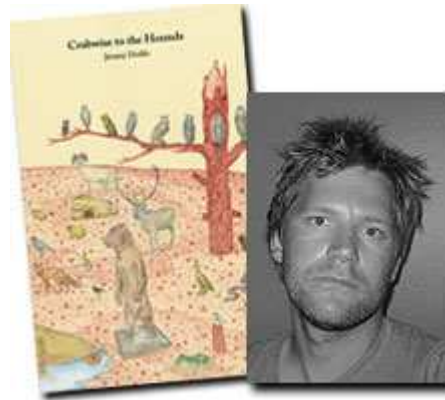
Biography: Kevin Connolly is a poet, editor and arts journalist. His first collection of poems, *Asphalt Cigar*, was published by Coach House Press in 1995 and nominated for the Gerald Lampert Award. Connolly's second collection, *Happy/and*, was published by ECW Press in 2002. His most recent collection, *Drift*, was published by House of Anansi Press in 2005, and won the Trillium Book Award for Poetry. Kevin Connolly lives with his partner, the novelist Gil Adamson, in Toronto.

Summary: Kevin Connolly's *Revolver* is a daring marriage of brilliant technical skill and explosive imagination. Each of the poems in this latest collection is written in a different vocal register – "revolving" through poetic voices with precise control and sharp wit. Connolly reveals himself to be one of the few poets in Canada who can pull off such a highwire act and make it both thrilling and meaningful.



THE GRIFFIN TRUST
For Excellence In Poetry

Canadian Shortlist



***Crabwise to the Hounds* • Jeramy Dodds**
Coach House Books

Judges' Citation: “ ‘We are only allowed to live/due to some colossal misunderstanding’ writes Jeramy Dodds in this astonishing first book. The exploration of this misunderstanding is the subject of *Crabwise to the Hounds*, and Dodds’ language confronts the entropy with some wondrous chaos of its own. There is a cyclonic lexical energy here, deep intelligence, and a serious commitment to craft. His poems build and infold all at once, and opposing forces create incredible tension in them: the reader’s mouth, open in awe, next barks a disbelieving laugh. There’s more than a little of Buster Keaton here, threading his body through a window in a falling wall: simple marvels that stop you in your own tracks when you begin to think about how they were done. The author seems *sui generis* at first, but then you sense how lightly he’s stepped through the bramble of various inheritances to find his own voice, and on the first try. In ‘Making Sure’, for instance, Dodds harnesses both Tim Lilburn and William Stafford at the same moment as he’s claiming a certain territory for his own now: the natural world occupied by an ineluctable machinery. He builds against it this machine of language in which Glenn Gould negotiates the Danube, Ho Chi Min has gone to ‘repair/the night through a colander of stars’, the aviary has a recovery wing, and even the act of sipping water is reinvented: ‘In stride with the clock’s/ hypnotics, his throat chops a glass of water/down’. A research archaeologist by training, Dodds is sounding the deeps here. A marvellous debut.”

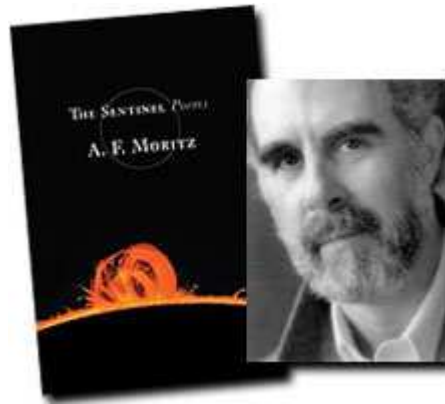
Biography: Jeramy Dodds lives in Orono, Ontario. His poems have been translated into Finnish, French, Latvian, Swedish, German and Icelandic. In 2007 he held a residency at the Baltic Centre for Writers and Translators on the island of Gotland, Sweden. He is the winner of the 2006 Bronwen Wallace Memorial Award and the 2007 CBC Literary Award in poetry. He works as a research archaeologist and co-edits for littlefishcartpress.

Summary: The poems in Jeramy Dodds’ first collection – with cameos by jackalopes, Glenn Gould, homemade spaceships and Carl Linnaeus – are remarkable for their technical agility and their restless inventiveness. ... these poems invoke historical figures like Hiram Bingham and Ho chi Minh even as they traverse a poetic landscape that includes telephone-game-style translations, interpretive dance poems on historic paintings and carnivalesque jaunts into a natural world overrun with mules, Alsatians, lions and motorcycle-sized deer.



