



THE GRIFFIN TRUST
For Excellence In Poetry

Trustees:

Margaret Atwood
Carolyn Forché
Scott Griffin
Robert Hass
Michael Ondaatje
Robin Robertson
David Young

Press Release

**THE GRIFFIN POETRY PRIZE ANNOUNCES THE 2007
CANADIAN AND INTERNATIONAL SHORTLIST**

An Unprecedented 483 Eligible Books Submitted

TORONTO – April 3, 2007 – Scott Griffin, founder of The Griffin Trust For Excellence In Poetry and David Young, trustee, today announced the Canadian and International shortlist for this year's prize. The C\$100,000 Griffin Poetry Prize is one of the most lucrative poetry prizes in the world – exemplifying the international spirit of the form. The prize is awarded annually for the two best books of poetry, including translations, published in English in the previous year.

Judges John Burnside, Charles Simic and Karen Solie read 483 books of poetry, including 18 translations, received from 15 countries around the globe. The seven finalists – three Canadian and four International – will be invited to read in Toronto at the MacMillan Theatre on Tuesday, June 5, 2007. The winners, who each receive C\$50,000, will be announced on Wednesday, June 6, 2007 at the seventh annual Griffin Poetry Prize Awards Evening.

Canadian Shortlist

Airstream Land Yacht • **Ken Babstock**
House of Anansi Press

Strike/Slip • **Don McKay**
McClelland & Stewart

Ontological Necessities • **Priscila Uppal**
Exile Editions

International Shortlist

Tramp in Flames • **Paul Farley**
Picador

Salvation Blues • **Rodney Jones**
Houghton Mifflin

Ooga-Booga • **Frederick Seidel**
Farrar, Straus and Giroux

Scar Tissue • **Charles Wright**
Farrar, Straus and Giroux



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The judges for the 2007 Griffin Poetry Prize are the distinguished poets John Burnside (Dunfermline, Scotland), Charles Simic (New Hampshire, USA) and Karen Solie (Toronto, Canada).

Each year, the Griffin Poetry Prize publishes an anthology, a selection of poems 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.

The Griffin Poetry Prize was launched in September, 2000 by trustees Margaret Atwood, Carolyn Forché, Scott Griffin, Robert Hass, Michael Ondaatje, Robin Robertson and David Young. Each year, the trustees (with the exception of Scott Griffin) are responsible for selecting the judges for the prize.

The Griffin Trust For Excellence In Poetry was created to serve and encourage poetry written in English anywhere in the world. Eligible collections of poetry, including translations, must be submitted by publishers no later than December 31 in the calendar year of their publication.

Tickets for the Readings to be held on Tuesday, June 5, 2007 at the MacMillan Theatre are available at www.griffinpoetryprize.com/tickets or by calling 905-565-5993.

- 30 -

NOTE: The publishers mentioned in our release are those who submitted the books.

NOTE TO BOOKSELLERS: Griffin Poetry Prize Shortlist posters and stickers are supplied free of charge by The Griffin Trust. To view these items and access the order form, visit our Web site, at <http://www.griffinpoetryprize.com/order.php>. Winner stickers will be available after June 6, 2007.

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Links: Shortlisted Publishers' Websites:

Exile Editions: www.exileeditions.com
Farrar, Straus and Giroux: www.fsgbooks.com
Houghton Mifflin: www.hmco.com
House of Anansi Press: www.anansi.ca
McClelland & Stewart: www.mcclelland.com/poetry
Picador: www.panmacmillan.com/imprints/picador/

Marketing Collateral:

<http://www.griffinpoetryprize.com/order.php>

Downloadable photographs of the 2007 shortlisted poets:

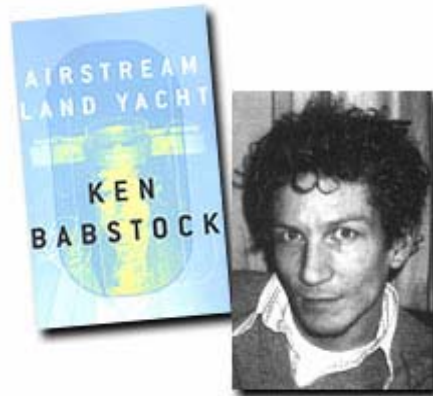
<http://www.griffinpoetryprize.com/presskit.php>



THE GRIFFIN TRUST
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**THE 2007 GRIFFIN POETRY PRIZE SHORTLIST
CITATIONS, BIOGRAPHIES AND SUMMARIES**

Canadian Shortlist



***Airstream Land Yacht* • Ken Babstock**

House of Anansi Press

Judges' Citation: "The feature of *Airstream Land Yacht* that seems most striking, on a first reading, is its range: here we find a poet who can do almost anything, both formally and in his exploration of such subject matter as romantic love, landscape, the body, the city, physical pain and a joyful awareness of the sensory details of a world full of marvels and riddles. Yet no matter what his subject matter is, or how he chooses to approach it, he never settles for effect: Babstock can be terse, darkly funny, tender, elegiac, wise, mysterious, but he is always fresh and always *honest*.

