



THE GRIFFIN TRUST
For Excellence In Poetry

Trustees:

Margaret Atwood
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Michael Ondaatje
Robin Robertson
David Young

Press Release

**THE GRIFFIN POETRY PRIZE ANNOUNCES THE 2008
CANADIAN AND INTERNATIONAL SHORTLIST**

An Unprecedented 509 Eligible Books Submitted

TORONTO – April 8, 2008 – 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 George Bowering, James Lasdun and Pura López Colomé read 509 books of poetry, including 19 translations, received from 31 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 3, 2008. The winners, who each receive C\$50,000, will be announced on Wednesday, June 4, 2008 at the eighth annual Griffin Poetry Prize Awards Evening.

Canadian Shortlist

The Holy Forest: Collected Poems of Robin Blaser • Robin Blaser
University of California Press

Notebook of Roses and Civilization • Robert Majzels and Erín Moure, translated
from the French, written by Nicole Brossard
Coach House Books

Why Are You So Sad? Selected Poems of David W. McFadden • David McFadden
Insomniac Press/4 a.m. Books

International Shortlist

Notes from the Air: Selected Later Poems • John Ashbery
HarperCollins Publishers/Ecco

Ripple Effect: New and Selected Poems • Elaine Equi
Coffee House Press

The Complete Poetry: A Bilingual Edition • Clayton Eshleman, translated from
the Spanish, written by César Vallejo
University of California Press

Selected Poems 1969-2005 • David Harsent
Faber and Faber



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The judges for the 2008 Griffin Poetry Prize are the distinguished writers and poets George Bowering (Canada), James Lasdun (USA) and Pura López Colomé (Mexico). 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 3, 2008 at the MacMillan Theatre are available at www.griffinpoetryprize.com/tickets or by calling 905-565-5993.

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

NOTE TO BOOKSELLERS: Griffin Poetry Prize 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 4, 2008.

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Links:

Shortlisted Publishers' Web sites:

Coach House Books: www.chbooks.com
Coffee House Press: www.coffeehousepress.org
Faber and Faber: www.faber.co.uk
Harper Collins Publishers: www.harpercollins.com
Insomniac Press/4 a.m. Books: www.insomniacpress.com
University of California Press: www.ucpress.edu

Marketing Collateral:

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

Downloadable photographs of the 2008 shortlisted poets:

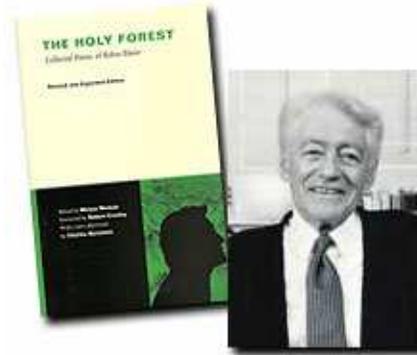
<http://www.griffinpoetryprize.com/presskit.php>



THE GRIFFIN TRUST
For Excellence In Poetry

**THE 2008 GRIFFIN POETRY PRIZE SHORTLIST
CITATIONS, BIOGRAPHIES AND SUMMARIES**

Canadian Shortlist



***The Holy Forest: Collected Poems of Robin Blaser* • Robin Blaser**
University of California Press

Judges' Citation: "There is an irony in the presumption that the universe contains the "collected" poems of Robin Blaser. Within the five hundred pages of *The Holy Forest* moves a lifetime's thought such as we are not used to or prepared for. Whitman was not fooling when he said that a poet, an extraordinary poet, can himself be a cosmos. But as sidereal as Blaser's lines become, we never forget that the purpose is human living every day inside what is. In a review of an earlier volume with the same title (bravely published in Canada by Coach House and later listed by Talonbooks), Brian Fawcett wrote: "His truest poetic instinct is that cosmology is at once humanity's fundamental pursuit - and the source of our most screamingly funny ironies, misapprehensions and pratfalls." Blaser is solemn enough to approach Dante Alighieri as a "Great Companion," and serious enough to maintain that "the truth is laughter" we might find some afternoon on the darkest pavement."

Biography: **Robin Blaser** is one of North America's most outstanding poets of the postwar period, having emerged from the Berkeley Renaissance of the 1940s and 1950s as a central figure in that burgeoning literary scene. He is Professor Emeritus at Simon Fraser University and has published several books of poems and numerous essays, many of which are included in *The Fire: Collected Essays of Robin Blaser* (University of California Press, 2006). Blaser established himself as a key figure on the west coast of British Columbia and an important influence among Canadian experimental poets such as George Bowering, Steve McCaffery, bp Nichol, Erín Moure and Daphne Marlatt. Blaser also penned an English and Latin opera libretto entitled *The Last Supper*. On May 31st, 2006, the legendary poet was honoured with The Griffin Trust for Excellence in Poetry's first Lifetime Recognition Award.

