



THE GRIFFIN TRUST
For Excellence In Poetry

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Press Release

**THE GRIFFIN POETRY PRIZE ANNOUNCES
THE 2011 INTERNATIONAL AND CANADIAN SHORTLIST**

TORONTO – April 5, 2011 – Scott Griffin, founder of The Griffin Trust For Excellence In Poetry and David Young, trustee, announced the International and Canadian shortlist for this year's prize noting that judges Tim Lilburn (Canada), Colm Toibín (Ireland) and Chase Twichell (USA) each read 450 books of poetry, including 20 translations, from poets in 37 countries around the globe. The seven finalists – three Canadian and four International – will be invited to read in Toronto at Koerner Hall at The Royal Conservatory in the TELUS Centre for Performance and Learning, 273 Bloor Street West, Toronto on Tuesday, May 31, 2011. The seven finalists will be awarded \$10,000 for their participation in the shortlist readings.

The winners, announced at the Griffin Poetry Prize Awards evening on Wednesday, June 1, 2011, will be awarded \$65,000 each.

International Shortlist

***Human Chain* • Seamus Heaney**

Farrar, Straus and Giroux

***Adonis: Selected Poems* • Khaled Mattawa, translated from the Arabic written by Adonis**

Yale University Press

***The Book of the Snow* • Philip Mosley, translated from the French written by François Jacqmin**

Arc Publications

***Heavenly Questions* • Gjertrud Schnackenberg**

Farrar, Straus and Giroux

Canadian Shortlist

***Ossuaries* • Dionne Brand**

McClelland & Stewart

***The Irrationalist* • Suzanne Buffam**

House of Anansi Press

***Lookout* • John Steffler**

McClelland & Stewart



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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.

Tickets for the Readings to be held on Tuesday, May 31, 2011, at Koerner Hall at The Royal Conservatory in the TELUS Centre for Performance and Learning, 273 Bloor Street West, Toronto are available at <http://performance.rcmusic.ca> or by calling 416 408 0208.

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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. Contact info@griffinpoetryprize.com to inquire about ordering these items. Winner stickers will be available after June 1, 2011.

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Links:

Shortlisted Publishers' Web sites:

Arc Publications: www.arcpublications.co.uk
Farrar, Straus and Giroux: www.fsgbooks.com
House of Anansi Press: www.anansi.ca
McClelland & Stewart: www.mcclelland.com/poetry
Yale University Press: www.yalebooks.com

Downloadable photographs of the 2011 shortlisted poets:

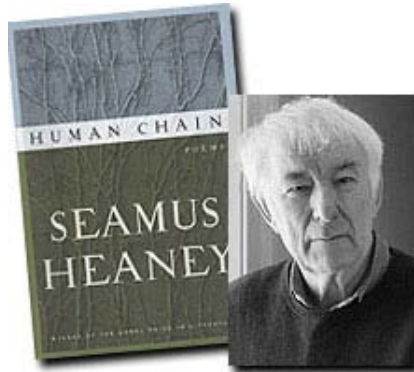
<http://www.griffinpoetryprize.com/news-and-events/media-resources/>



THE GRIFFIN TRUST
For Excellence In Poetry

THE 2011 GRIFFIN POETRY PRIZE SHORTLIST
CITATIONS, BIOGRAPHIES AND SUMMARIES

International Shortlist



***Human Chain* • Seamus Heaney**

Farrar, Straus and Giroux

Judges' Citation: "The poems in Seamus Heaney's *Human Chain* contain tones and phrases that are perfectly tuned; they are true to memory and loss, and somehow miraculously they also manage to offer a vision of what is above or beyond the mere facts. The feeling is elegiac but also loosened and buoyant. Memory in these poems is filled with tones of regret and undertones of anguish, but it can also appear in cadences of hard-won wonder. There is an active urge in the rhythms of these poems to capture the living breath of things; sometimes the breath is hushed, and other times wise and resigned in its way of holding rhythms in and then releasing them. In the most ambitious poem, Heaney wanders in the shadow of Virgil's *Aeneid*, making his own journey in memory across Northern Ireland, allowing images and recollections in all their sonorous beauty to hit sharply against the sense of a time that has past, and can be recovered now in ways which are controlled but insistent in these poems."