On a closer acquaintance, however, it is Babstock's exemplary compassion that dominates this extraordinary collection. His is a poetry that sees through our errors and wishful thinking, a poetry that recognises that "it's what we think we saw that sticks, never what we see", yet, in a series of poems of formal and philosophical rigour, he is able to conclude that "we should be held and forgiven". *Airstream Land Yacht* is a book with a vision, one in which a reasoned celebration emerges:

The earth on the roof. Voles over shingles.
Seven kinds of moss softening the gables.
And inside, each step a ride
On the backs of sea birds to a bed on a floor all sky."

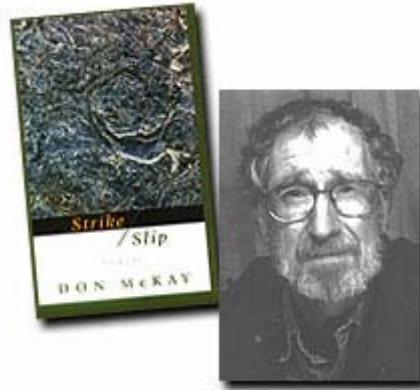
Biography: Ken Babstock is the author of *Mean*, which won the Atlantic Poetry Prize and the Milton Acorn People's Poet Award, and *Days Into Flatspin*, winner of a K.M. Hunter Award. His poems have won Gold at the National Magazine Awards, have been anthologized in Canada and the United States, and have been translated into Dutch, Serbo-Croatian, and Latvian. Ken Babstock lives in Toronto, Canada.

Summary: *Airstream Land Yacht* is Ken Babstock's third collection of poetry. In this work, poems of conscience collide with the problems of consciousness and the concrete and conceptual find equal footing. As in his previous collections Babstock displays formal beauty but mixes it with imagistic brinksmanship and playful humour. The clutch of love poems contained here are key to unlocking the larger collection, a love song to the wordless world.



THE GRIFFIN TRUST
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Canadian Shortlist



***Strike/Slip* • Don McKay**

McClelland & Stewart

Judges' Citation: "In *Strike/Slip*, Don McKay walks us out to the uncertain ground between the known and unknown, between the names we have given things and things as they are. This is wonder's territory, and from within it McKay considers a time "before mind or math" before rock, in human hands, turned over in the mind, becomes stone. The poems confront the strangeness and inadequacy of using language to address the point at which language fails – the point where, "wild and incompetent, / you have no house" – and suggest that in such an unsettled state we might truly pay attention. In McKay's work, attention is the foundation of a poetics and an ethics in which otherness is respected, indeed cherished, for its ability to unhouse. But *Strike/Slip* also speaks to the intimacy of our relationships with time. How, at once metaphysical, practical, and intuitive, the weight of it is thought, felt in the body, and discerned in the landscape as sediment and growth, rust and erosion. McKay's meditations on time's evidence acquire a similar heft, proposing, in their discipline of mind and generosity of spirit, a way to be at home in the world. A book of patience, courage, and quiet eloquence, *Strike/Slip* manifests, like quartz, 'Some act of pure attention simple, naked, perilously perfect'."

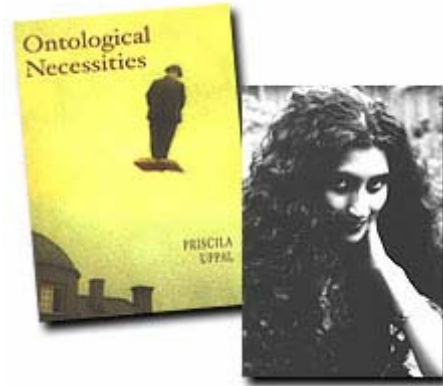
Biography: Don McKay has published 10 previous works of poetry. He is the winner of two Governor General's Literary Awards for Poetry for *Night Field* (1991) and *Another Gravity* (2000). He has been shortlisted twice for the Griffin Poetry Prize, first in 2001 for *Another Gravity* and most recently in 2005 for *Camber: Selected Poems*, which was also named a *Globe and Mail* Notable Book of the Year. Don McKay lives in British Columbia, Canada.