Summary: *The Holy Forest*, now spanning five decades, is Blaser's highly acclaimed lifelong serial poem. This long-awaited revised and expanded edition includes numerous published volumes of verse, the ongoing 'Image-Nation' and 'Truth Is Laughter' series and new work from 1994 to 2004. Blaser's passion for word making draws inspiration from the major poets and philosophers of our time – from friends and peers such as Robert Duncan, Jack Spicer and Steve McCaffery to virtual companions in thought such as Hannah Arendt, Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, among others. This comprehensive compilation of Blaser's prophetic meditations on the histories, theories, emotions, experiments, and counter-memories of the late twentieth century will stand as the definitive collection of his unique and luminous poetic oeuvre.



THE GRIFFIN TRUST
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Canadian Shortlist



***Notebook of Roses and Civilization* • Robert Majzels and Erín Moure, translated from the French, written by Nicole Brossard**
Coach House Books

Judges' Citation: "Over her four decades of writing and publishing poems and novels and essays-*textes*, Nicole Brossard has always shone an investigative light on every word that comes to her, and turned a demanding ear to each item of punctuation or notation. She sees the universe in the word for sand, and knows that it could be sable mouvant. So the translators of Nicole Brossard have to make poems we will love to read the way a carpenter loves a finished table. Majzels and Moure are not masters but divine servants of the English words they so carefully bring over to us. Inventive writers themselves, they are practiced translators who have here taken on a daunting project and succeeded beautifully."

Biographies:

Robert Majzels is a translator and writer of poems, plays and novels, most recently *Apikoros Sleuth* (Mercury Press, 2004). Born in Montreal, Quebec, Majzels has worked as a lathe operator in a steel plant, a taxi driver, a hospital orderly and an insurance appraiser. In 1986, he graduated with an MA in English Literature from Concordia University where he subsequently taught creative writing for 13 years. From 2000 to 2002, Majzels lived and studied Chinese in Beijing, China. He won a Governor General's Literary Award for French to English translation for *Just Fine*, from the French *Pas Pire* by France Daigle. Majzels's play *This Night the Kapo* won first prize in the Dorothy Silver Playwright's Award in 1991 and first prize in the Canadian Jewish Playwriting Competition in 1994. Robert Majzels currently teaches at the University of Calgary.

Erín Moure is an award-winning poet and translator with more than 15 books to her credit. Originally from Calgary, Moure wrote her first collections of poetry in Vancouver – *Empire; York Street*, which was nominated for the Governor General's Literary Award for Poetry in 1979; *Wanted Alive*; and *Domestic Fuel*, which won the 1985 Pat Lowther Prize. Her 1988 work *Furious* won the Governor General's Literary Award for Poetry. She was twice shortlisted for the Griffin Poetry Prize: in 2002 for *Sheep's Vigil by a Fervent Person* and in 2006 for *Little Theatres*. The latter work won the A.M. Klein Prize for Poetry in 2005. She has also published four chapbooks: *The Whisky Vigil, Excess, Visible Spectrum*, and *Search Procedures, or Lake This*. Her most recent collection is *O Cadoiro*. Erín Moure works as a freelance editor and communications specialist in Montreal.

Majzels and Moure were nominated for a Governor General's Literary Award for Translation in 2007 for *Notebook of Roses and Civilization*.

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THE GRIFFIN TRUST
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Canadian Shortlist

***Notebook of Roses and Civilization* • Robert Majzels and Erin Moure, translated from the French,
written by Nicole Brossard**

