

The Griffin Poetry Prize Announces International and Canadian Shortlist for 2001

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Montreal, April 11th – The seven shortlisted winners of the 2001 Griffin Poetry Prize were announced today by Scott Griffin, Michael Ondaatje and Robin Robertson, Trustees for The Griffin Trust. Selected by judges Carolyn Forché, Dennis Lee and Paul Muldoon, the books are divided into two categories, International and Canadian, with each prize worth \$40,000.

On the **International shortlist** are Yehuda Amichai's *Open Closed Open*; Paul Celan's *Glottal Stop: 101 Poems by Paul Celan*; Fanny Howe's *Selected Poems*; and Les Murray's *Learning Human*.

On the **Canadian shortlist** are Anne Carson's *Men in the Off Hours*; Robert Bringhurst's translation of Ghandl of the Qayahl Llaanas' *Nine Visits to the Mythworld*; and Don McKay's *Another Gravity*.

“The excellence found in the selected shortlist works is an indication of the high caliber of the 310 submissions from 28 different countries. The judges deserve credit and these works must be read!” says Scott Griffin, who, with the Trustees, launched the \$80,000 Griffin Poetry Prize in September, 2000. The announcement of the first Griffin Poetry Prize shortlist was made at Montreal's Blue Metropolis Literary Festival.

The shortlisted poets will be invited to give a reading in Toronto at a Harbourfront Reading Series Special Event on June 6th and the winners will be announced at the inaugural Griffin Poetry Prize awards ceremony on June 7th.

The Griffin Trust, based in Toronto, was created to serve and encourage excellence in poetry written in English anywhere in the world. Eligible collections of poetry, which includes translations, must be submitted by publishers in the calendar year of their publication. ([Click here for more information.](#))

The Griffin Poetry Prize International Shortlist

Book: *Open Closed Open*

Poet: Yehuda Amichai

Translators: Chana Bloch and Chana Kronfeld

Publisher: Harcourt, Inc.

These last poems by the greatest Israeli poet of the modern era are marked by the humanity and humor, which have always characterized his work. Here they seem even more

depth-charged, as when he writes, “When you go out for a night patrol, fill your canteen to the top/so the water won’t make a sloshing sound and give you away./That’s how your soul ought to be in your body, large and full and silent.” The challenge of rendering the range of his tone has been met with extraordinary amplitude and aplomb by Chana Bloch and Chana Kronfeld.

Biographies

Yehuda Amichai (1924-2000) is a writer with an international reputation. He was born in Germany and emigrated with his parents to Palestine in 1936. Best known for his poetry, he is the recipient of numerous awards, including the Israel Prize, his country’s highest honor. *Open Closed Open* was published in Israel in the original Hebrew in 1998.

Chana Bloch, author of the prize-winning *Mrs. Dumpty*, and co-translator of the *Selected Poetry of Yehuda Amichai* and the *Song of Songs*, directs the Creative Writing Program at Mills College, Oakland, CA.

Chana Kronfeld, who teaches Hebrew and Comparative Literature at UC Berkeley, writes about Amichai in her *On the Margins of Modernism*, winner of the MLA’s Scaglione Prize.

Book: *Glottal Stop: 101 Poems by Paul Celan*

Poet: Paul Celan

Translators: Nikolai Popov & Heather McHugh

Publisher: Wesleyan/University Press of New England

Paul Celan is arguably the most important European poet of the twentieth century, but much of his work has seemed too hermetic, linguistically complex, and bound to his struggle with the German language in the aftermath of the Shoah to be translatable. In *Glottal Stop*, however, Nikolai Popov and Heather McHugh have achieved the seemingly impossible: more than translating Celan into English, they have found a way to translate English into Celan.

Biographies

Paul Celan (1920-1970) is widely regarded as Europe’s greatest postwar poet. Born in Romania, Celan was an eastern European Holocaust survivor, who settled in Paris after the war where he remained, until his death. Celan, who spoke at least six languages, worked as a translator of French, Russian and English literature, but wrote his poetry solely in German. Among his major poems is *Death Fugue* that evokes the horrors of the Holocaust.

Nikolai Popov teaches English and Comparative Literature at the University of Washington in Seattle. A James Joyce scholar and translator, he co-translated with Heather McHugh a collection of the poems of Blaga Dimitrova.

Heather McHugh is Milliman Distinguished Writer-in-Residence at the University of Washington. In addition to six acclaimed books of poetry, including most recently, *The Father of the Predicaments*, and the collection of essays *Broken English: Poetry and Partiality*, she has translated poems by Jean Follain and Euripides’ *Cyclops*.

Book: *Selected Poems*

Poet: Fanny Howe

Publisher: University of California Press

Fanny Howe's lyric meditations on matter and spirit, the soul exiled, and the wondrous strangeness of human life on earth are akin to Dickinson's in their fierce wit, musicality and intelligence. Gathered from nine of her books spanning more than two decades, these poems articulate the inquisitive grace and courage of a secular contemplative, restoring to language its power to question the sacred in the interests of corporeal joy.