Biography: Seamus Heaney was born in Northern Ireland. *Death of a Naturalist*, his first collection, appeared in 1966, and since then he has published poetry, criticism, and translations that have established him as one of the leading poets of his generation. He has twice won the Whitbread Book of the Year award, for *The Spirit Level* (1996) and *Beowulf* (1999). In 1995 he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature. *District and Circle*, his eleventh collection of poems, was published in 2006 and was awarded the T. S. Eliot Prize.

Summary: Seamus Heaney's new collection elicits continuities and solidarities – between husband and wife, child and parent, then and now – inside an intently remembered present: the stepping stones of the day, the weight and heft of what is passed from hand to hand, lifted and lowered. *Human Chain* also broaches larger questions of transmission, of lifelines to the inherited past.



THE GRIFFIN TRUST
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International Shortlist



***Adonis: Selected Poems* • Khaled Mattawa, translated from the Arabic written by Adonis**
Yale University Press

Judges' Citation: "Adonis, along with Saadi Yousef and Mahmoud Darwish, has helped to bring into being modern Arabic poetry. Masterfully translated by Khaled Mattawa, his *Selected Poems* show a range comparable to Lorca's, stretching from the sensuous to the political. When he left the Syrian socialist party in the early Sixties, Adonis left all traditional politics behind only to become committed to deep cultural transformation through the creative energies of poetry, in a quest for what could be called an Arabic modernism. In the case of his poetry, this new mode takes the form of a combination of metaphysics, interiority and solidarity, a hybrid present as well in the poetry of Rumi and the thought of Ibn Arabi. 'I sang of gardens and a towering palace/while in wretchedness, in attics hid./Tell him who used to sleep on soft cushions/that the heights are being punished by a star.' From the swooping, Whitmanesque, epic voice of the early *Songs of Mihyar of Damascus*, to the erotic mysticism of the long poem "Body" and the subdued meditations of *Beginnings of the Body, Ends of the Sea*, we are in the presence of a poet of global importance."

Biographies: Khaled Mattawa is assistant professor of language and literature at the University of Michigan. Born in Benghazi, Libya, he emigrated to the United States as a teenager. He is the author of four books of poetry, most recently *Tocqueville*, and has translated five books of Arab poetry. Mattawa has received a PEN award for literary translation, a Guggenheim fellowship, and two Pushcart Prizes. He has just been selected by the Academy of American Poets as the recipient of the 2010 Academy Fellowship.

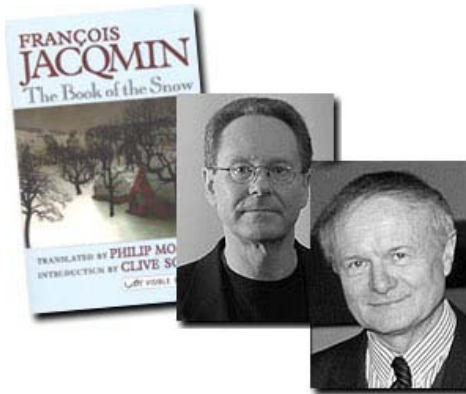
Adonis (born Ali Ahmad Said Esber) is a Syrian poet and essayist who led the modernist movement in Arabic poetry in the second half of the 20th century. He has written more than 20 books in his native Arabic, including the pioneering work *An Introduction to Arab Poetics*. Adonis received the Bjørnston Prize in 2007, the first International Nâzım Hikmet Poetry Award, the Syria-Lebanon Best Poet Award, and the highest award of the International Poem Biennial in Brussels. Elected a member of the Stéphane Mallarmé Academy in 1983, he lives in Paris.

Summary: Experimental in form and prophetic in tone, Adonis's poetry sings exultantly of both the sweet promise of Eros and the lingering problems of the self. Steeped in the anguish of exile and the uncertainty of existence, Adonis demonstrates the poet's profound affection for Arabic and European lyrical traditions even as his poems work to destabilize those very aesthetic and moral sensibilities.