Coach House Books

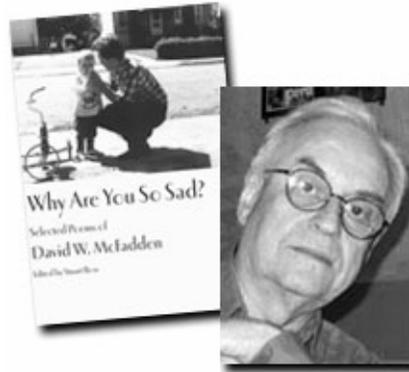
Nicole Brossard was born in Montreal in 1943. Since 1965 she has published more than 30 books, including *Museum of Bone and Water*, *The Aerial Letter* and *Mauve Desert*. Brossard has twice been awarded the Governor General's Literary Award for Poetry, first in 1974 and again ten years later. In 1965, she co-founded the literary periodical *La barre du jour* and, in 1976, the feminist journal *Les têtes de pioche*. That same year, she co-directed the movie *Some American Feminists*. In 1991, Brossard collaborated with Lisette Girouard on an anthology of women's poetry from Quebec entitled *Des origines à nos jours* which was awarded the Prix Athanase-David, Quebec's highest literary distinction. In 2003, she received the W.O. Mitchell Literary Prize for mentorship. Her books have been translated into English, Spanish and Japanese. Brossard's most recent novel is *Yesterday, at the Hotel Clarendon*.

Summary: The heat of summer on an earlobe, a parking meter, the shadow of crabs and pigeons under a cherry tree, an olive, a shoulder blade – in the poems of Nicole Brossard these concrete, quotidian things move languorously through the senses to find a place beyond language. Taken together, they create an audacious new architecture of meaning.



THE GRIFFIN TRUST
For Excellence In Poetry

Canadian Shortlist



***Why Are You So Sad? Selected Poems of David W. McFadden* • David McFadden**

Insomniac Press/4 a.m. Books

Judges' Citation: "David McFadden has been a major underground poet all his writing life, and the young poets discover him every year. He has always been the darling of the *avant-garde*, but he is the most readable poet on the planet. Like his hero William Blake, he lives at ease among the most supernatural of events, and gazes in wonderment at everyday things. As a poet he reminds you to be yourself, to be yourself in the world, and give it a chance to amaze you. While reading his beautiful clear language, you sense that he is a trickster, but you can not help believing every stanza he writes. If there is any such thing as an essential poet, here he is."

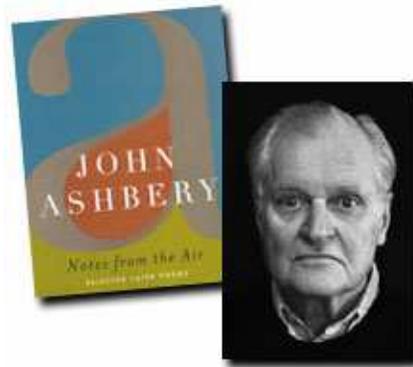
Biography: **David McFadden** began writing poetry, publishing in famous literary magazines, and corresponding with Jack Kerouac while still in high school in Hamilton, Ontario. He worked as a night proof reader at *The Hamilton Spectator* through the sixties, at the same period starting his own literary magazine, *Mountain*. His life in Canadian poetry has spanned five decades and David McFadden is still going strong. *An Innocent in Cuba* is the most recent of his many travel books over the past 30 years and *Five Star Planet* the most recent of his many books of poetry. Currently, the author is known to be working in fits and starts on a long series of sonnets. McFadden is that rare and precious breed of artist: he is both a poet's poet and a people's poet. He is currently living a quiet life in a noisy part of Toronto.

Summary: This selection from McFadden's career to date brings back into print many of the greatest poems from nearly two dozen books. The book has been described as astonishing, with the range of its invention, humour, humanity, compassion, description, self-aware sentimentality, insight, fun and ability to take the form of the poem to surprising and startlingly creative places. Chosen and introduced by fellow poet Stuart Ross, in full collaboration with the author, these poems reaffirm McFadden's status as one of Canada's most gratifying, ineffable and necessary poets.



THE GRIFFIN TRUST
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International Shortlist



***Notes from the Air: Selected Later Poems* • John Ashbery**

HarperCollins Publishers/Ecco

Judges' Citation: "The pleasure of reading John Ashbery's poetry defies explanation. The YOU the author makes reference to is ME, the *transcription* being rendered, paradoxically, by a poet who eschews autobiography; thus the I as well as the YOU names the reader. Ashbery's is one of the best and most intense poetry productions of the twentieth century. Its famous difficulty does not repel: it invites. It offers a "site of survival," a real mirror for human beings today, providing a place of honour and dignity for the very personal and secret hidden in everyone. His poems reach the private part of each individual. No wonder he has declared in interviews that he's "like everybody else"—the body breathing inside the poem is as much himself as ourselves. But the person who knows how to observe and therefore how to be unique is John Ashbery, ungraspable, inexplicable and as mysterious as the Delphic oracle. In *Notes from the Air*, Ashbery has taken the opportunity provided a long-living poet not to collect but to select what in his opinion constitutes the best part of his later production. These "notes" proceeding from the air or written by it honour the defining economy of poetry, unique lexical territory where one cannot go against the plurality of meaning embodied in words. He grants unity to this volume by sequencing poems deftly linked, forged with the delicateness of time, its overwhelming theme. The vigilant eye cast on this selection is omnipresent, and does not let a single detail go loose. With this personal organization of the most meaningful part of his work, Ashbery offers a new way of reading it, testing language by virtue of the American tongue, making it a true "remnant of energy" for which only the poet can take responsibility."

