



THE GRIFFIN TRUST
For Excellence In Poetry

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Press Release

**THE GRIFFIN POETRY PRIZE ANNOUNCES
THE 2012 INTERNATIONAL AND CANADIAN SHORTLIST**

TORONTO – April 10, 2012 – 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. Judges Heather McHugh (USA), David O'Meara (Canada) and Fiona Sampson (England) each read 481 books of poetry, from 37 countries, including 19 translations.

The seven finalists – four International and three Canadian – 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 Wednesday, June 6th. The seven finalists will each be awarded \$10,000 for their participation in the Shortlist Readings.

The winners, announced at the Griffin Poetry Prize Awards evening on Thursday, June 7th, will each be awarded \$65,000.

International

Night • **David Harsent**
Faber and Faber

The Chameleon Couch • **Yusef Komunyakaa**
Farrar, Straus and Giroux

November • **Sean O'Brien**
Picador

Sobbing Superpower: Selected Poems of Tadeusz Różewicz • **Joanna Trzeciak**
translated from the Polish, written by Tadeusz Różewicz
W.W. Norton & Company

Canadian

Methodist Hatchet • **Ken Babstock**
House of Anansi Press

Killdeer • **Phil Hall**
BookThug

Forge • **Jan Zwicky**
Gaspereau Press



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Each year, The Griffin Trust For Excellence In Poetry presents an anthology of poems selected 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. Copies of submitted poetry books will be donated to the Slave Lake Public Library, Slave Lake, Alberta.

Tickets for the Shortlist Readings to be held on Wednesday, June 6th, 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 book stickers are supplied free of charge by The Griffin Trust. Please contact info@griffinpoetryprize.com to place an order. Winner book stickers will be available after June 7th.

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Links: Shortlisted Publishers' Web sites:

BookThug: www.bookthug.ca
Faber and Faber: www.faber.co.uk
Farrar, Straus and Giroux: www.fsgbooks.com
Gaspereau Press: www.gaspereau.com
House of Anansi Press: www.anansi.ca
W.W. Norton & Company: www.wwnorton.com
Picador: www.picador.com

Downloadable photographs of the 2012 shortlisted poets:

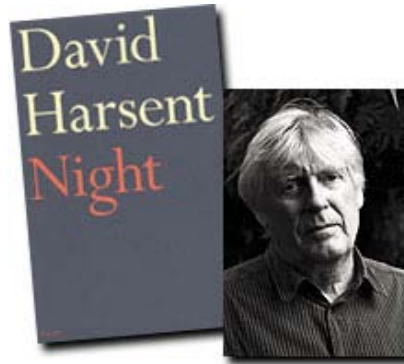
<http://www.griffinpoetryprize.com/news-and-events/media-resources/>



THE GRIFFIN TRUST
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THE 2012 GRIFFIN POETRY PRIZE SHORTLIST
CITATIONS, BIOGRAPHIES AND SUMMARIES

International



***Night* • David Harsent**

Faber and Faber

Judges' Citation: "David Harsent conducts an examination of the human psyche that is unique in both the unflinchingness of its gaze, and the fabular metaphors it uses to explore dream, terror and hidden impulse. Truly significant poets write like no-one else, and Harsent is both *sui generis* and unsurpassed. In *Night* an extraordinary imaginary is evoked, explored and even wrought by technique that shows its hand only gradually, as the patterning of rhythmic urges and sound-chimes reveal how extraordinarily through-composed the book is. This is at the same time poetry of supreme urgency, haunted by existential and contemporary necessities in which the homeless man in the underpass, the wild Goddess of back gardens, are trickster archetypes – and are our neighbours, too. A collection of tremendous rhythmic and formal variety, one which ranges from a set of colourist Abstracts to a Ballad, is dominated, but never overshadowed, by its last quarter. Extraordinarily-sustained, with more than four hundred lines composed in septets lightly patterned with slant, blanket stitch and internal rhymes, Elsewhere is quite simply a canonical poem. It is also a quest narrative that, like all Harsent's work, seems to pass right through its own genre, and return us to its origins in psychodrama and rite."

