



THE GRIFFIN TRUST  
For Excellence In Poetry

## Press Release

### THE GRIFFIN POETRY PRIZE ANNOUNCES

#### THE 2019 INTERNATIONAL AND CANADIAN SHORTLIST

**Trustees:**

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**TORONTO - April 9, 2019** – 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 Ulrikka Gernes (Denmark), Srikanth Reddy (USA), and Kim Maltman (Canada) each read 510 books of poetry, from 32 countries, including 37 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 5 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 6, will each be awarded \$65,000.

#### International

*The Perseverance* • **Raymond Antrobus**  
Penned in the Margins

*Lake Michigan* • **Daniel Borzutzky**  
University of Pittsburgh Press

*Autobiography of Death* • **Don Mee Choi**, translated from the Korean  
written by **Kim Hyesoon**  
New Directions

*Negative Space* • **Ani Gjika**, translated from the Albanian  
written by **Luljeta Lleshanaku**  
Bloodaxe Books

#### Canadian

*The Blue Clerk* • **Dionne Brand**  
McClelland & Stewart

*Quarrels* • **Eve Joseph**  
Anvil Press

*The Art of Dying* • **Sarah Tolmie**  
McGill-Queen's University Press



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Tickets for the Shortlist Readings to be held on Wednesday, June 5, 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 2019 Anthology can be purchased at <https://houseofanansi.com/products/the-2019-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](mailto:info@griffinpoetryprize.com) to place an order. Winner book stickers will be available after June 6.

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**Links: Shortlisted Publishers' Web sites:**

Anvil Press: [anvilpress.com](http://anvilpress.com)  
Bloodaxe Books: [bloodaxebooks.com](http://bloodaxebooks.com)  
McGill-Queen's University Press: [mqup.ca](http://mqup.ca)  
McClelland & Stewart:  
[penguinrandomhouse.ca/imprints/mcclelland-stewart](http://penguinrandomhouse.ca/imprints/mcclelland-stewart)  
New Directions: [ndbooks.com](http://ndbooks.com)  
Penned in the margins: [pennedinthemargins.co.uk](http://pennedinthemargins.co.uk)  
University of Pittsburgh Press: [upress.pitt.edu](http://upress.pitt.edu)

**Downloadable photographs of the 2019 shortlisted poets:**

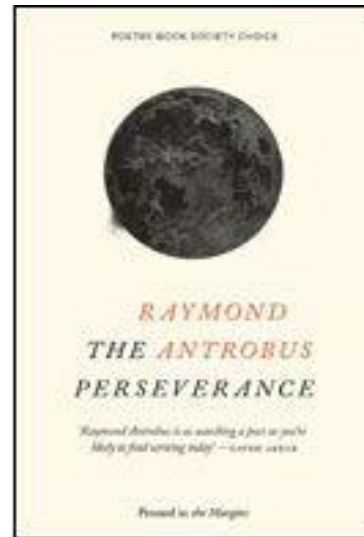
<http://www.griffinpoetryprize.com/news-and-events/media-resources/>



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THE 2019 GRIFFIN POETRY PRIZE SHORTLIST  
BIOGRAPHIES AND CITATIONS

International



*The Perseverance* • Raymond Antrobus  
Penned in the Margins

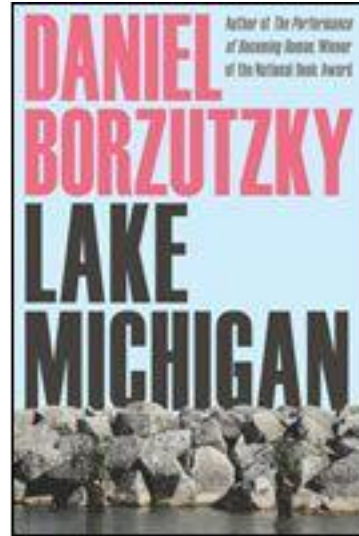
**Biography:** Raymond Antrobus was born in Hackney, London, England to an English mother and a Jamaican father. He is the recipient of fellowships from Cave Canem, Complete Works III, and Jerwood Compton Poetry. He is one of the world's first recipients of an MA in Spoken Word Education from Goldsmiths, University of London. Antrobus is a founding member of Chill Pill and the Keats House Poets Forum. He has had multiple residencies in deaf and hearing schools around London, as well as Pupil Referral Units. In 2018 he was awarded the Geoffrey Dearmer Award by the Poetry Society. He lives in London, England.