THE GRIFFIN TRUST
For Excellence In Poetry

Canadian Shortlist



***The Sentinel* • A. F. Moritz**

House of Anansi Press

Judges' Citation: "A. F. Moritz has beautiful command of what William Empson called 'a long delicate rhythm based on straight singing lines'. In his extraordinary collection *The Sentinel*, we never lose our bearing, so sure is his formal grace, even as we are carried into fabulous circumstance, get lost in places we know, are found in imaginary cities or in any 'prosperous country'. We read his fable of a city awaiting the arrival of a butterfly and stand with the crowd in wonder, as a creature so large it blots out the sun transforms to 'a humble yellow thing', so menacing and loud it crashes to the sea 'like a fighter jet' but erupts in 'a burst of quiet'. After such a dazzling show, we are left with unreadable feelings to watch 'the black ocean again'. It is a place Moritz often asks us to stand. He is at once moved and troubled by 'the black imperial/Roman traces' that our language shares with the classical poets, numbering himself among the barbarians with their 'slaughter/and triumph'. He stares out between the bars of its alphabet at the 'darkness/of useless vigilance', or inwardly as 'the keeper/of my own breast'. In the title poem, the one keeping watch – a figure, we now know, for the poet – stands on either side of two forms of darkness, 'the outward/dark before his face' and the dark of the camp at his back, where he imagines soldiers settling down to sleep. Their 'dreams of bleeding inwardly' are the dreams of this unsettling, superb collection of poems."

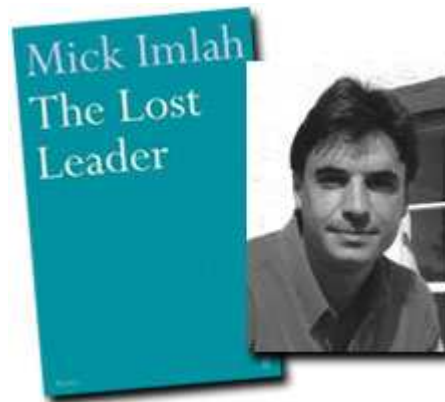
Biography: A. F. Moritz has written more than 15 books of poetry. He has been a finalist for the Governor General's Literary Award and he has won the Award in Literature of the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters and a Guggenheim Fellowship. His recent collection, *Night Street Repairs*, published by House of Anansi Press in 2005, won the ReLit Award and *The Sentinel* was given *Poetry* magazine's Bess Hokin Prize. A. F. Moritz lives in Toronto and teaches at Victoria University.

Summary: Mortality, love, ethics, civilization, divine presence, human body, modernity, the natural world and constructed spaces. *The Sentinel* watches and reports back to us in a voice that is timeless and worthy of trust. Whether describing renewal and regeneration, the despair brought on by global capitalism, or a place where decay and loss meet their antithesis, A. F. Moritz's magisterial voice, rare insight and supple craft are on impressive display.



THE GRIFFIN TRUST
For Excellence In Poetry

International Shortlist



***The Lost Leader* • Mick Imlah**

Faber and Faber

Judges' Citation: "Mick Imlah's masterful *The Lost Leader* is populated by voices and revenants that point to or joke with or slip in bits of the ballads, songs, and legends of Scotland that his elder Edwin Muir said 'no poet in Scotland now can take as his inspiration'. Muir's observation or injunction invites Imlah to wonder who or what can guide him now. He answers with the beautifully idiosyncratic, local, learned, teeming poems in this startling collection – the work of twenty years. Fiercely unelegiac, the book keeps equal company with the dead and the living, in its combination of demotic, modern, and archaic speech, trading in stories of legend, prophesy, insult, sport, alcohol, love, and neglect. Haunted by forgotten figures, lost guides, the divided, leaderless, often feckless characters in Imlah's poems have to make their own way, now that 'the fire of belonging was out'. They find temporary forms of shelter, 'a poor shift made/Between rain and wood', a room in a boarding house, a telephone box, a literary reputation. The poet himself seems to have declared a homecoming, not to the island Iona but to a child who is given its name. But he still wants to answer 'the mean/prophetic of a closed book' for the restless, homeless spirits he has evoked. He ends his own book with the brilliant 'Afterlives of the Poets', which draws on the company of Tennyson [celebrated therefore forgotten] and James Thomson [obscure and forgotten], musing on what's left to us of their lives and pages. He recovers the lost, leaving their books open for us. And, as his closes, he joins their company."

