



THE GRIFFIN TRUST
For Excellence In Poetry

Trustees:

Margaret Atwood
Scott Griffin
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Robin Robertson
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THE 2002 GRIFFIN POETRY PRIZE SHORTLIST
CITATIONS

The Canadian Shortlist

Book: *Eunoia*
Poet: **Christian Bök**
Publishers: Coach House Books

Citation: Christian Bök has made an immensely attractive work from those “corridors of the breath” we call vowels, giving each in turn its dignity and manifest, making all move to the order of his own recognition and narrative. Both he and they are led to delightfully, unexpected conclusions as though the world really were what we made of it. As we are told at the outset, “Eunoia, which means ‘beautiful thinking’, is the shortest English word to contain all five vowels.” Here each speaks with persistent, unequivocal voice, all puns indeed intended.

Book: *Sheep’s Vigil by a Fervent Person*
Poet: **Eirin Moure**
Publisher: House of Anansi Press Limited

Citation: **Eirin Moure’s** *Sheep’s Vigil by a Fervent Person* is wry, clever, playful and lyrical. It is essentially, and beautifully, a love letter to that poet of fluid identities Fernando Pessoa. And it is also a love letter to Toronto, its vanished pastoral. Pessoa’s Tejo river is Moure’s Humber river. Her language, as his, is always doubled. She translates and recreates their shared sensations of nature’s plain existence, its material absolutism.

Book: *Short Haul Engine*
Poet: **Karen Solie**
Publisher: Brick Books

Citation: **Karen Solie’s** first book of poems, *Short Haul Engine* – a nice phrase for poetry – stood out for its mix of physical impressions, perceptual strength, and – especially – mental grace. A kind of liveliness, agility, connectivity. In “Early in Winter”, one of her many car poems, she writes: “feet cold, heart wagging its little tail.” Grief shows: “what is not in everything/ there is; and all/ it wants to talk about/ is you.” A monstrous old fish, a sturgeon, is hauled out of the water by some teenagers, but then, “...when he began to heave and thrash over yards of rock/ to the water’s edge and, unbelievably, in./ we couldn’t hold him though we were teenaged/ and bigger than everything. Could not contain/ the old current he had for a mind, its pull,/ and his body a muscle called river, called spawn.” There is toughness here, as well as grace. Often in her pages, we encounter wisdom of a severity that we would almost rather not know. A cold person is a different species; there is a dismal companionship in grief, the water stays in the fish, even when the fish is out of the water. *Short Haul Engine* is not just an exceptional debut, it is an exceptional book.



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The International Shortlist

Book: *Maraca New and Selected Poems 1965-2000*

Poet: **Victor Hernández Cruz**

Publisher: Coffee House Press

Citation: **Victor Hernández Cruz** has long been the defining poet of that complex bridge between the Latino and mainland cultures of the U.S. *Maraca New and Selected Poems 1965-2000* proves the extraordinary range of this great, enduring poet, whose articulately persuasive humor and intelligence bear persistent witness to a meld of peoples: “All the exile from broken/ South/ The horses the cows/ the chickens/ The daisies of the rural/ road/ All past tense in the urbanity/ that/ remembers/ The pace of the mountains/ The moods of the fields ...” Bringing together long out-of-print work and that most recent, *Maraca* is testament to its author’s singular genius in a world he maintains so compassionately for all who will share it with him.

Book: *Homer: War Music*

Poet: **Christopher Logue**

Publisher: Faber and Faber Limited, Farrar, Straus & Giroux, Jonathan Cape

Citation: **Christopher Logue** is one of those all too rare poets whose ability to tell the story transforms each word of it to a freshness and a presence one had feared was lost. What could be more intimidating than Homer’s great epic, the *Iliad*? Yet Logue’s *War Music* (which collects the first three volumes of his brilliant adaptation) ‘makes it new’ with all the vigor and invention the old recountings could no longer carry. If ‘translation’ is literally a ‘carrying over,’ then *War Music* is a vivid and reaffirming instance of its power. First and last, Logue is a poet whose own authority here is as timeless as his master’s.

Book: *Conscious and Verbal*

Poet: **Les Murray**

Publisher: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, Duffy & Snellgrove, Carcanet, distributed by Douglas & McIntyre Ltd. in Canada.

Citation: *Conscious and Verbal*, the title of the latest book – the eighth in little over a decade – by **Les Murray**, is taken from a hospital press release, informing Australians that their great national poet, after three weeks at death’s door with sudden catastrophic liver failure, was on the mend. One can hear the deprecating giggle, the understatement, in the phrase once Murray adopted it as a title. It is a typically rich and varied performance. What Murray can do is to write interestingly and characteristically about anything and everything; his imagination is fired by any sort of subject: city and country, staying at home or travelling abroad, memory and history, the present or the future, satire or hymn, culture or nature.



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Here, as well as the poem of his survival – called “travels with John Hunter” (“I was sped down a road/ of treetops and fishing-rod lightpoles/ towards the three persons of God/ and the three persons of John Hunter/ Hospital. Who said We might lose this one.” – calm and witty and inventive, there are poems in *Conscious and Verbal* on the joys of libraries and swimming pools, on poetry and oysters, and Harley Davidsons. If you had to choose a poet to save your life, you could do worse than choose Les Murray.

Book: *Disobedience*

Poet: **Alice Notley**

Publisher: Penguin Putnam Inc. (U.S.), Penguin Books Ltd. (U.K.), Penguin Books Australia Ltd., Penguin Books Canada Ltd., and Penguin Books (N.Z.) Ltd.

Citation: *Disobedience* stands in ambush at the virtual co-ordinates of our ‘post-modern’ inferno. Against ‘decorous poetry’, Alice Notley’s verse has a caustic swish, the intimacy of a vivisectionist on the contemporary body politic. In an unsentimental interrogation of the will, the soul and the common being the long poem ‘disses’ the orthodoxies of political power, sex, and philosophy. *Disobedience* does what only the best poetry can do in times like these, surprise, denounce, dissent.