**Judges' Citation:** "The truth is I'm not /a fist fighter,' writes Raymond Antrobus, 'I'm all heart, no technique.' Readers who fall for this streetwise feint may miss out on the subtle technique—from the pantoum and sestina to dramatic monologue and erasure—of *The Perseverance*. But this literary debut *is* all heart, too. Heart *plus* technique. All delivered in a voice that resists over-simple categorization. As a poet of d/Deaf experience, his verse gestures toward a world beyond sound. As a Jamaican/British poet, he deconstructs the racialized empire of signs from within. Perhaps that slash between verses and signs is where the truth is."



THE GRIFFIN TRUST  
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International



*Lake Michigan* • Daniel Borzutzky  
University of Pittsburgh Press

**Biography:** Daniel Borzutzky is a poet and translator, and the author of *The Performance of Becoming Human*, winner of the 2016 National Book Award for Poetry. His other books include *In the Murmurs of the Rotten Carcass Economy*, *Memories of My Overdevelopment*, and *The Book of Interfering Bodies*. His translation of Galo Ghigliotto's *Valdivia* won the 2017 National Translation Award. Other translations include Raúl Zurita's *The Country of Planks* and *Song for His Disappeared Love*, and Jaime Luis Huenún's *Port Trakl*. He lives in Chicago and teaches in the English and Latin American and Latino Studies Departments at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

**Judges' Citation:** "Daniel Borzutzky's *Lake Michigan* is an elegant and chilling masterpiece of dramatic speech in a tradition of activist, political poetry that encompasses works as diverse as Pablo Neruda's *Canto General* and Peter Dale Scott's *Coming to Jakarta: A Poem About Terror*. One of the theses embodied in its multiplicity of voices might be said to be that state-sponsored (or state-acquiescent) violence creates ghosts—ghosts who, by continued speaking, come to stand in for the people from whose histories they have been created, people who are therefore never truly dead. Technically brilliant in its use of repetition and variation, leavened with touches of embittered, and yet, in the end, resilient, drollness, *Lake Michigan* is an eloquent, book-length howl, a piece of political theatre staged in a no-man's land lying somewhere between the surreal and the real."



THE GRIFFIN TRUST  
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International



*Autobiography of Death* • Don Mee Choi, translated from the Korean written by Kim Hyesoon  
New Directions

**Biography:** Don Mee Choi was born in Seoul, Korea, and is the author of *Hardly War* (2016), and *The Morning News is Exciting* (2010). She has received the 2011 Whiting Award for Poetry, a Lannan Literary Fellowship, and the 2012 Lucien Stryk Translation Prize.

Kim Hyesoon, born in 1955, is one of the most prominent and influential contemporary poets of South Korea. She was the first female poet to receive the prestigious Kim Su-yong and Midang awards, and has been translated into Chinese, French, German, Japanese, Spanish, and Swedish. Her most recent books include *I'm OK, I'm Pig!* (2014), and *Poor Love Machine* (2016).

**Judges' Citation:** "In the grievous wake of the Sewol Ferry incident of 2014, the Korean poet Kim Hyesoon composed a cycle of forty-nine poems—one for each day the dead must await reincarnation—to produce a harrowing work of shock, outrage, and veneration for the children lost to this disaster. Through Don Mee Choi's extraordinary translations, we hear the clamorous registers of Kim's art—a transnational collision of shamanism, Modernism, and feminism—yield 'a low note no one has ever sung before.' That otherworldly tone may sound like life itself, the poet sings, 'for even death can't enter this deep inside me.'"



THE GRIFFIN TRUST  
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International



*Negative Space* • Ani Gjika, translated from the Albanian written by Luljeta Lleshanaku  
Bloodaxe Books

**Biography:** Ani Gjika is an Albanian-born poet, literary translator and writer. Her book *Bread on Running Waters* (2013) was a finalist for the 2011 Anthony Hecht Poetry Prize, and the 2011 May Sarton New Hampshire Book Prize. Gjika moved to the US when she was 18, earning an MA in English at Simmons College, and an MFA in poetry at Boston University. Her honours include awards and fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Robert Pinsky Global Fellowship, English PEN Translates, Framingham State University's Miriam Levine Award, and the Robert Fitzgerald Translation Prize.

Luljeta Lleshanaku was born in Elbasan, Albania. She is the author of seven books of poetry in Albanian. Book length translations of her work into other languages include *Antipastoral* (Italy, 2006) *Kinder der natur* (Austria, 2010), *Dzieci natury* (Poland, 2011), and *Lunes en Siete Dias* (Spain, 2017). She has won several prestigious awards for her poetry, including PEN Albania 2016, and the International Kristal Vilenica Prize in 2009. In 2012 she was one of two finalists in Poland for their European Poet of Freedom Prize.