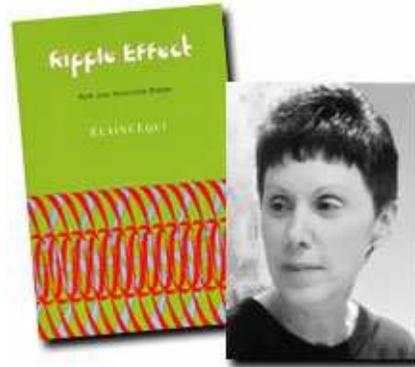
Biography: **John Ashbery** was born in Rochester, New York in 1927. Best known as a poet, he is the author of over 20 books of poetry including *Some Trees*, which was selected by W.H. Auden for the Yale Younger Poets Series and *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror*, which received the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry, the National Book Critics Circle Award and the National Book Award. He has served as executive editor of *ARTnews* magazine and as the art critic for *New York* and *Newsweek* magazines. A member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, Ashbery served as Chancellor of the Academy of American Poets from 1988 to 1999. He has received two Guggenheim Fellowships and was a MacArthur Fellow from 1985 to 1990. His work has been translated into more than 20 languages. John Ashbery lives in New York.

Summary: This collection reveals, for the first time in one volume, the remarkable evolution of Ashbery's poetry from the mid-1980s to the present, and offers an irresistible sampling of some of the finest work by a poet *The New York Times* Book Review called a "national treasure". This long-awaited volume, a new selection of his later poems, spans ten major collections by this most visionary and influential poet. Chosen by the author himself, the poems herein represent Ashbery's best work from the past two decades, from the critically acclaimed *April Galleons* and *Flow Chart* to the 2005 National Book Award finalist *Where Shall I Wander*.



THE GRIFFIN TRUST
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International Shortlist



***Ripple Effect: New and Selected Poems* • Elaine Equi**

Coffee House Press

Judges' Citation: "In a warmly appreciative essay on Frank O'Hara, Elaine Equi gives a description of the poet's distinct way of walking, as recalled by his friend Joe Brainerd: "Light and sassy. With a slight bounce and a slight twist. It was a beautiful walk. Confident. 'I don't care' and sometimes 'I know you are looking.'" The words could stand as an accurate description of Equi's own highly distinct poems. They too move with a bounce and twist; they have their own insouciant, confident wit, their own beautifully poised way of looking outward at the world in all its quirky variousness, while at the same time retaining an uncompromised inwardness: the registering of a complex, sophisticated poetic self. Founded on a casual mastery of modernist and post-modernist techniques – montage, free-form improvisation, prose-poem, surreal inventory, found object – her work is at once impeccably avant garde and immensely enjoyable: a rare combination. Her poems don't try to change the world, but as they rifle through it, pausing to think about sleeping pills or sales catalogs or Wang Wei or "a factory made fresh by broken windows" they use their abundant resources of humor, intelligence and verbal acuity to change the way we, as readers, see the world. Which is the mark of true poetry."

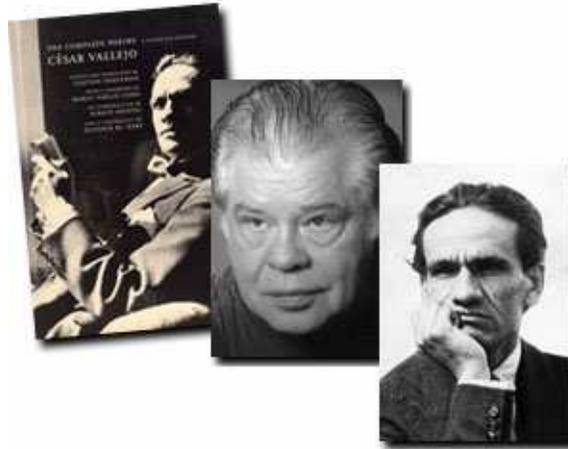
Biography: **Elaine Equi** grew up in Chicago and the outlying suburbs, graduating from Columbia College. During the late 1970s and early 1980s, she and her husband, the poet Jerome Sala, were at the forefront of Chicago's lively performance poetry scene. Equi is the author of more than 10 poetry collections including *The Cloud of Knowable Things* and *Voice-Over*, which won a San Francisco State University Poetry Center Award. Widely published and anthologized, her work has appeared in a number of *Best American Poetry* compilations as well as in publications such as *The New Yorker* and *American Poetry Review*. Equi lives in New York with her husband and teaches at New York University and in the MFA programs at The New School and City College.

