Press Release

THE CS$80,000 GRIFFIN POETRY PRIZE CANADIAN AND INTERNATIONAL 2004 SHORTLIST ANNOUNCED

Poetry Without Borders

TORONTO, March 31st — The Griffin Poetry Prize shortlist for 2004 was announced today by Scott Griffin, Chairman of The Griffin Trust. The CS$80,000 Griffin Poetry Prize is the most lucrative prize to accept books of poetry from any country in the world — “Poetry Without Borders”. The prize is awarded annually for the two best books of poetry (including translations) published in English the previous year.

A record-breaking 423 eligible books from 15 different countries, translated from 17 different languages, were submitted for 2004, nearly 100 more than the previous year. The seven finalists – three Canadian and four International – will be invited to read in Toronto at the MacMillan Theatre on June 2nd. The winners, who each receive CS$40,000, will be announced on June 3rd at the fourth Griffin Poetry Prize awards event.

The Canadian Shortlist

Now You Care • Di Brandt
Coach House Books

go-go dancing for Elvis • Leslie Greentree
Frontenac House Ltd.

Loop • Anne Simpson
McClelland & Stewart Ltd.

The International Shortlist

Notes from the Divided Country • Suji Kwock Kim
Louisiana State University Press

The Ha-Ha • David Kirby
Louisiana State University Press

The Strange Hours Travelers Keep • August Kleinzahler
Farrar, Straus & Giroux

The Owner of the House • Louis Simpson
BOA Editions, Ltd.
The judges for 2004 are the distinguished poets Billy Collins (U.S. Poet Laureate 2001-2003), Bill Manhire (New Zealand’s inaugural Poet Laureate) and Governor-General Award-winner Phyllis Webb (Canada).

Webb is the editor of the 2004 Griffin Poetry Prize Anthology, a selection of poems from the shortlisted books, published by House of Anansi Press Inc. Royalties from the Anthology are donated to UNESCO’s World Poetry Day.

Benefactor Scott Griffin launched The Griffin Poetry Prize in September, 2000 along with the literary luminaries, Trustees Margaret Atwood, Robert Hass, Michael Ondaatje, Robin Robertson and David Young.

The Toronto-based Griffin Trust was created to serve and encourage excellence in poetry written in English anywhere in the world. Eligible collections of poetry, including translations, must be submitted by publishers in the calendar year of their publication.

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

NOTE TO BOOKSELLERS: Griffin Poetry Prize Shortlist bookmarks, 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/gpp2004-form.html. Winner stickers will be available after June 3rd.

Please direct other inquiries as follows:

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Links:  Submitting Publishers’ Web sites:
BOA Editions, Ltd – http://www.boaeditions.org
Coach House Books – http://chbooks.com
Farrar, Straus & Giroux - http://www.fsgbooks.com/
Frontenac House Ltd. – http://www.frontenachouse.com
Louisiana State University Press – http://www.lsu.edu/lsupress/
McClelland & Stewart Ltd. - http://www.mcclelland.com/

Marketing Collateral

Downloadable photographs of 2004 shortlisted poets
http://www.griffinpoetryprize.com/pictures.html
Book: *Now You Care*
Poet: **Di Brandt**
Publisher: Coach House Books

Citation: “**Di Brandt** manages beautifully the difficult job of producing poems that are socially conscientious without being didactic. She knows that the best poetry rests on the authority of the heart. Thus, she makes her readers care not only through the pleasures of form and crafted language, but also through the risky honesty of her articulations.”

Biography: **Di Brandt**'s poetry has received many awards, including the Gerald Lampert Award, the McNally Robinson Manitoba Book of the Year Award and the CAA National Poetry Award. She has been twice shortlisted for the Governor General’s Award and has been nominated for the Commonwealth Poetry Prize and the Pat Lowther Award. *Now You Care* is her fifth collection of poetry and has also been shortlisted for the 2004 Trillium Book Award and the Pat Lowther Memorial Award. Among her other publications are *questions i asked my mother* (1987); *Agnes in the sky* (1990); *mother, not mother* (1992); *Wild Mother Dancing: Maternal Narrative in Canadian Literature* (1993); *Jerusalem, beloved* (1995) and *Dancing naked: Narrative Strategies for Writing Across Centuries* (1996). Selected anthologies include *Section Lines: A Manitoba Anthology* (1988); *Making a Difference: Canadian Multicultural Literature* (Oxford University Press, 1996) and *Uncommon Wealth: an Anthology of Poetry in English* (Oxford University Press, 1996). Brandt grew up in Reinland, a Mennonite farming village in south central Manitoba and was one of the first women writers to break the public silence of Mennonite women in Canada. She taught English and Creative Writing at the University of Winnipeg from 1986-1995, and currently teaches Creative Writing and Canadian Literature at the University of Windsor. She recently spent a year living and writing in Berlin. She is a former poetry editor of *Prairie Fire* and a founding member of the feminist editorial collective of *Contemporary Verse II.*
Book: *go-go dancing for Elvis*
Poet: Leslie Greentree
Publisher: Frontenac House Ltd.