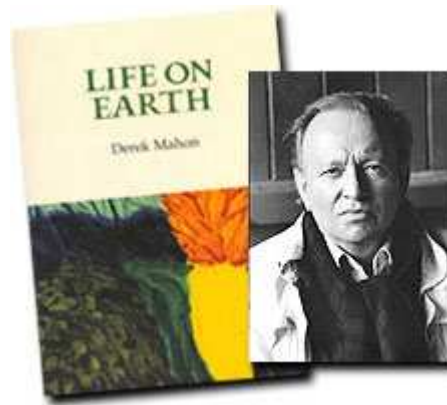
Biography: Mick Imlah was born in 1956 and brought up near Glasgow and in Kent. He was editor of the *Poetry Review* from 1983 to 1986, and had worked at the *Times Literary Supplement* since 1992. He edited *The New Penguin Book of Scottish Verse* (with Robert Crawford, 2000) and made selections of the poems of Tennyson and Edwin Muir for Faber and Faber. *The Lost Leader* is Mick Imlah's first collection of poetry in 20 years. It won the 2008 Forward Prize and was shortlisted for the 2008 T. S. Eliot Prize. In the autumn of 2007 Mick Imlah was given a diagnosis of motor neurone disease (also known as ALS/Lou Gehrig's disease) and died on January 12, 2009. He is survived by his partner, Maren Meinhardt, and their two daughters.

Summary: Imlah's approach to Scottish folklore – spanning the Wallace and the Bruce; the Bonnie Prince (pivotal Lost Leader of the title), Robert Burns and Walter Scott; whisky, Clydeside and football – is brilliantly fresh, a modern, sardonic but strongly-felt rendering of Scotland: from AD 500, by way of a guided tour of Iona, to yesterday at a Dumfries bus depot. As the chronicle reaches the twentieth century, the poems turn to friends and family – childhood reminiscences, elegies and celebrations – influenced still by sporting and military fantasy, the charm of history and the power of anachronism.



THE GRIFFIN TRUST
For Excellence In Poetry

International Shortlist



***Life on Earth* • Derek Mahon**

The Gallery Press

Judges' Citation: "Formal grace, uncluttered diction, and sprightliness of movement lend Derek Mahon's new poems a musicality and memorability which is intensified by their visionary gaze and their poignant yearning for unspoiled and unsoiled places: 'blue skies, /clear water, scattered light'. His light-filled work celebrates the sun's life-sustaining powers; yet he also fears the heat of the sun in the context of global warming: 'Sea levels rising annually, /glaciers sliding fast, /species extinct...' Mahon is drawn to the lives, worlds and work of other artists; a vivid bio-poem, retracing Coleridge's life, and an atmospheric poem evoking the post-war Belfast of the novelist Brian Moore are set alongside elegant versions of Ovid [the desolate 'Ariadne on Naxos'] and Ibsen [the haunting and unsettling 'The Lady from the Sea']. Visual art features prominently too: a sequence of 'Art Notes' re-creates the paintings of Edward Hopper, Howard Hodgkin, René Magritte and others with meticulously-crafted mastery. An outstanding collection from one of Ireland's most acclaimed poets."

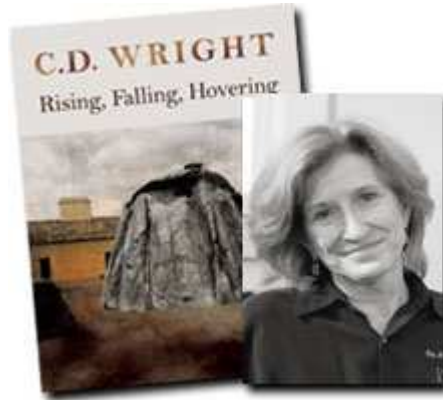
Biography: Derek Mahon was born in Belfast in 1941 and studied French literature at Trinity College Dublin and at the Sorbonne. He lived for many years in London, working variously as a reviewer, television adaptor of literary texts for British television and poetry editor of the *New Statesman*. More recently he has lived in Dublin and Kinsale. He is regarded as one of the most accomplished and influential of contemporary Irish poets. He has influenced not only a younger generation of British and Irish poets but has also been one of the influences on a new school of Scandinavian poets centred in Oslo and Gothenburg. He has been described as one of the most musical of poets now writing in English. Derek Mahon received the 2007 David Cohen Prize, for recognition of a lifetime's achievement in literature.