Biography: David Harsent has published nine collections of poetry. The most recent, *Legion*, won the Forward Prize for best collection in 2005 and was shortlisted for both the Whitbread Award and the T. S. Eliot Prize. His *Selected Poems* (2007) was shortlisted for the 2008 Griffin Poetry Prize.

Summary: Among the poems that open *Night*, David Harsent's follow-up to his Forward Prize-winning collection *Legion*, is a startling sequence about a garden – but a garden unlike any other. It sets the tone for a book in which the sureties of daylight become uncertain: dark, unsettling narratives about what wakes in us when we escape our day-lit selves to visit a place where the dream-like and the nightmarish are never far apart. The book culminates in the seductive and brilliantly sustained Elsewhere, a noirish, labyrinthine quest-poem in which the protagonist is drawn ever onward through a series of encounters and reflections like an after-hours Orpheus, hard-bitten and harried by memory.



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International



***The Chameleon Couch* • Yusef Komunyakaa**

Farrar, Straus and Giroux

Judges' Citation: "Alter egos, second selves figure largely in Komunyakaa's new poetry collection, *The Chameleon Couch*. In *The Hedonist*, successive masks are donned and discarded to feed the speaker's voracious appetite for experience, as throughout the book, personae are adopted – The Window Dresser, Adonis, Orpheus, the Ten or Eleven Disguises, a Mr. Decoy – to bear witness to the continual bartering of good and evil that comprise the fallen mythic world of the book's vision. Both speaking from direct experience and with the collective scrutiny of our shared civilization, where ages and cultures overlap, in the 'scuffle / between gods and human shadows,' the poems roam contemporary streets to the edges of crumbling empires, where the restless ghosts of history still linger on the corner. Beneath these masks, and central to the success of these poems, is Komunyakaa's singular voice: curious, doubtful, stubborn, damning and self-accusing, asserting itself against the never-tiring devastation wrought by history, its testimony 'good as making a wager against the eternal hush.' "

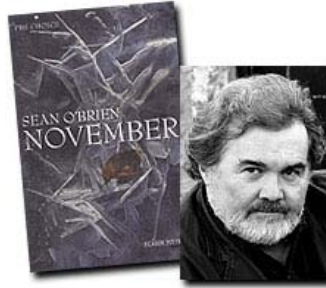
Biography: Yusef Komunyakaa's 13 books of poems include *Warhorses* (2008), *Taboo* (2004), and *Neon Vernacular: New and Selected Poems*, for which he received the Pulitzer Prize. He teaches at New York University.

Summary: This latest collection from Yusef Komunyakaa is one of his most personal to date. As in his breakthrough work *Copacetic*, Komunyakaa writes of music as muse – from a Blues club in the East Village to the Shakuhachi of Basho. Beginning with *Canticle*, this varied new collection often returns to the idea of poem-as-hymn, ethereal and haunting, as Komunyakaa reveals glimpses of memory, myth and violence. With contemplations that spring up along walks or memories conjured by the rhythms of New York, more than ever Komunyakaa pays tribute to those who came before him.



THE GRIFFIN TRUST
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International



November • Sean O'Brien

Picador

Judges' Citation: “*November* is a book of subtle virtuosity. O'Brien's skilled handling of rhythm, structure, narrative and image are on full display in this latest collection, rich in evidence of a careful, elegant mind at work. In *November* we approach year's end, a time of reassessment, of clear-eyed stock-taking and redirection. ‘Look away just for a moment. / Then look back and see...’ are the book's apt, opening lines. This turning away and back, this existential strophe and antistrophe, are like the picked-through furrows of a ploughed field where O'Brien paces us with a firm hand past sites of sober reckoning. Gates, graveyards, stations, junctions and the hazy light of more than one afternoon bar become sites of conciliation with both past and present, where ‘every failure brings you its account / for signing.’ Placed in these terrains of transition, peopled by the dedicatees of elegy and homage, *November* affirms, through accumulated detail, these disappearing worlds that ‘cannot be other than real.’ ”

Biography: Sean O'Brien has written six collections of poetry, most recently *The Drowned Book* (2007), which won the Forward and T. S. Eliot prizes; *Cousin Coat: Selected Poems 1976-2001* (2002) and other works which include the book of essays *The Deregulated Muse* (1998); the verse plays *The Birds* (2002); *Keepers of the Flame* (2003) and a verse translation of *Dante's Inferno* (2006); the short story collection *The Silence Room* (2008) and the novel *Afterlife* (2009). He is Professor of Creative Writing at Newcastle University.