Summary: Don McKay walks the strike/slip fault between poetry and landscape, sticks its strange nose into the cold silence of geologic time, meditates on marble, quartz, and gneiss, and attends to the songs of ravens and thrushes, and the clamour of the industrialized bush. Behind these poems lies the urge to engage the tectonics of planetary dwelling with the rickety contraption of language, and to register the stress, sheer, and strain – but also the astonishment – engendered by that necessary failure.



THE GRIFFIN TRUST
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Canadian Shortlist



***Ontological Necessities* • Priscila Uppal**

Exile Editions

Judges' Citation: "Who are you? One of Priscila Uppal's poems keeps asking itself. Are you the oyster shell of the new millennium, the sundial waitress in her two-bit automobile with a license to fish, the wristwatch of the nation, the woman's shelter of the soul? The poems in *Ontological Necessities* are all that and much more. Audacious, irreverent, funny and, at the same time, deeply serious, they explore our notions of identity and various other conventions we live by striving to see through the lies. The ever-present horrors of our age; the injustice, the violence, the abuse and slaughter of the innocent, are almost always present. Uppal is a political poet who sounds like no other political poet, someone bound to get in trouble in every political system in the world. Her subject matter tends to be dark, but her telling of it is exhilarating. Every poem in her book comes as a surprise, and that includes the free translation of the Anglo-Saxon poem "The Wanderer" with which the book concludes, and which in her version deals with the Iraq war and the fate of people displaced by such calamities. Uppal has done the rare and difficult thing: she has brought a brand new voice to poetry."

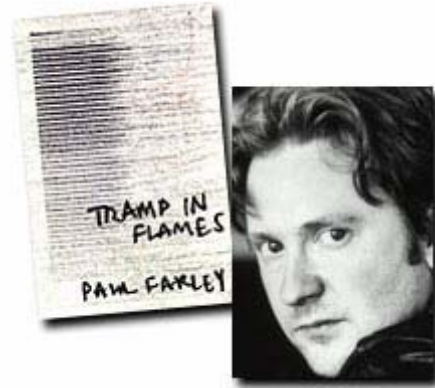
Biography: Priscila Uppal is the author of four previous collections of poetry: *How to Draw Blood From a Stone* (1998); *Confessions of A Fertility Expert* (1999); *Pretending to Die* (2001); *Live Coverage* (2003) and a novel, *The Divine Economy of Salvation* (2002), which was published by Doubleday in Canada and Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill in the United States, and translated into Dutch and Greek. Her poetry has been translated into Korean, Croatian, Latvian, and Italian. She is professor of Humanities at York University and co-ordinator of York's Creative Writing Program. Priscila Uppal lives in Toronto, Canada.

Summary: In *Ontological Necessities* Priscila Uppal investigates the emotional and philosophical struggle fundamental to notions of being in the 21st century. From poems that explore questions of identity to those that attempt to examine human relationships amid the onslaught of horrors depicted daily in the news, this collection uses surrealist and absurdist language in subversive and startling ways to grapple with the increasingly absurd world we all occupy.



THE GRIFFIN TRUST
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International Shortlist



***Tramp in Flames* • Paul Farley**

Picador

Judges' Citation: "Paul Farley is a poet of wit, sensuality and warmth. His work engages with the commonplace and the overlooked, the absurd and the catastrophic, the scientific and the mythic, in ways that make us stop and think again about what it is to be living in this particular world, at this particular moment in our history. Though he wears his learning lightly, Farley draws upon philosophy and natural science, as well as a deep, occasionally elegiac affection for the streets and fields and hillsides of the places he has called home, to create a poetry of exceptional formal skill. What makes his work so remarkable is that, whatever his subject matter, from the city of Liverpool to an old Ovaltine tin, everything is transformed by his imagination and his formal gifts, making us think again about what we know, and what we think we know. That said, however, what comes across most vividly here is the sheer music of the writing: every line sings off the page, and there can be few poets whose work is so memorable. If the best poetry aspires to the condition of music, as Mallarmé suggests, then this is poetry of the highest order: melodic, humane and intellectually engaging. *Tramp in Flames* renews our contract with the given world, yet challenges us to think again about what we see, and what we take for granted."