Summary: *Life on Earth* collects and adds to works which have appeared recently in limited editions. It opens with celebrations of notable exemplars: Coleridge, Chekhov, the novelist Brian Moore. This echo poetry extends to "Art Notes" on Hopper, de Staël and others, followed by the eco-poetry of the "Homage to Gaia" sequence on environmental themes. A substantial and positive volume distinguished by its light touch, *Life on Earth* is the work of a supreme artist.



THE GRIFFIN TRUST
For Excellence In Poetry

International Shortlist



***Rising, Falling, Hovering* • C. D. Wright**
Copper Canyon Press

Judges' Citation: "C. D. Wright's thirteenth collection, *Rising, Falling, Hovering*, reminds us what poetry is for. This is poetry as white phosphorus, written with merciless love and depthless anger, but it is 'not a chemical weapon, it's an incendiary ... it is for illumination'. *Rising, Falling, Hovering* is about conflict, local and global, and how failures of the heart bring disaster on every scale. In the long poem that anchors this book, Wright ties together the war in Iraq, the war on the poor, the challenges borders present, and family crises to create a portrait of the human soul riven by separateness. It is, primarily, a red-hot political epic, in which Wright states 'to be ashamed is to be American' and that 'happiness is for amateurs'. And yet, how can we react to a poetry this alive with invention and purpose but with joy? In *Rising, Falling, Hovering*, C. D. Wright wakes the reader – from dreams of both a perfect world and one drowned in horror – to the saving beauty of clear sight. Over a long career marked by deep moral engagement and constant reinvention, Wright has placed herself and her readers 'at a crossroads', as she writes, which is not just a place, but 'the very instant you stopped looking for meaning and began rifling among the folds of feeling instead where things were to be made new again ...' "

Biography: C. D. Wright was born and raised in the Ozark Mountains of Arkansas. She has published 12 previous poetry collections. Her collaboration with photographer Deborah Luster, a journey into the prison-industrial complex entitled *One Big Self*, was honoured with a Lange-Taylor Prize from the Center for Documentary Studies. Wright has also received fellowships from the MacArthur Foundation, the Guggenheim Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Lannan Foundation. In the 1990s she served for five years as the State Poet of Rhode Island. Wright is currently the Israel J. Kapstein Professor of English at Brown University, and lives outside Providence, Rhode Island.

Summary: Deeply personal and politically ferocious, *Rising, Falling, Hovering* addresses... "the commonly felt crises of [our] times" – from illegal immigration and the specific consequences of empire to the challenges of parenting and the honesty required of human relationships.



THE GRIFFIN TRUST
For Excellence In Poetry

International Shortlist



***Primitive Mentor* • Dean Young**
University of Pittsburgh Press

Judges' Citation: "Dean Young is a high-energy poet of copious invention and bold imagination. His vigorous, vibrant, fast-paced poems make startling connections between highly improbable things as they take the measure of a world too variegated and complex to be fully comprehended, a 'world so full/of detail yet so vague'. A Dean Young poem may set off from anywhere ['I am not a flower./I am a chunk of meat/sprayed by the department store cosmetic technicians'] and may lead anywhere ['My real mother burst into flame/smoking a Chesterfield in a paper shift']. His zany wit and hyperactive surrealism are all the more compelling for their capacity to suddenly morph into an elegiac register, marked by piquant ruminations on evanescence, mortality and death. As entertaining as they are original, as resourceful as they are beguiling, Young's mesmeric poems convey a uniquely accurate sense of life as it is experienced in the fraught and tumultuous circumstances of the globalised twenty-first century."

Biography: Dean Young has published eight previous books, most recently *elegy on toy piano*, which was named a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize, and *Embryoyo*. His collection *Skid* was a finalist for the Lenore Marshall Prize. Young has received fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts. In 2007 he received an Academy Award in Literature from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. He teaches at The Writers' Workshop at the University of Iowa and in the Warren Wilson Low Residency Program. Dean Young divides his time between Berkeley, California, and Iowa City, Iowa, residing with his wife, the novelist Cornelia Nixon.

Summary: In *Primitive Mentor*, Young applies his wit and humour to a wide spectrum of topics: the afterlife, sex with strangers, loneliness, and his outlook on life. In this ninth collection, Dean Young remains as entertaining, imaginative and inventive as ever. He asks striking questions: "Why aren't we more terrified of sleep,/of consciousness extinguished and no/guarantee of return?" and makes unusual observations: "Some people should not/be exposed to modern art or permitted/gum."

NOTE: Summaries taken from promotional materials supplied by the publisher, unless otherwise noted.