Citation: “Leslie Greentree is a conversational poet whose artful talk is not afraid to engage any subject head-on. Her unpretentious, sometimes comic, lower-case poems have an irresistible charm. They pull us into the funk and drama of her everyday experience and, further, into the center of her interior life.”

Biography: Leslie Greentree’s first book of poetry, *guys named Bill* (Frontenac House, 2002) was followed a year later by *go-go dancing for Elvis* (Frontenac House, 2003). She recently won the CBC Poetry Face-off for Calgary, and is competing in the National Face-off in April, 2004.

“Fargo’s, Whyte Avenue”, a poem from *go-go dancing for Elvis*, was selected for inclusion in *Writing Alberta: An Anthology* by Dr. Robert Stamp (U of C Press, forthcoming in 2004).

“Stranger”, a poem from *guys named Bill*, was featured on Edmonton City Transit buses in 2002 as part of the Writers’ Guild of Alberta Take the Poetry Route.

As well as working full-time at Red Deer Public Library, Greentree does freelance writing and acts as associate editor for a Central Alberta cultural tabloid called *artichoke*. She has read across Alberta, as well as in Saskatoon, Humboldt and Toronto, and is a featured reader at the Moose Jaw Festival of Words this summer, and the South Country Fair in Fort McLeod, Alberta. She has also been a featured reader at various other literary festivals, including the popular Word on the Street Festival in Calgary. Greentree is one of several organizers of Crossing Place: Red Deer Writers’ Festival, a day-long literary festival featuring writers from Central Alberta and beyond. She serves on two cultural boards in Red Deer. Born in Grande Prairie, Alberta, Greentree earned a B.A. (English) and a B.Ed. at the University of Lethbridge.
Book: *Loop*
Poet: **Anne Simpson**
Publisher: McClelland & Stewart

Citation: “The twin towers collapsing in New York, a plane spiralling down into the sea, a suicide’s fatal leap, even a flying carpet “riding on the wing of darkness”, such images of falling recur in Anne Simpson’s poetry with disturbing frequency. But as if to catch the fragments from these scenes of fracture, ellipses, loops, skeins and joinings, and the planets on their rounds also make appearances. Many poems are composed in sequences: a breath-taking demonstration of a “Möbius Strip” glides across the middle of ten beautiful pages of *Loop*. A down-to-earth series, “The Trailer Park”, juxtaposes a mundane world of low-rent lives, family squabbles and love-making against the struggles of great astronomers who helped domesticate the skies. A troubled and generous spirit pervades and inspires Simpson’s achievement of craft and lyric in these poems.”

Biography: Anne Simpson’s first collection of poetry, *Light Falls Through You* (2000), won the Gerald Lampert Memorial Award and the Atlantic Poetry Prize, and was a finalist for the Pat Lowther Poetry Award. Her first novel, *Canterbury Beach* (2001), was shortlisted for the 2002 Thomas Head Raddall Atlantic Fiction Award. In 1997, her short story “Dreaming Snow” shared the Journey Prize; and in 1999, she was awarded the Bliss Carman Poetry Award. Her work has also appeared in the anthologies: *Atlantic Canada Poetry: Words Out There: Women Poets in Atlantic Canada*; and *Home for Christmas*--stories from the Maritimes and Newfoundland. Simpson has spent periods of time working or studying in Italy, West Africa and the U.K. Currently she lives with her family in Antigonish, Nova Scotia, where she has worked for seven years as the Coordinator of the Writing Centre at St. Francis Xavier University. During 2002-2003, she was Writer in Residence at the University of New Brunswick in Fredericton.
Book: *Notes from the Divided Country*
Poet: **Suji Kwock Kim**
Publisher: Louisiana State University Press

Citation: “**Suji Kwock Kim**’s title *Notes from the Divided Country* refers not only to the Koreas North and South and to all the Americas, but also to the countries of the mind. Travelling between past and present, Kim’s powerful fictive imagination creates almost unbearably realistic enactments of war-zones once inhabited by her parents, grandparents, and even her great-grandparents. If “death is no remedy for having been born”, as she says in “The Tree of Knowledge”, then perhaps poetry is: poetry as expiation, history, memory treasure trove. In highly sophisticated verse, with lines long and lean or short and subtle, an exorcism seems to take place through the precision and music of her language. In poems about the couple next door in San Francisco, or the poet on the road to Skye in Scotland, or in the streets of Seoul on the Buddha’s birthday, Suji Kwock Kim celebrates being alive and well in the complexities of the present moment.”