THE GRIFFIN TRUST
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International Shortlist



***The Book of the Snow* • Philip Mosley, translated from the French written by François Jacqmin**
Arc Publications

Judges' Citation: “François Jacqmin’s *The Book of the Snow* displays a poetry which is pure, abstract and uncompromising, but also deeply felt, utterly precise, attuned to the complexity of the world. It takes the language of philosophy, of speculation and meditation, and adds to it a rich calm cadence; every image has a real and exact value. The short poems are surrounded with terms which seem to gesture towards saying something which is true and towards something else which is beyond mere truth. The central paradox of Jacqmin’s poetry is the human mind’s need to speak played against a profound suspicion of language. The unmarked snowy fields, the mind before thought, the blank silence that underlies all human expression—these are the slates on which these poems form and disintegrate. The poems in Philip Mosley’s translation are thus filled with a mysterious beauty; they have a sort of shimmering quality. They are poems filled with both the world’s weather and a weather which belongs to language purely and exquisitely shaped and sculpted.”

Biographies: Philip Mosley is Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Pennsylvania State University. He earned his M.A. in European literature and his Ph.D. in comparative literature from the University of East Anglia. He has translated *The Intelligence of Flowers* by Maurice Maeterlinck, *Bruges-la-Morte* by Georges Rodenbach, *Tea Masters*, *Teahouses* by Werner Lambersy, and *October Long Sunday* by Guy Vaes. In 2008 he was awarded the Prix de la Traduction Littéraire by the French Community of Belgium for his translations of Belgian authors into English.

François Jacqmin, acknowledged as one of the foremost francophone Belgian poets of the latter half of the twentieth century, was born in 1929 in Horion-Hozémont in the province of Liège. In 1940 his family fled to England to escape the German occupation. He returned to Belgium in 1948 and rediscovered his native language and literature. His three major volumes of poetry are *Les Saisons* (1979), *Le Domino gris* (1984), and *Le Livre de la neige* (1990). *Éléments de géométrie*, a volume of prose poems written a few years before his death in 1992, was published in 2005.

Summary: An intriguing set of short, deceptively simple poems, *The Book of the Snow* meditates on the austere beauty and elemental power of the midwinter scene. It is also a subtle, witty, occasionally savage critique of our philosophical and artistic complacency. Mosley’s beautifully modulated translation of the last collection to be published in the poet’s lifetime, makes available to English-language readers for the first time the work of one of Belgium’s foremost francophone poets of the twentieth century.



THE GRIFFIN TRUST
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International Shortlist



***Heavenly Questions* • Gjertrud Schnackenberg**

Farrar, Straus and Giroux

Judges' Citation: "Throughout her career, Gjertrud Schnackenberg has been widely admired for her elegant, inventive, and musically complex prosody, her emotional decorum, and her timeless frames of reference. *Heavenly Questions* is a book that has all of these qualities, yet moves far beyond them. Its six long poems tell a story of epic scale, creating a world large enough to contain Classical and Buddhist mythologies, a personal human drama of rare power, and the mathematics of physical existence (among many other things) while making them seem like entirely natural neighbors. This magic comes to us in a great upheaval of brilliant prosodic rule-breaking and reinvention. Describing these poems as blank verse heavily enriched by rhyme does not begin to describe the power of their formal realization. Reading this book is like reading the ocean, its swells and furrows, its secrets fleetingly revealed and then blown away in gusts of foam and spray or folded back into nothing but water. *Heavenly Questions* demands that we come face to face with matters of mortal importance, and it does so in a wildly original music that is passionate, transporting, and heart-rending."

Biography: Gjertrud Schnackenberg was born in Tacoma, Washington, in 1953. *The Throne of Labdacus* (2000) received the Los Angeles Times Book Prize in Poetry.