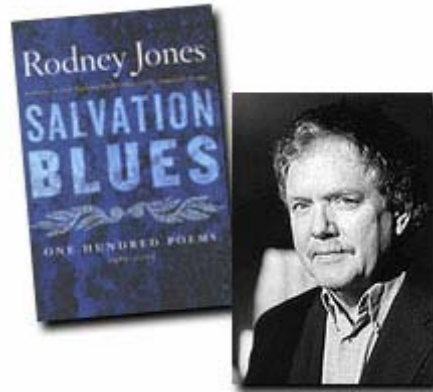
Biography: Paul Farley won the Arvon Poetry Competition Competition in 1996. His first poetry collection, *The Boy From the Chemist is Here to See You* (1998), won the Forward Poetry Prize for Best First Collection and a Somerset Maugham Award, and was shortlisted for the Whitbread Poetry Award. He was named *Sunday Times* Young Writer of the Year (1999). He received an Arts Council Writers' Award in 2000. *The Ice Age* (2002) won the 2003 Whitbread Poetry Award and was shortlisted for the T.S. Eliot Prize. In addition to being shortlisted for the Griffin Poetry Prize, Paul Farley's *Tramp in Flames* won the 2006 Forward Prize for Best Individual Poem for "Liverpool Disappears for a Billionth of a Second". Paul Farley currently lectures in Creative Writing at the University of Lancaster. He lives in England.

Summary: Paul Farley has been widely and justly praised for his extraordinary knack of casting the contemporary experience in an almost mythic and historic light, and following the exceptional acclaim for his first two books, Farley might have been forgiven for resting on his laurels for his third. *Tramp in Flames*, however, finds him pushing his imaginative daring and formal ambition to the limit. A book of astonishing variety and range and no little emotional bravery, *Tramp in Flames* shows Farley rapidly becoming one of the most unfailingly interesting writers of any genre, and a definitive voice of the age.



THE GRIFFIN TRUST
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International Shortlist



***Salvation Blues* • Rodney Jones**
Houghton Mifflin

Judges' Citation: "There are not many poets who get as much of American life in their poems as Rodney Jones. His *Salvation Blues*, a book made up of one hundred poems taken from six previous collections published over the last twenty years, brings to mind Whitman. Jones asks in a poem, what happened to all the people the older poet cheered westward across the continent? They are all here in his poems, making ends meet, working as farmers, shipping clerks, waitresses, car mechanics, butchers, strippers and teachers, while trying their best to believe in the American dream and a religion whose preachers tend to be actors and salesmen whose pulpit is television. Jones is a marvelous story teller and a contemplative man with an interest in both character and the way the world works. "Most of us are compositions that begin in error," he says. He never forgets that. His poems are angry, bawdy, funny, wise and deeply moving. They sing to remind us of our humanity and to heal the language of its long service as a mere tool."

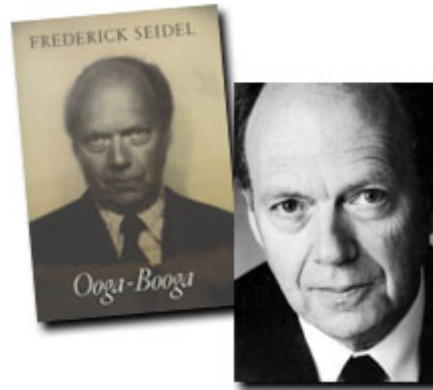
Biography: *Salvation Blues* is Rodney Jones' eighth book of poetry. Previous collections include *Kingdom of the Instant: Poems* (2004); *Elegy for the Southern Drawl* (1999); *Things That Happen Once* (1996); *Apocalyptic Narrative* (1993); *Transparent Gestures* (1989); *The Unborn* (1985); and *The Story They Told Us of Light* (1980). He was named a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize and the winner of the 1989 National Book Critics Circle Award. His other honours include a Guggenheim Fellowship, the Peter I.B. Lavan Award from the Academy of American Poets, the Jean Stein Award from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, a Southeast Booksellers Association Award, and a Harper Lee Award. Rodney Jones is a professor of English at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale.

Summary: In *Salvation Blues* Jones has chosen the best of his previous work and included 25 new poems from the past three years which share a common theme. Ask Rodney Jones how he spends his time these days when he's not writing poetry: he plays jazz guitar; he goes fishing; and he regrets the Bush administration. In describing the new poems in the collection Jones says: "The new poems make me uncomfortable. They seem aesthetically and politically unflinching, statements of my depression and disgust with the people of the United States."



