



THE GRIFFIN TRUST
For Excellence In Poetry

Trustees:

Mark Doty
Carolyn Forché
Scott Griffin
Michael Ondaatje
Robin Robertson
Karen Solie
Colm Tóibín
David Young

Press Release

**THE GRIFFIN POETRY PRIZE ANNOUNCES
THE 2015 INTERNATIONAL AND CANADIAN SHORTLIST**

TORONTO – April 7, 2015 – Scott Griffin, founder of The Griffin Trust For Excellence In Poetry is pleased to announce the International and Canadian shortlist for this year's prize. Judges Tim Bowling (Canada), Fanny Howe (USA) and Piotr Sommer (Poland) each read 560 books of poetry, from 42 countries, including 24 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 3rd at 7.30 p.m. The seven finalists will each be awarded \$10,000 for their participation in the Shortlist Readings.

The winners, to be announced at the Griffin Poetry Prize Awards on Thursday, June 4th, will each be awarded \$65,000.

International

Something Crosses My Mind • Eleanor Goodman, translated from the Chinese written by Wang Xiaoni
Zephyr Press

Finite Formulae & Theories of Chance • Marek Kazmierski, translated from the Polish written by Wioletta Greg
Arc Publications

The Stairwell • Michael Longley
Jonathan Cape

The Road to Emmaus • Spencer Reece
Farrar, Straus and Giroux

Canadian

Congotronic • Shane Book
House of Anansi Press

Blue Sonoma • Jane Munro
Brick Books

The Hundred Lives • Russell Thornton
Quattro Books



THE GRIFFIN TRUST
For Excellence In Poetry

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.

Tickets for the Shortlist Readings to be held on Wednesday, June 3rd, 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/event/2015-griffin-poetry-prize-shortlist-readings> or by calling (416) 408-0208.

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 4th.

Media Inquiries:

Melissa Shirley
Tel: (647) 389-9510
Email: publicity@griffinpoetryprize.com

General Inquiries:

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

Links: Shortlisted Publishers' Web sites:

Arc Publications: www.arcpublications.co.uk
Brick Books: www.brickbooks.ca
Farrar, Straus and Giroux: www.fsgbooks.com
House of Anansi Press: www.houseofanansi.com
Jonathan Cape: www.Randomhouse.co.uk
Quattro Books: www.quattrobooks.ca
Zephyr Press: www.zephyrpress.org

Downloadable photographs of the 2015 shortlisted poets:

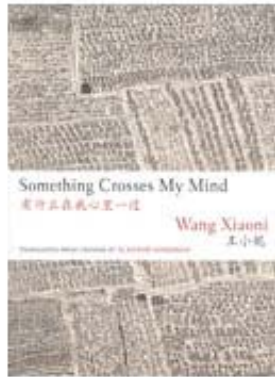
<http://www.griffinpoetryprize.com/news-and-events/media-resources/>



THE GRIFFIN TRUST
For Excellence In Poetry

THE 2015 GRIFFIN POETRY PRIZE SHORTLIST
CITATIONS, BIOGRAPHIES AND SUMMARIES

International



Something Crosses My Mind • Eleanor Goodman, translated from the Chinese written by Wang Xiaoni
Zephyr Press

Judges' Citation: “What is so attractive about Wang Xiaoni’s poems as translated into English by Eleanor Goodman is her quiet, loving, meditative distance to the mostly anonymous and lonely heroes she clearly knows well. And her attitude to time, which she keeps dragging out of its anchored localities (and barely marked history) to extend and connect, or fuse with specific spaces that she also enlarges in size and scope. Moments prolong into a century or a life, imaginary beasts meld with real animals, description becomes an act of meditation. In a few lines, a village can take on the dimension of a vast landscape—and yet still remain that particular village. And while Xiaoni’s characters may not speak, they seem to have a real insight into our experience and lives. In a way nothing much happens in her magic lyricism: the wind blows, the ocean rises, people work or move from one place to another, or wait, or just leave some place, and they have souls (which behave like shadows); someone on a journey sees them, through the window, between one landscape and another, and it’s difficult to know why all this is so moving. Reading her, I found myself repeating Auden’s phrase “About suffering they were never wrong, / The old Masters.” Wang Xiaoni is a terrific contemporary poet gracefully extending the great classical Chinese tradition.”