Summary: *November* is haunted by the missing, the missed, the vanished, the uncounted, and the uncountable lost: lost sleep, connections, muses, books and the ghosts and gardens of childhood. Ultimately, these lead the poet to contemplate the most troubling absences: O'Brien's elegies for his parents and friends form the heart of this book, and are the source of its pervasive note of *depart*. Elsewhere – as if a French window stood open to an English room – the islands, canals, railway stations and undergrounds of O'Brien's landscape are swept by a strikingly Gallic air. This new note lends O'Brien's recent poems a reinvigorated sense of the imaginative possible: *November* shows O'Brien at the height of his powers, with his intellect and imagination as gratifyingly restless as ever.



THE GRIFFIN TRUST
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International



***Sobbing Superpower: Selected Poems of Tadeusz Różewicz* • Joanna Trzeciak, translated from the Polish written by Tadeusz Różewicz**

W.W. Norton and Company

Judges' Citation: "Hearts can smart, and kindnesses be minded. *Sobbing Superpower's* world-class document, compellingly assembled by Joanna Trzeciak, gives us an EKG-cum-EEG for an entire era – its double helix inscribed by that most sensitive device: a soul the equal of the world's occasion. A second global war had cast its blooming shade abroad, when Różewicz's carouseling lovers sang, on fabulous beast-back, in scarlet carnivale: 'let us adjust the paper ribbons and wreaths / crouch down: let hip touch hip / your thighs are alive / let us flee let us flee.' But Różewicz is himself too alive to history's evidence to pass off life and death as mutually exclusive: 'Man is killed just like an animal / I've seen: / truckloads of chopped up people ... // Concepts are only words: / ... / truth and lie / beauty and ugliness / courage and cowardice. // ... / I've seen: / a man...both / vicious and virtuous.' The etymological job of the skeptic: to keep an eye on things. Różewicz is that rare character – skeptic as full of passion as of intelligence, of warmth as wariness. Thanks to Trzeciak's deft, deferential translation, English readers see his place among stars of his Central-European generation – Herbert, Szymborska, Popa, Holub – poets who illustrate the power of a single plainsong to be heard over milling mobs; one sensibility to outweigh hours of broadcast nonsense; one oddball to resist the prefixed troopers; one poem's power to outlast the props of all sub-supers, super-sub. Over 60 years, with grand themes but plain speech, with mortal passion but Heraclitic judgment, in torment and in tenderness, Różewicz proves as wary of philosophy's bureaucracy as government's; as wary of heaven's offices as man's. Alert to our condition's own momentous momentariness, he's funny, fierce, or casual; but never inconsequential."

Biographies: Joanna Trzeciak's translations include *Miracle Fair: Selected Poems of Wislawa Szymborska*, winner of the Heldt Translation Prize. She lives in Cleveland, Ohio.

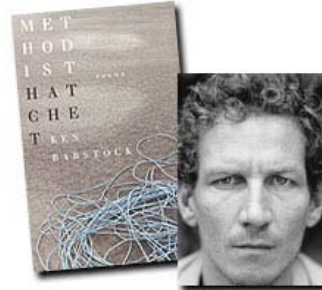
Tadeusz Różewicz was born in Radomsko, Poland, in 1921. During the Nazi occupation he joined the Polish resistance. Following the war, at the age of 26, he published his first collection of poems, *Anxiety*, which was received as the work of a major poet and redefined poetry after the Holocaust. A prolific poet and major playwright, Różewicz lives in Wrocław, Poland.