**Judges' Citation:** "With a lesser known original language, the more precious the gift of translation! Luljeta Lleshanaku's *Negative Space* offers a rare glimpse into contemporary Albanian poetry. Effortlessly and with crisp precision, Ani Gjika, herself a poet, has rendered into English, not only the poems in *Negative Space*, but also the eerie ambience which resonates throughout the book, the deep sense of impermanence that is one of the many consequences of growing up under severe political oppression. 'Negative space is always fertile.' Opening trauma's door, we're met by a tender and intelligent voice with stories illuminating existence in a shared humanity, thus restoring dignity. In a world fractured by terror and violence, Lleshanaku's poetry is infinitely exciting, soothing us, its citizens."



THE GRIFFIN TRUST  
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Canadian



***The Blue Clerk* • Dionne Brand**  
McClelland & Stewart

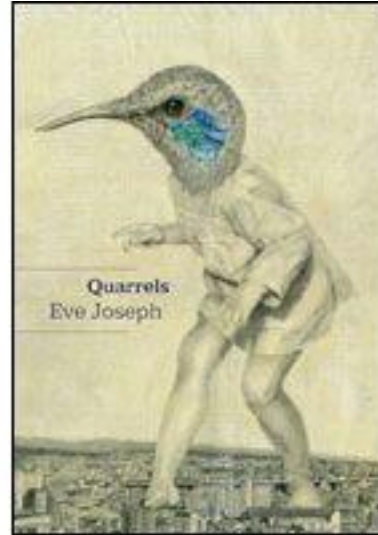
**Biography:** Dionne Brand was born in Trinidad and is a poet, novelist, non-fiction writer, filmmaker, educator, and activist. She has written 10 previous books of poetry, and is a winner of the Governor General's Award, the Trillium Book Award, the Pat Lowther Memorial Award, and a past winner of the Griffin Poetry Prize. She was Toronto's third Poet Laureate from 2009-2012. In 2017 she was named to the Order of Canada. Brand is a Professor in the School of English and Theatre Studies at the University of Guelph. She lives in Toronto.

**Judges' Citation:** "Dionne Brand's *The Blue Clerk* is many things at once: a book-length *ars poetica*; an act of memory and reconfiguration; an extended meditation (one that moves at times directly, at others by a kind of philosophical osmosis) touching on the realms of history, politics, race and gender; an internal, consciously curated and interrogated dialogue that manages to create a space for all of these. Expansive, beautifully written, structurally compelling, and above all moving, *The Blue Clerk* is a book to be read (and re-read), not just for the pleasures of its language, but for the breadth of its vision, and the capaciousness of its thinking."



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***Quarrels* • Eve Joseph**  
Anvil Press

**Biography:** Eve Joseph's two previous books of poetry, *The Startled Heart* (2004) and *The Secret Signature of Things* (2010) were both nominated for the Dorothy Livesay Award. Her nonfiction book, *In the Slender Margin* (2014) won the Hubert Evans award for nonfiction. Joseph grew up in North Vancouver, British Columbia, and now lives in Victoria.

**Judges' Citation:** "In *Quarrels*, Eve Joseph's delightful collection of prose poems, you enter the marvelous and that is the truth! The poet has surrendered herself to the realm of the illogical, trusting that it has a logic of its own, and the outcome is, indeed, a new music. These poems are intriguing spaces and moments defeating the boundaries of the real, but rest assured, Joseph leads you by the hand with warmth, wit and empathy.

Perhaps these poems are crystallisations of a deeply human, spiritual knowledge, gathered over decades working in a hospice. Joseph's previous book, the exceptional memoir, *In the Slender Margin*, renders this experience. Certainly, without gravity, poems wouldn't be able to sing. As distillations of life, these poems, with beauty and charm, hold their own credibility: an omnipresent, merely-in-glimpses-tangible marvelousness, miraculously fastened to the pages of a single slender volume that will fit into most pockets and assure magnificent company on any given journey."





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Canadian



*The Art of Dying* • Sarah Tolmie  
McGill-Queen's University Press

**Biography:** Sarah Tolmie is an associate professor of English at the University of Waterloo. Her poetry collection, *Trio*, was shortlisted for the 2016 Pat Lowther Award. She is a medievalist trained at the University of Toronto and University of Cambridge.

**Judges' Citation:** "A modern *danse macabre* in eighty-nine parts, Sarah Tolmie's *The Art of Dying* conceals a multifaceted meditation on mortality beneath its deceptively simple lyric surface. An irreverent feminist in the tradition of Dorothy Parker and Stevie Smith, Tolmie leverages the subversive possibilities of doggerel to upend our assumptions about everything from abortion to the Anthropocene. Wickedly funny, this is work of great intimacy, too, introducing us to a mother, concerned citizen, social media addict, bookworm, and bon vivant who wants nothing more than to remain 'Here on the quiet earth that I still love, / Where the last humans are.'".