Biography: **Suji Kwock Kim** won the 2002 Walt Whitman Award from the Academy of American Poets for her first book of poetry, *Notes from the Divided Country*, selected by Yusef Komunyakaa. Her poems have appeared in *The Nation, The New Republic, Poetry, Yale Review, Harvard Review, Threepenny Review, DoubleTake, Ploughshares, Asian-American Poetry: The Next Generation* and other journals and anthologies. “Private Property,” a multimedia play Kim co-wrote, was produced at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe and was featured on BBC-TV. She is the recipient of fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown: *The Nation/ Discovery* Award, and grants from the New York Foundation for the Arts, California Arts Council, Washington State Artist Trust, Korea Foundation and Blakemore Foundation for Asian Studies. Kim earned her B.A. at Yale University; a Master of Fin Arts at the Iowa Writers’ Workshop; attended Seoul National University, where she was a Fulbright Scholar; and Stanford University, where she was a Stegner Fellow. She divides her time between San Francisco and New York.
Book: *The Ha-Ha*
Poet: David Kirby
Publisher: Louisiana State University Press

Citation: “David Kirby’s illusionistic poetics are like a ha-ha, “which is not a joke but a landscape trick…used to keep cows at a picturesque distance from the manor house.” The formal appearance of this poet’s stanzaic patterns—so chaste and well-behaved and structurally deft—support the genial but disruptive spirit of these narrative performances. Talk, talk, talk about travel, food, more food, art, architecture, Barbara, more Barbara, mother, nuns, Rotarians, Americans, more Americans, etc., little operas with recitative. *The Ha-Ha* is funny and sad, colloquial and learned, and full of wry self-observation and social profundities. The poems are accompanied here and there by photographs of a large cow who is not laughing.”

Biography: David Kirby has received many honors for his work, including the Brittingham Prize in Poetry and citations in *Best American Poetry 2000* and *20001*, and *Pushcart Prize XXV*. He has been awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship and grants from the National Endowment for the Arts and Florida Arts Council. Kirby is the author or co-author of twenty-two books, including the poetry collections *The Ha-Ha*, *The House of Blue Light*, and *The Traveling Library* in addition to a collection of essays, *What Is a Book?*. His verse has appeared in such publications as the *Kenyon Review*, *Southern Review*, and *Ploughshares*. A member of the National Book Critics Circle, Kirby also writes regularly for the *New York Times Book Review*, the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, and the *San Francisco Chronicle*. Kirby received his bachelor’s degree in English from Louisiana State University and his doctoral degree in English from Johns Hopkins University in 1969. He is Robert O. Lawton Distinguished Professor of English at Florida State University, where he has taught since 1969 and lives in Tallahassee.
Book: *The Strange Hours Travelers Keep*
Poet: **August Kleinzahler**
Publisher: Farrar, Straus & Giroux

Citation: “*The Strange Hours Travelers Keep* is a masterful collection of work from a poet who inhabits the energies of urban life more fully than anyone currently writing. If **August Kleinzahler**’s poems notice birdsong, they do so by their own account as “part of a mix – footsteps, traffic, / fountains, shouts”. There is something exhilarating about passages of verse which are so ferociously on the move, between locations, between forms, between registers. These poems swagger and swerve and sing, while their moments of grace are ruthlessly sudden and just as swiftly abandoned to all the other stuff that’s happening in the universe. Kleinzahler’s poems also talk a lot about music, and they themselves live in the miraculous, conditional way that music does – finding their harmonies by moving forward.”

Biography: **August Kleinzahler** published his first book of poetry, *A Calendar of Airs*, in 1978. Since then, he has published six others, including *Storm over Hackensack* (1985); *Earthquake Weather* (1989); *Red Sauce Whiskey and Snow* (1995); and *Green Sees Things in Waves* (1998). In 2000, Farrar, Straus & Giroux published *Live from the Hong Kong Nile Club: Poems 1975-1990*. His poems have appeared in numerous publications including *The New Yorker*, *The American Poetry Review*, *Poetry*, *Harper’s Magazine*, *Grand Street*, *The Threepenny Review*, and *The Paris Review*. A native of Jersey City, Kleinzahler is the recipient of awards from the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation (1989), the Lila Acheson-Reader’s Digest Award for Poetry (1991), and an Academy Award in Literature from the American Academy of Arts and Letters (1996). In 2000 he was awarded a Berlin Prize Fellowship. Kleinzahler has been a taxi driver, a locksmith, a logger, and a building manager. He has taught creative writing courses at Brown University, the University of California at Berkeley, and the Iowa Writers’ Workshop, as well as to homeless veterans in the Bay Area. He lives in San Francisco.
Book:  *The Owner of the House*
Poet:  Louis Simpson
Publisher: BOA Editions, Ltd.

Citation: “Louis Simpson has been enriching the tradition of poetry in English for over 60 years, from his eloquent poems of the Second World War to the later understated, sometimes dyspeptic, tales of contemporary suburban life. He is one of the few poets of our time to have kept the art of narrative, of story-telling, alive in poetry, and yet he has done so without any sacrifice of lyric power: the work in *The Owner of the House* enchants and disenchants in equal measure. These conversations with America, held over many decades, are informed by a melancholy clear-sightedness, a generous, wry sense of humour, and a determination to celebrate the true lives and capacities of ordinary people. If Chekhov were reincarnated as a poet into the world where we live, this is surely what he would sound like.”