



THE GRIFFIN TRUST
For Excellence In Poetry

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Press Release

**THE GRIFFIN POETRY PRIZE ANNOUNCES
THE 2017 INTERNATIONAL AND CANADIAN SHORTLIST**

TORONTO – April 11, 2017 – 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 Sue Goyette (Canada), Joan Naviyuk Kane (USA) and George Szirtes (UK) each read 617 books of poetry, from 39 countries, including 23 translations.

Trustees Emeriti:

Margaret Atwood
Robert Hass
Robin Robertson

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 7 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 8, will each be awarded \$65,000.

International

***World of Made and Unmade* • Jane Mead**
Alice James Books

***In Praise of Defeat* • Donald Nicholson-Smith,**
translated from the French written by Abdellatif Laâbi
Archipelago Books

***Falling Awake* • Alice Oswald**
Jonathan Cape/W.W. Norton & Company

***Say Something Back* • Denise Riley**
Picador

Canadian

***Injun* • Jordan Abel**
Talonbooks

***Violet Energy Ingots* • Hoa Nguyen**
Wave Books

***Silvija* • Sandra Ridley**
BookThug



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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.

Tickets for the Shortlist Readings to be held on Wednesday, June 7, 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/2017-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 8.

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Links: Shortlisted Publishers' Web sites:

Alice James Books: alicejamesbooks.org

Archipelago Books: archipelagobooks.org

BookThug: bookthug.ca

Jonathan Cape: penguinrandomhouse.co.uk/publishers/vintage/jonathan-cape/

W.W. Norton & Company: wnorton.com

Picador: picador.com

Talonbooks: talonbooks.com

Wave Books: wavepoetry.com

Downloadable photographs of the 2017 shortlisted poets:

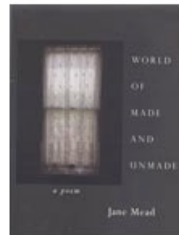
<http://www.griffinpoetryprize.com/news-and-events/media-resources/>



THE GRIFFIN TRUST
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**THE 2017 GRIFFIN POETRY PRIZE SHORTLIST
CITATIONS, BIOGRAPHIES AND SUMMARIES**

International



***World of Made and Unmade* • Jane Mead**

Alice James Books

Judges' Citation: “Jane Mead’s poem, *World of Made and Unmade*, moves with elegance between elegy and harvest, between the work of practical care to the unmooring that loss precipitates. The poem allows for the intrusions of dogs and the laundry room flooding, acknowledging how the force of our days persists in the company of the dying. And how those disruptions are sometimes what can help carry us, sustain us through the experience, realign our spirit, or afford us reprieve. And in the midst of this is the poet’s mother, the life she has lived persuasive and just as vital. Mead moves from the days’ demands, engaged and articulate, to depict the service, the duty, and the company the dying require. Occasionally, the poem is still, reflective, posited at the bottom edge of the page, engaging in the on-going conversation and the reckoning. Her language serves loss as a bell serves its chime. In her life, Mead’s mother planted and cared for 2001 pecan trees; her legacy, an orchard. In *World of Made and Unmade*, her life asks her daughter’s ‘How will you spend your courage?’ This poem seems that brave response.”

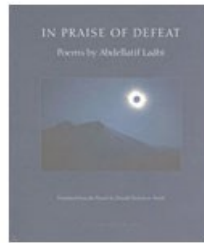
Biography: Jane Mead is the author of four previous collections of poetry, most recently *Money Money Money* | *Water Water Water* (2014). Her poems appear regularly in journals and anthologies, and she is the recipient of a Guggenheim Foundation Fellowship, a Whiting Writers Award, and a Lannan Foundation Completion Grant. She teaches at the low residency MFA program at Drew University and Farms in northern California.

Summary: Mead’s fifth collection candidly and openly explores the long process that is death. These resonant poems discover what it means to live, die, and come home again. We’re drawn in by sorrow and grief but also by the joys of celebrating a long life and by how simple it is to find laughter and light in the quietest and darkest of moments.



