



THE GRIFFIN TRUST
For Excellence In Poetry

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**THE GRIFFIN POETRY PRIZE ANNOUNCES
THE 2018 INTERNATIONAL AND CANADIAN SHORTLIST**

TORONTO - April 10, 2018 – Scott Griffin, on behalf of the trustees of The Griffin Trust For Excellence In Poetry, is pleased to announce the International and Canadian shortlist for this year's prize. Judges Sarah Howe (UK), Ben Lerner (USA), and Ian Williams (Canada) each read 542 books of poetry, from 33 countries, including 17 translations.

The authors of the seven shortlisted books – 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 6 at 7.30 p.m.

The finalists will each be awarded \$10,000 for their participation in the Shortlist Readings.

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

International

Heaven Is All Goodbyes • Tongo Eisen-Martin
City Lights

Debths • Susan Howe
New Directions

Whereas • Layli Long Soldier
Graywolf Press

Hard Child • Natalie Shapero
Copper Canyon Press

Canadian

This Wound is a World • Billy-Ray Belcourt
Frontenac House

I have to live. • Aisha Sasha John
McClelland & Stewart

Same Diff • Donato Mancini
Talonbooks



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Tickets for the Shortlist Readings to be held on Wednesday, June 6, at Koerner Hall at The Royal Conservatory in the TELUS Centre for Performance and Learning, 273 Bloor Street West, Toronto are available at <https://www.rcmusic.com/events-and-performances/griffin-poetry-prize-readings>, or by calling (416) 408-0208.

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. The 2018 Anthology can be purchased at <https://houseofanansi.com/products/the-2018-griffin-poetry-prize-anthology>.

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 7.

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Links: Shortlisted Publishers' Web sites:

City Lights: citylights.com/publishing
Copper Canyon: coppercanyonpress.org
Frontenac House: frontenachouse.com
Graywolf Press: graywolfpress.org
McClelland & Stewart:
penguinrandomhouse.ca/imprints/mcclelland-stewart
New Directions: ndbooks.com
Talonbooks: talonbooks.com

Downloadable photographs of the 2018 shortlisted poets:

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



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THE 2018 GRIFFIN POETRY PRIZE SHORTLIST
BIOGRAPHIES AND CITATIONS

International



***Heaven Is All Goodbyes* • Tongo Eisen-Martin**
City Lights

Biography: Tongo Eisen-Martin’s previous book, the critically acclaimed *someone’s dead already* (2015) was nominated for a California Book Award, and his poetry has been featured in *Harper’s Magazine*. He is also a movement worker and educator who has taught in detention centres from New York’s Rikers Island to California county jails. He has been a faculty member at the Institute for Research in African-American Studies at Columbia University, and his curriculum on the extrajudicial killing of Black People, “We Charge Genocide Again!”, has been used as an educational and organizing tool throughout America. He lives in San Francisco, California.

Judges’ Citation: “Tongo Eisen-Martin’s *Heaven Is All Goodbyes* moves between trenchant political critique and dreamlike association, demonstrating how, in the right hands, one mode might energize the other – keeping alternative orders of meaning alive in the face of radical injustice. Eisen-Martin’s voice is a chorus of other voices, many arising from prisons and landscapes of engineered poverty; his poems are places where discourses and vernaculars collide and recombine into new configurations capable of expressing outrage and sorrow and love. This unpredictable volume is equally a work of commitment and of wonder; no false consolation, no settling for despair. Its music makes a clearing in the dominant logic of the day. “When a drummer is present, he or she is God // “I am not an I. / I am a black commons.”



THE GRIFFIN TRUST
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International



***Debths* • Susan Howe**
New Directions

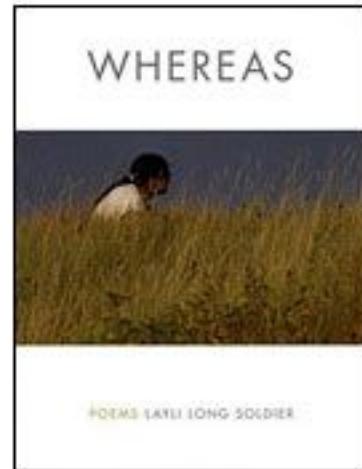
Biography: Author of more than a dozen books of poetry and two of literary criticism, Susan Howe's recent collection of poems *That This* won the Bollingen Prize in 2011. Howe held the Samuel P. Capen Chair in Poetry and the Humanities at the State University New York at Buffalo until her retirement in 2007. The recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship, she was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1999 and served as a Chancellor to the Academy of American Poets between 2000-2006. In 2009 she was awarded a Fellowship to the American Academy at Berlin. Recently, she was an Artist In Residence at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston. Howe has also released three CDs in collaboration with the musician/composer David Grubbs, *Thieft*, *Souls of the Labadie Tract*, and *Frolic Architecture*. In 2013 her word collages were exhibited at the Yale Union in Portland, Oregon, and in the Whitney Biennial Spring, 2014. Most recently, a limited press edition of *Tom Tit Tot* (word collages which amount to a series poem) with artwork by R. H. Quaytman has been published by MoMA in New York, and *Spontaneous Particulars: The Telepathy of Archives* by Christine Burgin and New Directions.