Summary: *Ripple Effect* is an amalgam of the fetishes that have captivated Equi throughout her career, offering new work alongside the poems that readers have come to know as distinctly 'Equi'. Her shrewd cultural observation and criticism are presented in poems whose subjects are often blithe – aliens, prescription drugs, shopping – but whose complexity lingers long after the first reading. Succinct, approachable and innovative as ever, Equi continues to dazzle with her sophisticated and sly wit.



THE GRIFFIN TRUST
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International Shortlist



***The Complete Poetry: A Bilingual Edition* • Clayton Eshleman, translated from the Spanish, written by César Vallejo**
University of California Press

Judges' Citation: "When Mario Vargas Llosa refers to the work of Clayton Eshleman as a sort of *heroic* enterprise, he is hitting the target – life given as an act of love. Here are more than five decades of perseverance, polishing and devotion to translation of someone who has been called inexplicable. And if we had untranslatability, we have what would seem to be an impossible task. Eshleman's versions deserve not only praise, but many readers. Without boasting about talent, intelligence, ear, or personal creative powers, he has applied these characteristics to the meticulous, slow, unrewarding, never sufficiently recognized or valued work of an ant constructing a palace. Most important, he has followed Cid Corman's teachings: respect for the original, verification and confirmation not only of what one recognizes as alien or unknown, but of which one seems to know, invention of words in English that will work in a way similar to the Spanish words coined by Vallejo, absolute awareness of the fact that one is creating *something else*, a different music, different possibilities of sound, wanting only to stay level with the original intentions, turning the already said into something sayable again. The result has been the wonderfully rendered complete work of a very complex poet in terms of imagination and style, of multilayered registers – a poet who aspires to wholeness of expression, the world and his perception as the same thing, full of ambivalence and contradiction, a poet who deep down didn't want to be translated, having enormous doubts as to the capacity even of one's own language to confront sadness and human grief. Eshleman has opened, as have few others, a window to another life, a new one, not necessarily his nor Vallejo's."

Biographies:

Clayton Eshleman is a poet and essayist as well as Professor Emeritus of English at Eastern Michigan University. Between 1967 and the present, he founded and edited two of the most seminal and highly-regarded literary magazines of the period, *Caterpillar* and *Sulfur*. A recipient of the National Book Award and the Landon Translation Prize, he is the co-translator of *Aimé Césaire: The Collected Poetry* and the author of *Juniper Fuse: Upper Paleolithic Imagination & the Construction of the Underworld*. Between 1979 and 1986, Eshleman was a regular reviewer for *The Los Angeles Times* Book Review, contributing 51 articles on books by Rilke, Whitman, Bishop, Olson, Milosz, Montale, Ashbery and many others. He has translated books by Pablo Neruda, Antonin Artaud, Vladimir Holan, Michel Deguy and Bernard Bador. Eshleman has also received a Guggenheim Fellowship in Poetry, two Fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, two Fellowships from the National Endowment for the Humanities, and several research Fellowships from Eastern Michigan University.

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THE GRIFFIN TRUST
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International Shortlist

***The Complete Poetry: A Bilingual Edition* • Clayton Eshleman, translated from the Spanish, written by César Vallejo**

University of California Press

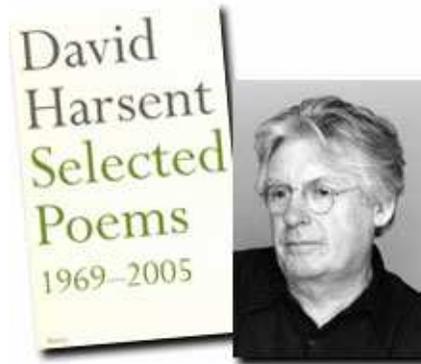
César Vallejo (1892-1938) Born in Santiago de Chuco, a small town in the Andean sierra of northern Peru, César Vallejo is the best-known Peruvian poet of the twentieth century. His 1922 book-length sequence *Trilce* was one of only two collections of his poetry published during his lifetime, the other being *Los heraldos negros* (*The Black Heralds*). Vallejo was a political radical and a communist, and for part of his life lived in exile in Paris where he studied Marxism, leaving to visit Russia three times in the 1930s to observe for himself the great Soviet experiment in social engineering. In those years, he met Antonin Artaud, Pablo Picasso and Jean Cocteau and fell in love with, and married, a French girl named Georgette Philippart. Vallejo wrote stories, essays, a novel and several plays, but did not collect any of his subsequent poems for book publication. Since his death, these poems have usually been referred to as the *Poemas humanos* after the title of one of the posthumous volumes.