Biographies: Eleanor Goodman is a writer and translator. She is a Research Associate at the Fairbank Center at Harvard University and spent a year at Peking University on a Fulbright Fellowship. Her book of translations, *Something Crosses My Mind*, by Wang Xiaoni was the recipient of a 2013 PEN/Heim Translation Grant. Goodman has been an artist in residence at the American Academy in Rome, was awarded a Henry Luce Translation Fellowship from the Vermont Studio Center and received the International Merit Award in Poetry from the *Atlanta Review*. Her work appears in publications such as *PN Review*, *The Quarterly Conversation*, *Fiction*, *Pathlight*, *Cha*, *The Guardian*, *Pleiades*, *Acumen*, *Perihelion*, *The Los Angeles Review* and on *The Best American Poetry* web site.

Wang Xiaoni was born in Changchun, Jilin, near the border with North Korea, in 1955 and spent seven years as a laborer in the countryside during the Cultural Revolution. In 1977 she was accepted into the Chinese Department at Jilin University and in 1985 she moved to Shenzhen, in southern China. She is one of the few women associated with the “Misty” poets, though her poetry tends to focus on what she calls “the complex state of the human psyche” and avoids the overtly political. Wang has worked as a film script editor and college professor. Her publications include more than twenty five books of poetry, essays and novels.

Summary: *Something Crosses My Mind* spans twenty years of Wang Xiaoni’s poetry and is her first book to appear in English. It is part of the “Jintian Series” of books of contemporary Chinese poets, published by Zephyr Press in conjunction with the Jintian Foundation of Hong Kong and the Chinese University Press.



THE GRIFFIN TRUST
For Excellence In Poetry

International



***Finite Formulae & Theories of Chance* • Marek Kazmierski, translated from the Polish written by Wioletta Greg**
Arc Publications

Judges' Citation: "These poems, as translated from Polish into English by Marek Kazmierski, retain the force of first experience and, equally, a collection of history's remains. Greg's thoughts include the catastrophe of the 20th century whose marks still wobble before her eyes, and into the experience of living in post-Communist Poland. This stunning collection shows us (mostly through the eyes and memories of childhood) a world of objects transported across years. 'Tossing satin bulbs into wicker baskets,' the child poet is at ease with the earth and the hardy objects made from it. Greg grants us the privilege of seeing what she saw before she saw more."

Biographies: Marek Kazmierski is a writer, publisher and translator. He escaped communist Poland as a child and settled in the UK. Joint winner of the Decibel Penguin Prize and sole recipient of the *BIKE Magazine* Philosopher of the Year award, Marek is also the managing editor of a prison literary magazine *Not Shut Up* and founder of OFF_PRESS, an independent publishing house which has worked with English PEN, the South Bank Centre, the Polish Cultural Institute, the Mayor of London and various universities across Europe. His work has been published in numerous journals and titles, including *The Guardian*, *3AM Magazine* and *Poetry Wales*. This book was translated during his residency at Villa Decius in Krakow, Poland, courtesy of The Polish Book Institute.

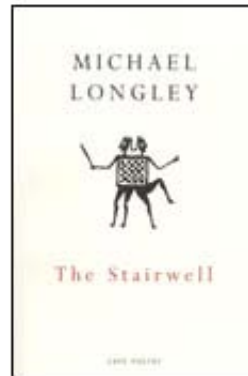
Wioletta Greg is a poet, writer, editor and translator. Born in southern Poland, she moved to the UK in 2006 and currently resides in the town of Ryde on the Isle of Wight. Wioletta has published several volumes of poetry in Poland, Canada and the UK, including *Wyobraźnia kontrolowana (Controlled Imagination, 1988)*; *Parantele (Kinships, 2003)*; *Orinoko (2008)*; *Inne obroty (Alternate Turns, 2010)*; the bilingual *Smieny/Smena's Memory (2011)*; the collection of short prose forms *Notatnik z wyspy (Notes from an Island, 2011)* and a debut novel, *Guguly (2014)* in which she revisits the experience of growing up in communist Poland. Her poems have appeared in numerous literary journals and she has won several literary prizes, including the Tyska Zima Poetycka.

Summary: One hundred years since the outbreak of the First World War, the Polish poet Wioletta Greg undertakes a literary journey through her own family history, exploring in both poetry and prose a century of life, death, love and tragedy. With passion, tenderness and humour, she traces a path from the lives of her grandparents in early twentieth-century Poland, through two world wars, life under Communism and the subsequent liberation, to her own experiences as a migrant living in Britain on the Isle of Wight. Wioletta Greg's new collection, in Marek Kazmierski's attentive and nuanced translation, serves as both a moving personal testament to a family that survived, and a compelling document of a century of European history.