Judges' Citation: "In a lecture of 2014, Susan Howe quoted Robert Duncan on how poetry's secret lies in the "keeping of time": "Counting the measures. . . one image may recall another, finding depth in the resounding." It's an apt description of Howe's own method in her extraordinary new book, *Debths*, which continues to plumb the intertextual depths (also at once *debts* and *deaths*) of the archives and collections that have fed her work for almost thirty years. Across the book's four sections, we hear its poems resound in sympathy not only with their reinvented source materials, but with earlier moments in Howe's career - one of the most significant, innovative and humane in recent American letters - whose varied threads this new work draws triumphantly together. As Howe writes in her evocative foreword, "Secret connections among artifacts are audible and visible and yet hidden until you take a leap. . . It's the mystery of strong music in the soul." The strong music of *Debths* reveals itself in poems to be returned to again and again with growing astonishment and gratitude."



THE GRIFFIN TRUST
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International



Whereas • Layli Long Soldier
Graywolf Press

Biography: Layli Long Soldier earned a BFA from the Institute of American Indian Arts and an MFA with honours from Bard College. She is the author of the chapbook *Chromosomory* (2010) and the full-length collection *Whereas* (2017), which was a finalist for the National Book Awards. She has been a contributing editor to *Drunken Boat* and is poetry editor at Kore Press; in 2012, her participatory installation, *Whereas We Respond*, was featured on the Pine Ridge Reservation. In 2015, Long Soldier was awarded a National Artist Fellowship from the Native Arts and Cultures Foundation and a Lannan Literary Fellowship for Poetry. A citizen of the Oglala Lakota Nation, Long Soldier lives in Tsaile, Arizona, in the Navajo Nation, with her husband and daughter. She is an adjunct faculty member at Diné College.

Judges' Citation: "Layli Long Soldier's *Whereas* repurposes congressional doublespeak in order to lay bare the murderous hypocrisy lurking behind the official language of the state. Deftly deploying a variety of techniques and idioms, Long Soldier has crafted an intricate and urgent counter-history, a work of elegy, outrage and profound generosity that explores what possibilities of interconnection in the present might be enabled by a genuine reckoning with the past. "I am a citizen of the United States and an enrolled member of the Oglala Sioux Tribe," Long Soldier writes in the introduction to the title poem, "meaning I am a citizen of the Oglala Lakota Nation — and in this dual citizenship, I must work, I must eat, I must art, I must mother, I must friend, I must listen, I must observe, constantly I must live."



THE GRIFFIN TRUST
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International



***Hard Child* • Natalie Shapero**
Copper Canyon Press

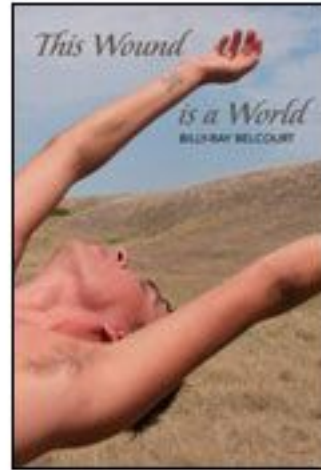
Biography: Natalie Shapero is the Professor of the Practice of Poetry at Tufts University and an editor at large of the *Kenyon Review*. Her first poetry collection, *No Object*, was published by Saturnalia Books in 2013. Natalie's writing has appeared in publications such as *The Nation*, *The New Republic*, *The New Yorker*, *Poetry*, and *The Progressive*. She holds degrees in creative writing and in law and has worked as a litigation fellow with Americans United for Separation of Church and State. Her awards include a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship, a Ruth Lilly Fellowship, a *Kenyon Review* Fellowship, and a Great Lakes College Association New Writers Award.

Judges' Citation: "The poems in Natalie Shapero's *Hard Child* come as close as lyric poems can to perfection. We feel the effect of them before noticing their machinery. Yet every poetic instinct Shapero possesses, every decision of line, image, stanza, diction, and tone, results in poems that are limber, athletic, powerful, and balanced. And behind her technical choices lie an emerging ethics: "I don't want any more of what I have. / I don't want another spider plant. I don't // want another lover." Her poems take us to the purest evolutionary point of the lyric form through their single-speaker stance, the movement of a mind over subjects, the emotional weight carried on the backs of images, the unpredictable associations, the satisfying call-backs. She teaches us how to retain the self without disappearing into the object we behold. She holds herself at various distances from the thing considered. She drives us toward a view and back again. This is how to write a lyric poem."