Summary: *Heavenly Questions*, the first new collection of poems from Gjertrud Schnackenberg since her critically acclaimed *The Throne of Labdacus*, finds her at the height of her talents and showcases her continued growth as an artist. In six long poems, Schnackenberg's rhyme-rich blank verse, with its densely packed images, shifts effortlessly between the lyric and the epic, setting passion to a verbal music that is recognizably her own. An exceptional and moving new collection from one of the most talented American poets of our time, *Heavenly Questions* is a work of intellectual, aesthetic, and technical innovation – and, more than that, a deeply compassionate and strikingly personal work.



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***Ossuaries* • Dionne Brand**
McClelland & Stewart

Judges' Citation: "What Dionne Brand has done in *Ossuaries* is amazing. Working with a novel-length narrative about the life of an activist named Yasmine, who lives an underground existence on various continents, she has constructed a long poem, which is not a traditional seamless epic, nor a Poundian extended collage, but something else that seems quite new. The most remarkable part of her achievement is that in fulfilling the novelistic narrative ambition of her work, she has not sacrificed the tight lyrical coil of the poetic line. The story vaults us ahead with its emerging and receding characters, its passions and dramas, which include a violent bank robbery and tense escape, while each line holds us and demands we admire its complex beauties. The sensation of hurtling and, at the same time, being caught is uncanny. Brand's innovation on *Ossuaries* calls forth an entirely new sort of reading. The book is a triumph."

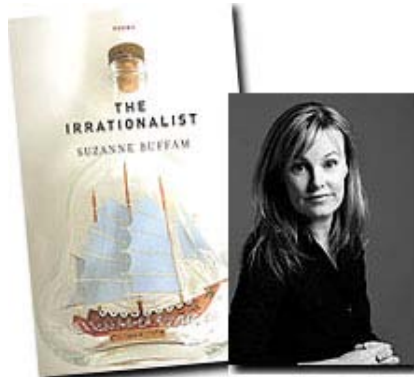
Biography: Dionne Brand's previous collections of poetry include *Land to Light On*, winner of the Governor General's Award and the Trillium Book Award; *thirsty*, winner of the Pat Lowther Memorial Award and a finalist for the Trillium Book Award, the Toronto Book Award, and the Griffin Poetry Prize; and *Inventory*, a finalist for the Pat Lowther Memorial Award and the Governor General's Award. In 2006, Brand was awarded the prestigious Harbourfront Festival Prize, and in 2009, she was named Toronto's Poet Laureate.

Summary: Dionne Brand's hypnotic, urgent long poem – her first book of poetry in four years, is about the bones of fading cultures and ideas, about the living museums of spectacle where these bones are found. At the centre of *Ossuaries* is the narrative of Yasmine, a woman living an underground life, fleeing from past actions and regrets, in a perpetual state of movement. She leads a solitary clandestine life, crossing borders actual (Algiers, Cuba, Canada), and timeless. Cold-eyed and cynical, she contemplates the periodic crises of the contemporary world. This is a work of deep engagement, sensuality, and ultimate craft from an essential observer of our time and one of the most accomplished poets writing today.



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Canadian Shortlist



***The Irrationalist* • Suzanne Buffam**

House of Anansi Press

Judges' Citation: "Suzanne Buffam's *The Irrationalist* takes nothing for granted. Its rhythms manage to mimic the mind at work, the mind edgy and witty and sharp. The tones are brave and sweeping, ready to re-define the world, alert not only to history and the exigencies of the contemporary, but also to larger questions to do with philosophy, with time and space. Buffam's talent is to find the startling, telling phrase, arranging and turning her lines and cadences with considerable surprise and flair. Some of the poems are funny; others capture culture and nature, or the connections between them, with intelligence, originality and wisdom. Her poetic systems are bathed in irony, but she is also capable of allowing language to soar. In her three-line poem 'On Last Lines', she sums up the power of her own poetic gift: 'The last line should strike like a lover's complaint./ You should never see it coming./ And you should never hear the end of it.'"