Summary: Trzeciak's stripped-down translation (as her foreword explains) tries to convey both Różewicz's plain speech and his frequently intricate allusion to writers and works from Polish, German, Russian, and English, among them Franz Kafka and Ezra Pound. "Of course I try to write/ light carefree / even with my left foot/ but it's tethered to a stone," a recent poem complains in a poetry able to incorporate almost anything, from headlines to the simplest sentences a child might say, which a disillusioned adult might need to hear again: "this is a man/ this is a tree this is bread// people eat to live."



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Canadian



***Methodist Hatchet* • Ken Babstock**

House of Anansi Press

Judges' Citation: "Babstock is the live wire in the gene pool: stirring things up, rocking boats, disjoining easier conjunctions, jolting the culture's DNA. From sea-and-skyscapes literally lettered, from the suspect core of our 'décors' ('lost heart' informs that fashion's stock and trade), he winds past mere mundanities to find the world again, with words for his divining wands. 'Money's the more virtual virtual,' Babstock writes. 'I don't talk this way in Real Life.' Cable-stitched by shopping channels, across northernmost America and more, desire is wired: With HGTV's IV, or the PC's ICU, we feed our merchandizing minds. 'We bought this stuff,' he says. Disclosure's what he's after, as wary of the cosy center as of the so-called cutting-edge. But get a load of those poetic closures: master craft in 'Wikileaks and sea smoke' weaving worlds of words together. Man of letters, he remarks the X's on workmen's safety vests; the V's descending out of Gander, headed for the kind of down discounted in an Army-Navy store. A shapely mind will note the uppers, too; they're cut with aspirin and talc. This guy is one ferocious logophile. A signature device, the 'disconnected current gauge,' trips all the switches: current cut off into currency – but also presents. It was 'a gift,' writes Babstock, with 'its needle stilled between / "Reverse clips" and "Start charge." Consult it / and it shivers on a hash mark.' Thus, in a flash, the disused item (mere décor) becomes occasion for a gift: the wordsmith talent, not the dollar sign, with other hashes hinted, other hushes marked. The old and new worlds hackable in just one comprehensive stun, this shock of shiver to be had. *Methodist Hatchet* lets us have it. Thus do local gifts turn into global ones."

Biography: Ken Babstock was born in Newfoundland and raised in the Ottawa Valley. He is the author of three previous collections of poetry, including *Airstream Land Yacht* which won the Trillium Book Award, was shortlisted for the 2007 Griffin Poetry Prize and the Governor General's Literary Award and was named a *Globe and Mail* Top 100 book. Ken Babstock lives in Toronto.

Summary: Marooned in the shiftless, unnamed space between a map of the world and a world of false maps, the poems in *Methodist Hatchet* cling to what's necessary from each, while attempting to sing their own bewilderment. Carolinian forest is echoed back as construction cranes in an urban skyline. Second Life returns as wildlife, as childhood. Even the poem itself – the idea of the poem – as a unit of understanding is shadowed by a great unknowing. Fearless in its language, its trajectories and frames of reference, *Methodist Hatchet* gazes upon the objects of its attention until they rattle and exude their auras of strangeness. It is this strangeness, this mysterious stillness, that is the big heart of Ken Babstock's playful, fierce, intelligent book.



THE GRIFFIN TRUST
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Canadian



***Killdeer* • Phil Hall**

BookThug

Judges' Citation: "Straddling the thin line between argument and lyric, the 'Essay-Poems' of *Killdeer* are deceptively prosodic, and can switch from the stark and factual to short flights of startling, gorgeous lyricism: 'Killdeer on my oozing stumps...Whipped the years' butcher block rings to crèche shavings... Her desperate ruse has settled into gunwales – her closed cry a prow's nib.' Suspicious of artifice, surgically self-evaluating, Hall's poems at once pay tribute to writers and friends who have shaped his sense of integrity while analyzing his own progress and methods as an artist. A record of private and imaginative growth, *Killdeer* builds a powerful narrative of recognition, attesting to the introspective mind's capacity to transgress pain. This document of the examined life, through its hard-nosed accretion of realizations, is remarkably moving as it rows tenaciously between 'islands of repair.' Full of unease, gratitude, humour, intellectual and personal challenges, and not without bite, *Killdeer* is a testament to the creative life as an act of faith and transformation."