Biography

Fanny Howe is Professor of Writing and Literature at the University of California, San Diego. One of the best and most respected experimental poets in the United States, she is the author of more than 20 books of fiction and poetry, most recently, *One Crossed Out*, 1997. Boston is the setting for some of the early poems, and Ireland, the birthplace of Howe's mother, is the home of *O'Clock*, a spiritually piquant series of short poems included in *Selected Poems*.

Book: *Learning Human*

Poet: Les Murray

Publisher: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, Carcanet (UK)

A generous selection of poems, written over a period of thirty-five years by the preeminent Australian poet of the late twentieth century. Les Murray has a sure touch with the long leisurely poem, written in panavision and what he celebrates in "The Quality of Sprawl!" – "Sprawl is doing your farming by aeroplane, roughly, /or driving a hitchhiker that extra hundred miles home." Murray is also good on the Polaroid snapshot – of an oyster, for instance, with its "bloodless sheep's eye." Whether he's running a marathon or the hundred meters, Murray gives us beauty and bounty in equal measures.

Biography

Born in Australia in 1938, **Les Murray** is the author of 23 titles published in Australia and several in the United States and England, including *The Vernacular Republic* (1982), *The Daylight Moon* (1988), *The Rabbiter's Bounty: Collected Poems* (1991), *The Boys Who Stole the Funeral Sequence* (1991), *Dog Fox Field* (1992), *Translations from the Natural World* (1992), he was awarded the U.K.'s T.S. Eliot Prize for *Subhuman Redneck Poems* (1997), and *Fredy Neptune: A Novel in Verse* (1999). He has been honored by the Australian government with the Medal of the Order of Australia for his services to literature and was awarded the prestigious Queen's Gold Medal for Poetry in 1998 in addition to numerous National Book Council Awards in Australia, and the Australian National Poetry Award, among others.

The Griffin Poetry Prize Canadian Shortlist

Book: *Men in the Off Hours*

Poet: Anne Carson

Publishers: Vintage Canada, Jonathan Cape (UK), Alfred A. Knopf (USA), Cape/Random House (Australia)

Anne Carson continues to redefine what a book of poetry can be; this ambitious collection ranges from quatrains studded with uncanny images (“Here lies the refugee breather/who drank a bowl of elsewhere”) to musing verse essays, personal laments, rigorous classical scholarship, and meditations on artists’ lives, caught in the carnage of history. All are burnished by Carson’s dialectical imagination, and her quizzical, stricken moral sense.

Biography

Anne Carson lives in Montreal, where she is Director of Graduate Studies, Classics, at McGill University. Her first book published in Britain, *Glass and God*, was shortlisted for the 1998 Forward Prize; her second, *Autobiography of Red*, was shortlisted for the National Book Critics Circle Award and the T.S. Eliot Prize. She has been the recipient of the Lannan Award, a Pushcart Prize, and most recently, the MacArthur Fellowship.

Book: *Nine Visits to the Mythworld*

Poet: Ghandl of the Qayahl Llaanas

Translator: Robert Bringhurst

Publishers: Douglas & McIntyre Ltd., University of Nebraska (USA)

For most readers, *Nine Visits to the Mythworld* will be a revelation. These sophisticated narrative poems by Haida mythteller Ghandl come from an unfamiliar imaginative world, studied by specialists more for its anthropological interest than its artistry. Robert Bringhurst’s sinewy language and acute formal intelligence now reveal poetry of vivacity and stature, which can be enjoyed as a cultural treasure.

Biography

Robert Bringhurst is one of Canada’s most respected poets, one of its most probing cultural historians, a skilled linguist who has worked for many years with Native American texts and author of *Story as Sharp as a Knife*, Volume 1 of the trilogy: *Masterworks of the Classical Haida*. He translated *Nine Visits to the Mythworld* from Haida, originally phonetically transcribed by a young American anthropologist on the Northwest Coast of North America in 1900. Among the legendary mythtellers was a blind man in his fifties by the name of Ghandl.

Book: *Another Gravity*

Poet: Don McKay

Publisher: McClelland & Stewart Ltd.

Don McKay's journey through closely observed places and creatures not only brings them alive with great panache, it explores a more humane way of living on earth, "bereft and happy, my whole mind/applauding." These wonderfully bittersweet poems establish a rich vocabulary of dwelling – have "lift and drag," of homing and leaving home. The result is a playful yet resonant microcosm, charted with virtuosity and love.

Biography

Don McKay won Canada's Governor General's Award for *Night Field* (1991), and prior to that was a finalist for *Birding, or desire* (1983), which won him the Canadian Authors Association Award for Poetry. McKay's most recent collection of poems, *Apparatus* (1997) was a finalist for the Governor General's Award. He lives in Victoria, British Columbia. *Another Gravity* is his ninth collection of poetry.

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Note to Booksellers: The Griffin Trust supplies, free of charge, The Griffin Poetry Prize 2001 Shortlist stickers, shelf talkers, and postcards. Winner stickers will be available after June 7th. [Click here to go to our online order form.](#)

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