THE GRIFFIN TRUST
For Excellence In Poetry

International



***The Stairwell* • Michael Longley**
Jonathan Cape

Judges' Citation: "Part of the excitement and pleasure of Michael Longley's *The Stairwell* comes from the quiet unpredictability of what his language does. It is modest and unassuming, yet bold in its deceptively small meditations. His sentences achieve their goals through sophisticatedly simple means: Longley loves to understate (or underplay), retard (and see how far he can go), imply, question, and enumerate (long enumeration in short poems is part of his signature). This book, including the elegy sequence that comprises the whole second section, is a masterly realization of the light touch he brings to serious subjects, as if sentences were his way of breathing. And they do not behave conventionally, despite his life-long study of such basic things as love, friendship, death, experience, memory, historical memory included, and of some other disciplines that go along with them, like learning to know nature for instance. There's also a lot to learn from Michael Longley—part of the pleasure is the detailed knowledge and wisdom the poems bring. While greatly attached to certain classical rules, Longley has always paid homage to them so interestingly, simultaneously mastering and subverting them. *The Stairwell* is a book by a major poet writing at the height of his powers."

Biography: Michael Longley was born in Belfast in 1939. He has published nine collections of poetry including *Gorse Fires* (1991) which won the Whitbread Poetry Award, and *The Weather in Japan* (2000) which won the Hawthornden Prize, the T.S. Eliot Prize and the *Irish Times* Poetry Prize. In 2001 he received the Queen's Gold Medal for Poetry and in 2003 the Wilfred Owen Award. He was awarded a CBE in 2010 and was Ireland Professor of Poetry, 2007-2010.

Summary: The psychologically suggestive word 'stairwell' is in itself ambiguous. In his tenth collection of poems Michael Longley writes of birth as well as death, childhood and age, nature and art, the animal and human worlds, tenderness and violence, battlefield and 'homeland'. Longley has built this collection on intricate doublings; the second part of the book is a powerful sequence of elegies for his twin brother, Peter, and elsewhere the dominant mood is elegiac.



THE GRIFFIN TRUST
For Excellence In Poetry

International



***The Road to Emmaus* • Spencer Reece**

Farrar, Straus and Giroux

Judges' Citation: "This is an open book, a welcoming one like a voice on the phone we instantly remember. Maybe Frank O'Hara has returned? Maybe the Berrigans, including Ted? What happiness to hear that good-natured tone again! Spencer Reece has slipped in among us, without any forewarning or embarrassment, his poems like faces turning to call us to follow them. Who is he? Let's go. Whether he knew it or not, the experience of reading his poems is similar to the recognition moment on the road to Emmaus. We are glad to trust so completely. In these poems we also meet a kind of 'innocent American' in the best, almost lost sense."

Biography: Spencer Reece is a poet and priest. His first collection, *The Clerk's Tale*, won the Bakeless Prize in 2003. He has received an NEA grant, a Guggenheim grant, a Witter Bynner Prize from the Library Congress, a Whiting Writers' Award, and the Amy Lowell Travelling Scholarship. His poems have been published in *The New Yorker*, *Poetry*, *The American Scholar*, and *The New Republic*. He served at the Honduran orphanage Our Little Roses, and works for the Bishop of Spain for the Reformed Episcopal Church, Iglesia Española Reformada Episcopal.

Summary: Reece's central figure in *The Road to Emmaus* is a middle-aged man who becomes a priest in the Episcopal Church; these poems follow him to New York City, to Honduras, to a hospital where he works as a chaplain, to a prison, to an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting. A yearning for connection, an ache of loneliness and the instant of love disappearing before our eyes haunt this long-awaited second collection from Spencer Reece.



THE GRIFFIN TRUST
For Excellence In Poetry

Canadian



***Congotronic* • Shane Book**

House of Anansi Press

Judges' Citation: "Here is a contemporary world music that whirls the reader into the centre of the action at once. Here is a spread of thoughts with a winning beat, a door held open to varieties of sound and content from multiple cultures. In these beautifully adept pages, English as we know it is not the only language we are reading but a spread of voices receptive to webs and forms from everywhere else. It's a new poetics but also wholly recognizable in its content. An outcry written to be heard while reading: this poetry signals a breakthrough necessary, innovative and emotionally piercing."

Biography: Shane Book is an award-winning poet and filmmaker. He was educated at the University of Victoria, the Iowa Writers' Workshop and Stanford University where he was a Wallace Stegner Fellow. His writing has appeared in more than twenty anthologies, including *The Great Black North: Contemporary African Canadian Poetry*.