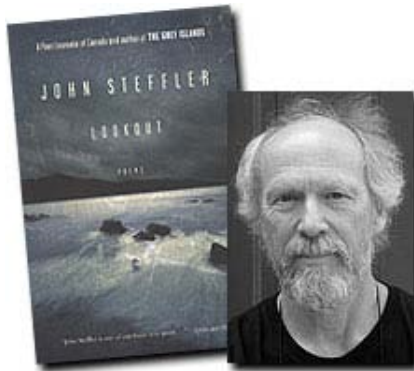
Biography: Suzanne Buffam's first collection of poetry, *Past Imperfect*, won the Gerald Lampert Memorial Award for Poetry, was named a *Globe and Mail* "Top 100" Book of the Year, and was longlisted for the ReLit Award. She won the 1998 CBC Literary Award for Poetry and has twice been shortlisted for a Pushcart Prize. Her poetry has appeared in various literary magazines and journals in the United States and Canada, including *Books in Canada*, *Poetry*, *Jubilat*, *A Public Space*, *The Canary*, *The Denver Quarterly*, *Prairie Schooner*, and *The Colorado Review*. Her work has also appeared in the anthologies *Language Matters*, *Breathing Fire: Canada's New Poets* and *Breaking the Surface*. A graduate of the Iowa Writers' Workshop and the Master's program in English at Concordia University, she currently teaches Creative Writing at the University of Chicago.

Summary: With Suzanne Buffam's second collection, this poet of unusual range, formal rigour, and imaginative force introduces us to the wry meditations of a Chaplinesque literary "Irrationalist" who pursues her own poetic logic beyond the bounds of reason. In the book's deadpan opening lines our narrator travels nimbly from Genesis to the Age of Exploration to the Cold War, deftly transporting us along: "In the beginning was the world. /Then the new world. /Then the new world order." Throughout the collection, in resolutely modern, rueful and eccentric lyrics, Buffam investigates the shifting grounds of knowledge while refusing to take any philosophical authority too seriously. Together, these poems compose a swift, durable, protean argument for the necessity of interior maps in a world that may be on the eve of extinction, but whose darkness is continually illuminated by a pyrotechnics of curiosity, candour, and wit.



THE GRIFFIN TRUST
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Canadian Shortlist



***Lookout* • John Steffler**
McClelland & Stewart

Judges' Citation: “The playful spontaneity that enlivens John Steffler’s *Lookout* moves through the poems like wind, revealing both their flexibility and their sturdiness. With a passionate naturalist’s trained and ever-curious eye, Steffler is interested in what happens both in and out of sight. In language that ranges from affable story-telling to tough, spare, startling lyrics, he probes the complex collisions between Nature and humankind without inflicting upon his subject any of the ecological ranting, self-dramatizing grief, or faux-mysticism that infects so much contemporary “nature poetry.” Modest, plainspoken, and unsentimental in stance, his poems are at the same time untethered to the literal, which allows for sudden and unnerving swerves, poems that decisively and unpredictably break the membrane between realms, as when a vole with “a laugh like a snowplow’s blade” begins to speak, or rifts appear in a loved one’s memory, allowing reality and fantasy, past and present, to dissolve into one another. Steffler’s quality of attention is so fierce and so assured that we trust it to lead us into new and often unsettling territory. In *Lookout*, his masterful inter-leaving of physical, philosophical, and psychological worlds entices us into a dream of wakefulness we recognize as our own.”

Biography: John Steffler was the Parliamentary Poet Laureate of Canada from 2006 to 2008. His previous books of poetry include *The Grey Islands*, *That Night We Were Ravenous*, winner of the Atlantic Poetry Prize, and *Helix: New and Selected Poems*, winner of the Newfoundland and Labrador Poetry Prize. Steffler is also the author of the award-winning novel *The Afterlife of George Cartwright*.

Summary: The poems in John Steffler’s new collection are enlivened by the same muscular acts of attention that characterize his earlier books. As always, his poems inhabit experience fully, senses on high alert, transmitting the abundance and turbulence of physical existence; they are charged with the raw Eros of being. Nowhere – not in Canada nor in the world at large – is there a more complete nature poet: attuned, robust, honest, fully informal, and emotionally candid, brimming with energy and animal spirits.

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