THE GRIFFIN TRUST
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International Shortlist



***Ooga-Booga* • Frederick Seidel**

Farrar, Straus and Giroux

Judges' Citation: "Frederick Seidel's work reminds us that it is not poetry's job to reassure, to confirm expectations and habits of thought. Its beauty is often difficult and its pleasures complicated and unnerving. Violent, scary, uncomfortably funny and ferociously sad, angry, mourning, or in love, the poems' brutal honesty of intellect and instinct is written with wicked, magnificent control. And always, they are utterly human. Morality is never excused from the mess of politics and culture. "Civilized is about having stuff," writes Seidel. "Too much is almost enough." Addressing privilege and complicity in the first person, the poems know that for all that is acquired, somebody, or something, pays. "The American trophies covered in tears that deck the American halls" dog the boutique hotels, shadowing corners of those poems in which "We lived like hummingbirds on nectar and oxygen." *Ooga-Booga* places in uneasy proximity images and statements that, in the discomfort of the other's glare, reveal their underpinnings and implications. Its poems refuse complacency and the inertia of despair, whether from trajectories of loss, war, movies, hunting, cocktails at the Carlyle or superbike racing. It bids us take a look at our own affairs. Seidel has written a startling, haunting book. Its risks are both its challenge and reward."

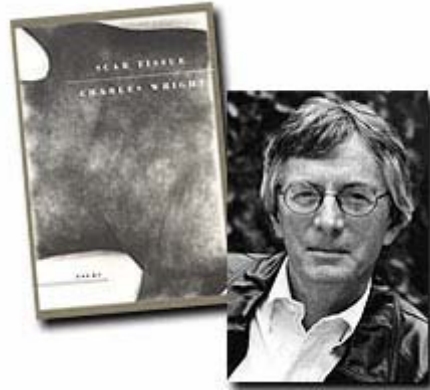
Biography: Frederick Seidel's previous collections include *Final Solutions: Poems, 1959 – 1979*; *Sunrise* (1980), which won the National Book Critics Circle Award in Poetry and the Lamont Prize; *My Tokyo* (1993); *Going Fast* (1998); *The Cosmos Poems*, illustrated by Anselm Kiefer (2000); *Life on Earth* (2001); and *Area Code 212* (2002). He is the recipient of numerous prizes including the 2002 PEN/Voelker Award for Poetry. Frederick Seidel is a founding editor of *The Paris Review*, a protégé of Ezra Pound and Robert Lowell, and one of the original Elaine's crowd. He was born in St. Louis and graduated from Harvard and now lives in New York City.

Summary: Since his first collection appeared in 1963, Seidel has written about the present state of things – private and public, acknowledged and unacknowledged, decade by decade – with laconic craft, inspired malice, terrible hilarity and disabused omniscience.



THE GRIFFIN TRUST
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International Shortlist



***Scar Tissue* • Charles Wright**

Farrar, Straus and Giroux

Judges' Citation: "At the heart of every poem is a journey of discovery. Something is being found out," Charles Wright has written. In his poems, the same old world we look at every day without seeing it, be it a tree in the yard, the bird in that tree, the branch swaying after the bird has flown, is the subject of endless interest. For Wright, reality is not stable; it changes with the seasons and has to be rediscovered again and again. "I write out my charms and spells / against the passage of light / and gathering evil," he writes in his new book. The mind in the act of finding what will suffice in the face of one's own mortality is Wright's inexhaustible theme. His spiritual and philosophical problem is that he is a "God-fearing agnostic" sure only of his need to question everything. What makes his poems memorable is his seemingly inexhaustible ability to see things with new eyes. In *Scar Tissue*, as in his other books, he is a poet of great originality and beauty."

Biography: Charles Wright's previous books of poetry include *The Grave of the Right Hand* (1970); *Hard Freight* (1973); *Bloodlines* (1975); *China Trace* (1977); *The Southern Cross* (1981); *Country Music: Selected Early Poems* (1982); *The Other Side of the River* (1984); *Zone Journals* (1988); *The World of the Ten Thousand Things: Poems 1980 – 1990* (1990); *Chickamauga* (1995), which won the 1996 Academy of American Poets' Lenore Marshall Poetry Prize; *Black Zodiac* (1997), which received the 1998 Pulitzer Prize for Poetry; *Appalachia* (1998); *Negative Blue: Selected Later Poems* (2000); *A Short History of the Shadow* (2002); and *Buffalo Yoga* (2004). He has received a Guggenheim Fellowship (1975), the National Book Award in Poetry (1983), and the PEN Translation Prize for his translation of the Italian poet Eugenio Montale's *The Storm and Other Things*. Charles Wright is a professor of English at the University of Virginia at Charlottesville, where he also lives.

Summary: In his new collection, Charles Wright investigates the tenuous relationship between description and actuality--"thing is not an image"--but also reaffirms the project of attempting to describe, to capture the natural world and the beings in it, although he reminds us that landscape is not his subject matter but his technique: that language was always his subject--language and "the ghost of god." And in the dolomites, the clouds, stars, wind, and water that populate these poems, "something un-ordinary persists." -- Booklist

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



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