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International



In Praise of Defeat • Donald Nicholson-Smith, translated from the French written by Abdellatif Laâbi
Archipelago Books

Judges' Citation: "In this bilingual book (Laâbi's original French and Nicholson-Smith's English) – a book that is monumental both in size (over 800 pages) and in scope – we meet one of the major poets of our time, one who has lived through great and catastrophic events and responded to them with a passionate intelligent humanity. Laâbi can move from the simplest short poems about the delights of the body to complex meditations on war, violence and prison. That he does so in such an open, generous voice (so well communicated by the dedicated translator, since this must have been an epic labour of love for him) is one of the admirable aspects of Laâbi's mind and art. The rhetorical pitch is perfectly judged. There is nothing glib about the eloquence, nor is there anything uncontrolled or self-indulgent about the fury when it rises. The poems are public in the best sense in that they address the reader as an equal, not as from a tower but in the street. The interest in Laâbi's work is intense and growing and other fine books of translations from his work have become available. But this is a landmark."

Biographies: Donald Nicholson-Smith is a translator and freelance editor. Born in Manchester, England, and a long-time resident of New York City, Nicholson-Smith's many translations include the works of Jean-Patrick Manchette, Thierry Jonquet, Guy Debord, Paco Ignacio Taibo II, Henri Lefebvre, Raoul Vaneigem, Antonin Artaud, Jean Laplanche, and Guillaume Apollinaire. He has also translated many texts dealing with psychology and social criticism. He won the 2015 French-American Foundation Translation Prize for his translation of Manchette's *The Mad and the Bad*.

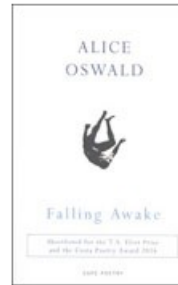
Abdellatif Laâbi, poet, novelist, playwright, translator, and political activist, was born in Fez, Morocco in 1942. He was the founder of *Souffles*, a left-leaning literary review banned by the Moroccan government in 1972. An outspoken critic of the authoritarian and theocratic regimes of the Maghreb, Laâbi was imprisoned in Morocco for eight years and later exiled to France. Deemed by Amnesty International a prisoner of conscience, Laâbi received the Prix de la Liberté and the Prix International de Poésie while imprisoned. He went on to receive the Prix Robert Ganzo de Poésie in 2008, the Prix Goncourt de la Poésie for his *Œuvre complète* in 2009, and the Grand Prix de la Francophonie from the Académie Française in 2011.

Summary: Abdellatif Laâbi is without a doubt the major francophone voice of Moroccan poetry today. Shaped by struggle and the pain of exile, Laâbi's is a poetry of protest – internally tumultuous yet delicate verse that grapples with political and spiritual oppression. This collection of poems, selected by Laâbi himself, shows the evolution of his style. From the mutilated syntax and explosive verse of his early work to the subtle lyricism and elegant constructions of phrase that characterize him now, Laâbi never ceases searching, demanding, penetrating.



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International



***Falling Awake* • Alice Oswald**
Jonathan Cape/W.W. Norton & Company

Judges' Citation: "Alice Oswald's *Falling Awake* presents as a dark text to (re)turn (in)to, its language of '... maybe the last green places[...]' striking bright inscriptions that may have been 'falling for a long time.' How fortunate we are to tread the paths of myth and that which presupposes it, and us: line, image, lilt. Quite within other declarations, Oswald exalts with great nimbleness: 'I notice the lark has a needle / pulled through its throat.' In these poems, enclosed at times within the old enchantments of Eurydice, Orpheus and Tithonus, one wonders about the problem of being bound to place, to anything at all. And then, the problem, too, becomes a source of wonder—albeit tempered by the concise splendour of a mind that moves quickly within the confines of night and day. *Falling Awake* permits the reader to breach lyric time as the poet explicates the fixed architecture as it flickers by, 'trying over and over its broken line / trying over and over its broken line.'"

Biography: Alice Oswald lives in Devon and is married with three children. Her collections include *Dart*, which won the 2002 T.S. Eliot Prize, *Woods etc.* (Geoffrey Faber Memorial Prize), *A Sleepwalk on the Severn* (Hawthornden Prize), *Weeds and Wildflowers* (Ted Hughes Award) and, most recently, *Memorial*, which won the 2013 Warwick Prize for Writing. 'Dunt', included in this collection, was awarded the Forward Prize for Best Single Poem.