THE GRIFFIN TRUST
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Canadian



***This Wound is a World* • Billy-Ray Belcourt**
Frontenac House

Biography: Billy-Ray Belcourt is from the Driftpile Cree Nation. He is a Ph.D. student at the University of Alberta, and a 2016 Rhodes Scholar who holds a M.St. in Women's Studies from the University of Oxford. In 2016, he was named one of six Indigenous writers to watch by CBC Books, and was the winner of the 2016 P.K. Page Founder's Award for Poetry. His work has been published in *Assaraus: A Journal of Gay Poetry*, *Decolonization*, *Red Rising Magazine*, *mâmwai-âcimowak*, *SAD Mag*, *Yellow Medicine Review*, *The Malahat Review*, *PRISM International*, and *The Next Quarterly*.

Judges' Citation: "Blending the resources of love song and elegy, prayer and manifesto, Billy-Ray Belcourt's *This Wound is a World* shows us poetry at its most intimate and politically necessary. Mindful of tangled lineages and the lingering erasures of settler colonialism, Belcourt crafts poems in which "history lays itself bare" – but only as bare as their speaker's shapeshifting heart. Belcourt pursues original forms with which to chart the constellations of queerness and indigeneity, rebellion and survival, desire and embodiedness these poems so fearlessly explore. Between its bold treatment of sexuality and wary anatomy of despair, *This Wound is a World* peels back the layers of feeling and experience to offer, finally, the glimmerings of hope – which only sometimes looks like escape: "follow me out the backdoor of the world". This electrifying book reminds us that a poem may live twin lives as incantation and inscription, singing from the untamed margins: "grieve is the name i give to myself / i carve it into the bed frame. / i am make-believe. / this is an archive. / it hurts to be a story."



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Canadian



I have to live. • Aisha Sasha John
McClelland & Stewart

Biography: Aisha Sasha John is a poet, dancer and choreographer. Her solo performance ‘The Aisha of Oz’ premiered at the Whitney Museum in New York in 2017. Another iteration of the show will take place at the MAI in Montreal in 2018. Her previous poetry collection, *Thou* (2014), was a finalist for both the Trillium Book Award for Poetry and the ReLit Poetry Award. In addition to her solo work, she has choreographed, performed, and curated as a member of the performance collective WIVES. Aisha’s video work and text art have been exhibited in galleries and public installations. Born in Montreal, Aisha has an MFA in Creative Writing from the University of Guelph, and a B.A. in African Studies and Semiotics from the University of Toronto.

Judges’ Citation: “Aisha Sasha John’s *I have to live* shows what poetry can become when stripped of prettiness and polite convention – when in survival mode. Spontaneous, its subjects unposed, its language unrehearsed, each poem has the effect of being taken with a polaroid camera. John writes poems that are resistant to overwrought aesthetics, poems that have popular appeal yet are uninhibited by audience, poems whose casual demeanour belie their fight against casualty. They wind their way into us like a chorus. They gain force by accumulation: “I do. / I did it. / I did. / I had to. / I have to. / I have to live.” As a result, one does not engage with *I have to live* by familiar means of dissection and analysis. One need only listen, as to an aching friend. No need to fix anything. Just listen.”



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Canadian



***Same Diff* • Donato Mancini**

Talonbooks

Biography: The interdisciplinary practice of Donato Mancini focuses mainly on poetry, bookworks, text-based visual art and cultural criticism. His books and chapbooks include *Snowline* (2015), *Loitersack* (2014), *Buffet World* (2011), *Fact 'N' Value* (2011), *Hell Passport no.22* (2008), *Æthel* (2007), *58 Free Coffees* (2006), and *Ligatures* (2005). *Ligatures* and *Æthel* were each nominated for the ReLit Poetry Award, and *Ligatures* received honourable mention in the Alcuin Society book design awards. Mancini's published critical writing includes work on the archive, time, and memory in *Anamnesia: Unforgetting* (2011), and a discourse analysis of poetry reviews in *You Must Work Harder to Write Poetry of Excellence* (2012). He holds a Ph.D. in English from the University of British Columbia.

Judges' Citation: "Donato Mancini's *Same Diff* crosses pre-existing texts with a strong design impulse to assemble a work of unusual beauty, resonance, and timelessness. In "Snowline," a famous French phrase about snow is translated over centuries; translations snow down the pages until the original phrase is buried; they fall through different hands until they turn from snow into a meditation on time. Mancini's primary methods are curatorial (he assembles), orchestral (he coordinates), mechanical (he repeats), and archaeological (he excavates language rather than the world for his materials). He fractures words to let out their yolk. *Same Diff* is a monument to Mancini's accomplishments: he uses the words of others without appropriation; he negotiates self-effacement, humility, and invisibility; he offers a way to recover a self, not through self-assertion, but by attending to the voices and needs of others. What belongs to any of us? Even Mancini's words never seem to be his. He is a custodian of language who returns it to us cleaned."