Summary: Vallejo's poetry takes the Spanish language to an unprecedented level of emotional rawness and stretches its grammatical possibilities. Striking against theology with the very rhetoric of the Christian faith, Vallejo's is a tragic vision – perhaps the only one in the canon of Spanish-language literature – in which salvation and sin are one and the same. This edition includes notes on the translation and a fascinating translation memoir that traces Eshleman's long relationship with Vallejo's poetry. An introduction and chronology provide further insights into Vallejo's life and work.



THE GRIFFIN TRUST
For Excellence In Poetry

International Shortlist



***Selected Poems 1969-2005* • David Harsent**

Faber and Faber

Judges' Citation: "The four decades' worth of work spanned by David Harsent's *Selected Poems* reveal a writer of enormous accomplishment in whom a constant, restless investigation of new forms, new subjects, new ways of putting together a poem or sequence of poems, is underpinned by a remarkably consistent and powerful poetic sensibility. You know, instantly, when you are in a David Harsent poem: the vivid landscapes where the weather shifts as rapidly between inner and outer as it does between bright and menacing; the haunting psychological situations that give you a novel's worth of drama in a few lines; the dense imagery continually opening up the narratives to new levels of suggestion and implication; the controlled riot of language; the intense, fluid musicality. Like the elusive figure of the hare that slips in and out of these poems – a motif borrowed in part from Egyptian writing where it formed the hieroglyph for the auxiliary verb 'to be' – the ultimate quarry of these poems, whether pursued through marriage or war or some more indefinite terrain, is nothing less than existence itself: what it feels like to be alive, human, and of this world. At a time when so many poets are retreating into the sphere of pure language, this unabashed engagement with reality is extraordinarily invigorating."

Biography: David Harsent was born in 1942 in Devonshire. He has published nine collections of poetry, including *Legion* which won the 2005 Forward Poetry Prize and was shortlisted for the 2005 T. S. Eliot Prize and the 2005 Whitbread Poetry Award. His poetry includes versions of the work of Bosnian poet Goran Simic, notably *Sprinting from the Graveyard* (1997), poems written during the siege of Sarajevo. He was co-editor, with Mario Susko, of *Savremena Britanska Poezija* (1988). His work in musical theatre has involved collaborations with a number of composers, but most often with Harrison Birtwistle, and has been performed at the Royal Opera House, Carnegie Hall, the South Bank Centre, the Proms, the Megaron (Athens), and on BBC2 and Channel 4 TV. His libretti include *Serenade the Sike* for the Prussia Cove Festival in 1994 and *When She Died* for Tiger Aspect and Channel 4 television in 2002. He writes crime fiction under a pseudonym and has written a number of screenplays and television dramas. David Harsent was appointed Distinguished Writing Fellow at Sheffield Hallam University in 2005, and is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature.

Summary: Nicholas Wroe, writing in the June 23, 2007 edition of *The Guardian* said: "These poems, selected by Harsent himself, take us from *A Violent Country*, his 1969 debut, to the violent countries of his war-fuelled Forward prize-winning collection, *Legion* (2005). Harsent's early gift was for the icy observation and resonant image: 'As the train slowed I could see the plant / glimmering in its own steam, / a tangle of pipes and fragile catwalks. / He watched it too, as he told me again / how he saw Italy for the first time / And Africa, like a graveyard.' Harsent displays a "...cool brevity, but it was partly at (poet and editor) Ian Hamilton's suggestion that Harsent's verse opened up to longer lines and the poem sequences *Mr Punch* (1984), *News From the Front* (1993) and *Marriage* (2003), which drew on Bonnard's relationship with his model. By the time of the *Legion* war poems – 'Then we had iron rain, nine days without break or let' – the terse exactitude still projects a stunning clarity of vision, but has expanded into a wider and deeper wisdom, and this exemplary distillation of a career exerts a formidable potency."

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