Biography: Phil Hall's first small book, *Eighteen Poems*, was published by Cyanamid, the Canadian mining company, in Mexico City, in 1973. Among his many titles are: *Old Enemy Juice* (1988), *The Unsaid* (1992), and *Hearthedral – A Folk-Hermetic* (1996). In the early 80s, Phil was a member of the Vancouver Industrial Writers' Union, and also a member of the Vancouver Men Against Rape Collective. He has taught writing at York University, Ryerson University, Seneca College, George Brown College, and elsewhere. He has been poet-in-residence at Sage Hill Writing Experience (Saskatchewan), The Pierre Berton House (Dawson City, Yukon), and elsewhere. Hall also currently works as a poetry manuscript midwife, a distance program offered by the Toronto New School of Writing. In 2007, BookThug published Phil's long poem, *White Porcupine*. Also in 2007, he and his wife, Ann, walked the Camino de Santiago de Compostela. He is a member of the Writers' Union of Canada, and lives near Perth, Ontario. Recent books include *An Oak Hunch* (shortlisted for the Griffin Poetry Prize in 2006) and *The Little Seamstress*. In 2011, he won Canada's Governor General's Award for Poetry for his most recent collection, *Killdeer*, a work the jury called "a masterly modulation of the elegiac through poetic time."

Summary: These are poems of critical thought that have been influenced by old fiddle tunes. These are essays that are not out to persuade so much as ruminate, invite, accrue. Hall is a surrealist (rural and surreal), and a terroir-ist (township-specific regionalist). He offers memories of, and homages to, Margaret Laurence, Bronwen Wallace, Libby Scheier, and Daniel Jones, among others. He writes of the embarrassing process of becoming a poet, and of his push-pull relationship with the whole concept of home. In this book, the line is the unit of composition; the reading is wide; the perspective personal: each take a give, and logic a drawback. Language is not a smart aleck; it's a sacred tinkerer. Readers are invited to watch awe become a we.



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Canadian



***Forge* • Jan Zwicky**
Gaspereau Press

Judges' Citation: "In *Forge*, Jan Zwicky performs a balancing act of great poise and beauty. An extended set of variations on the theme of listening, the collection pays repeated attention to music – and through it, to the natural world and human relationships. Love and death are topics almost too risky to address directly, especially with this kind of breathless, caught-up writing: the stakes could not be higher. Zwicky addresses them fearlessly, making them meaningful and felt, and borrowing the languages of mystery, even religion, to do so. The payoff is real and extraordinary. Gracefully sustained, her unashamedly lyric verse always feels earned by, and earthed in, lived experience: whether of grief or companionship, those great conditions, or, repeatedly, of a watery world. This is a book gauzy with images of condensation, meltwater, flood and mist. It also manages the rare trick of taking on music's abstract forms. For all her precision, this poet brings us close to the music of abstraction that lies near the heart of true verse."

Biography: Jan Zwicky has published eight collections of poetry including *Songs for Relinquishing the Earth*, which won the Governor General's Literary Award in 1999, *Robinson's Crossing*, which won the Dorothy Livesay Prize and was shortlisted for the Governor General's Literary Award in 2004, and *Thirty-Seven Small Songs and Thirteen Silences*. Her books of philosophy include *Wisdom & Metaphor*, which was shortlisted for the Governor General's Literary Award in 2004, and *Plato as Artist*, a non-specialist celebration of Plato's writerly talents. Zwicky has published widely as an essayist on issues in music, poetry, philosophy and the environment. A native of Alberta, she now lives on Quadra Island, off the coast of British Columbia.

Summary: This new collection from Jan Zwicky is a set of variations that employs a restricted, echoic vocabulary to explore themes of spiritual catastrophe, transformation and erotic love.

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