Summary: Alice Oswald's poems are always vivid and distinct, alert and deeply, *physically* engaged in the natural world. Mutability – a sense that all matter is unstable in the face of mortality – is at the heart of this new collection and each poem is involved in that drama: the held tension that is embodied life, and life's losing struggle with the gravity of nature. Working as before with an ear to the oral tradition, these poems attend to the organic shapes and sounds and momentum of language as it's spoken, as well as how it's thought: fresh, fluid and propulsive, but also fragmentary, repetitive. These are poems that are written to be read aloud.



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International



***Say Something Back* • Denise Riley**
Picador

Judges' Citation: “The beauty of Denise Riley’s book lies in its rejection of the kind of beauty that is ready to hand. In it we meet a mind that scrupulously rejects the grandiose gesture but is not averse to play and tenderness. Or indeed to tragedy. The longest poem in the book, ‘A Part Song’ is about the loss of the poet’s son. In it she addresses poetry itself and questions its ability to give appropriate form to such loss. But what might appear to be the bare cupboard of grief is, in her poem, packed with voices, entrances and movements that doubt their own validity and are, marvellously, all the more valid for that. Beyond the loss there remains the close, firmly disciplined observation of the world, of the humour and pathos at its edges, and the lifelong attempt to allow it its own voice, the willingness, as the book’s title has it, to ‘say something back’. Riley’s work has always been substantial but this book is something very special, a full blossoming and gathering.”

Biography: Denise Riley is a critically acclaimed writer of both philosophy and poetry. She is currently Professor of the History of Ideas and of Poetry at the University of East Anglia, and has taught and researched widely at many institutions in Europe and America.

Summary: *Say Something Back* will allow readers to see just why the name of Denise Riley has been held in such high regard by her fellow poets for so long. The book reproduces *A Part Song*, a profoundly moving document of grieving and loss, and one of the most widely admired long poems of recent years. Elsewhere Riley’s poetry becomes a space for contemplation of the natural world, of physical law, and for the deep consideration of what it is to invoke those who are absent. Finally, it extends our sense of what the act of human speech can be, and especially what is drawn forth from us when we address our dead. Lyric, intimate, acidly witty, unflinchingly brave, *Say Something Back* is destined to introduce one of our finest poets to a wide new readership.



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Canadian



***Injun* • Jordan Abel**

Talonbooks

Judges' Citation: "Jordan Abel's collection *Injun* evacuates the subtexts of possession, territory, and erasure. Lyric, yes: 'that part of sparkling / kn ife love that // hates the trouble of rope / and the letters / of towns.' Testimony of another kind, too: 'all misdeeds at the milk house / all heap shoots by the sagebrush // all the grub is somewhere / down in the hungry bellies [...]'. The fog of tedious overdramatization clears and the open skies of discourse can be discerned. What does it mean to arrange hate to look like verse? What becomes of the ugly and meaningless? Words are restored to their constituent elements as countermovements in Abel's hands, just as they are divested of their capacity for productive violence. The golden unity of language and its silvered overcoding erode, bringing to bear the 'heard snatches of comment / going up from the river bank.' To pixelize is to mobilize, not to disappear."

Biography: Jordan Abel is a Nisga'a writer currently completing his PhD at Simon Fraser University, where he focuses on digital humanities and indigenous poetics. Abel's conceptual writing engages with the representation of indigenous peoples in anthropology and popular culture. His chapbooks have been published by JackPine Press, and above/ground press, and his work has appeared in numerous magazines and journals across Canada. He is an editor for *Poetry is Dead* magazine and a former editor for *PRISM international* and *Geist*. Abel's first book, *The Place of Scraps* was a finalist for the Gerald Lampert Memorial Award and won the Dorothy Livesay Poetry Prize. Abel's second book, *Un/inhabited* was published in 2014. CBC Books named Abel one of 12 Young Writers to Watch (2015).

Summary: Jordan Abel's *Injun* takes "cut", "copy", and "paste" to the public domain – particularly to 92 westerns published during the heyday of pulp publishing between 1840 and 1950, also a period of unfettered colonialism in North America. Abel's third book of poetry, a long poem about race and racism, destabilizes the colonial image of the "Indian", both in the public domain and the western genre as a whole. By narrowing the search to the word "Injun" as it appears in the 10,000-page source text of pulp westerns, and by re-appropriating the "erasure" imposed by settler colonialism, Abel reclaims erasure, and pastiche to chisel a path through privileged, colonial histories. *Injun* testifies to the need for intervention by calling attention to contested issues of land ownership, territory, and the silencing of Indigenous peoples. A natural follow-up to *Un/inhabited*, Abel's visual poetics bring urgency to the materiality of text by restructuring history on the site of the page.