Summary: *Congotronic* is the second collection from Canadian poet and filmmaker Shane Book. At once original, strange, funny and unnerving, *Congotronic* takes the reader into unstable territory, where multiple layers of voice, diction and music collide. Some of these poems have the sparse directness of a kind of bleak prayer; others mingle the earthbound rhythms of hip-hop with the will-to-transcendence of high Romanticism.



THE GRIFFIN TRUST
For Excellence In Poetry

Canadian



***Blue Sonoma* • Jane Munro**
Brick Books

Judges' Citation: "Somewhere between the directness and clarity of haiku and Yeats's 'An aged man is but a paltry thing' moves Jane Munro's hauntingly candid explorations of the hard truths of growing old. But *Blue Sonoma* unflinching as its poems are in their wrestling with a partner's Alzheimer's, with memory, death, and dying, and with the inexorable advance of time, achieves an engaging liveliness as a result of the poet's earthy voice, colloquial wit, and acute descriptive powers. For Munro, language, travel, and art are the 'props/in a little, local theatre of light', and this theatre's relationship to other worlds, other possible states of consciousness, repeatedly leavens *Blue Sonoma*'s painful content with wisdom and delicacy. In primarily short lines of impressive transparency, Munro's writing, replete with natural images of Canada's west coast, celebrates, even as it confronts with blunt honesty, the sensuous passage through the years towards whatever transition must follow. 'And us, were we substance or reflection?' The question hovers over this gathering of deeply meditative and viscerally felt poems and leads us, with gentleness but no apology, into the realm of riveting and ultimate contemplation."

Biography: Jane Munro is the author of five previous books of poetry, most recently *Active Pass* (2010) and *Point No Point* (2006). Her work has received the Bliss Carman Poetry Award, the Macmillan Prize for Poetry and been nominated for the Pat Lowther Award. She is a member of Yoko's Dogs (Jan Conn, Mary di Michele, Susan Gillis, Jane Munro), a poetry collective whose first book *Whisk* was published in 2013. After living for twenty years on the southwest coast of Vancouver Island, she has now returned to Vancouver.

Summary: In *Blue Sonoma*, award-winning poet Jane Munro draws on her well-honed talents to address what T.S. Eliot called "the gifts reserved for age". A beloved partner's crossing into Alzheimer's is at the heart of this book and his "battered blue Sonoma" is an evocation of numerous other crossings: between empirical reportage and meditative apprehension, dreaming and wakefulness, Eastern and Western poetic traditions. Rich in both pathos and sharp shards of insight, Munro's wisdom here is deeply embedded, shot through with moments of wit and candour. In the tradition of Taoist poets like Wang Wei and Po-Chu-i, her sixth and best book opens a wide poetic space and renders difficult conditions with the lightest of touches.



THE GRIFFIN TRUST
For Excellence In Poetry

Canadian



***The Hundred Lives* • Russell Thornton**
Quattro Books

Judges' Citation: "The poems in *The Hundred Lives* burn with a rare blend of rhythmic intensity and hard-earned experience that make them at once timeless and contemporary; on page after page, in line after line, we hear the ancient, communal music of language sung through a consciousness of maturity, loss, and restless spiritual hunger. In a very real sense, Thornton's lyric narratives and dialogues – of travel, of Lazarus and the Song of Songs, of romantic love – dramatically enact Robert Frost's notion that the greatest of all attempts is 'to say matter in terms of spirit, or spirit in terms of matter, to make the final unity'. Thornton speaks with utter conviction and credibility to forge a personal vision, a 'pathway through the apple', to an always richer understanding of human experience. Whether the poems take us to Greece, where gypsy women move 'like living tarot in the street', or to the memory of a beloved grandmother 'out in the sailing ship of her wedding dress. Her ashes', always *The Hundred Lives* puts us in intimate touch with 'first fire, first waters', with the tenderness and pain of vital engagement."

Biography: Russell Thornton has published five previous books of poetry, with *House Built of Rain* being shortlisted for the BC Book Prize and the ReLit Poetry Award and *Birds, Metals, Stones & Rain* shortlisted for the 2013 Governor General's Award. Thornton won the League of Canadian Poets National Contest in 2000 and *The Fiddlehead* magazine's Ralph Gustafson Prize in 2009. He lives in North Vancouver.

Summary: In *The Hundred Lives* Russell Thornton illuminates the intricate imaginative orders of love at work within an individual life. From poems set in the eastern Mediterranean, with its abiding reverberations of the ancient Greek world, to a series of sonnet responses to the Gospel story of Lazarus, a lyric narrative engagement with the mythic-erotic drama of the Biblical *Song of Songs*, to intensely personal poems that explore love and loss, this collection highlights the mystery of the interplay between inner and outer energies at the core of human experience.

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