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***Violet Energy Ingots* • Hoa Nguyen**
Wave Books

Judges’ Citation: “Hoa Nguyen’s poems tread delicately but firmly between the linear demands of narrative and syntax on the one hand and between registers of speech and forms of address on the other. There are spaces for breath, and asides hovering in parentheses. There are also the slippages in language, in the slide from, say ‘staring’ through ‘starving’ and ‘starring’ to ‘scarring’. Everything is at once tangential yet surprisingly direct. This is where the pleasure and depth reside: in the off balancing of the language and its pure, uncalculated tone. What are the poems about? Many things, often simple and direct, like food, or sex, or rivers, or sickness. The poems are packed with fine precisions and particulars. But there is politics too, sometimes startlingly straight as in the poem about Andrew Jackson or sharp-edged as in ‘Screaming’. *Violet Energy Ingots* is a fully mature work in that it is confident of both its voice and its readers’ alertness. It makes its own space. It demands it and holds it.”

Biography: Born in the Mekong Delta and raised in the Washington, D.C. area, Hoa Nguyen studied Poetics at New College of California in San Francisco. With the poet Dale Smith, Nguyen founded *Skanky Possum*, a poetry journal and book imprint in Austin, TX, their home for 14 years. She is the author of several poetry collections, including *Red Juice: Poems 1998-2008* and *As Long As Trees Last*. She lives in Toronto, Ontario where she teaches poetics privately and at Ryerson University, Bard College, and Miami University.

Summary: The poems in *Violet Energy Ingots* contain a sense of dis-ease, rupture, things frayed, and grief – as love shimmers the edges. Ryo Yamaguchi describes Nguyen’s writing as “a kind of stuttering with intelligences, impressions, and emotions flaring up as the words find their pathways”. As grounded in earth as in the stars, her poems are reminders of the possibilities of contemplation in every space and moment.



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Canadian



***Silvija* • Sandra Ridley**

BookThug

Judges' Citation: “The poems in Sandra Ridley’s book are potent and beguiling. Words are given the space they need to root and branch. This pace of them engages with the unarticulated, the hidden, the unbearable as readers encounter five elegies that allude to and invoke trauma, shame, and a profound sense of loss. Given the themes at work in this collection, silence is an essential part of the reading. Ridley conducts and curates that space as liminal. Here’s where we understand the scope of the work and concede to bearing witness. Here’s where we understand that we will be haunted. And from that silence, the words that emerge have been given the time they need to properly cure and to season in the poem’s atmosphere. They reach, as words do, singular and fluent. Ridley’s language is persuasive and ripe. ‘[N]arrow your eyes to the now,’ the poem requests. Here is ‘a shame unleashed by plain talk’. Beneath these elegies, there is a current, a reprise praising the healer. This current is another root system, an on-going poem, essential to the collection.”

Biography: Multiple-award-winning poet, instructor and editor, Sandra Ridley is the author of three books of poetry: *Fallout* (winner of a 2010 Saskatchewan Book Award and the Alfred G. Bailey Prize); *Post-Apothecary* (finalist for the ReLit and Archibald Lampman awards); and *The Counting House* (finalist for the Archibald Lampman Award and chosen as one of the top five poetry books of 2013 in *Quill & Quire*’s Readers’ Poll). In 2015, Ridley was a finalist for the KM Hunter Artist Award for Literature. She lives in Ottawa.

Summary: In a sequence of five feverish elegies, Sandra Ridley’s *Silvija* combines narrative lyric and experimental verse styles to manifest dark themes related to love and loss: the traumas of psychological suffering (isolation and confinement), physical abuse (by parent and partner), terminal illness (brain tumour and heart attack), revelation, resolution, and healing. Pulsing with the award-winning writer’s signature blend of fervour and sangfroid, the serial poems in *Silvija* accrue into a book-length testament to a grief both personal and human, leaving readers with the redemptive grace that comes from poetry’s ability to wrestle chaos into meaning.

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