



**THE GRIFFIN TRUST**  
**For Excellence In Poetry**

**Trustees:**

Mark Doty  
Carolyn Forché  
Scott Griffin  
Michael Ondaatje  
Robin Robertson  
Karen Solie  
Colm Tóibín  
David Young

***FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE***

***The Stairwell***  
**by Michael Longley**

**and**

***Blue Sonoma***  
**by Jane Munro**

**Trustees Emeritus:**

Margaret Atwood  
Robert Hass

**WIN THE 2015 GRIFFIN POETRY PRIZE**

**TORONTO – Thursday, June 4 – *The Stairwell* by Michael Longley and *Blue Sonoma* by Jane Munro** are the International and Canadian winners of the 2015 Griffin Poetry Prize. They each received C\$65,000 in prize money.

The Griffin Poetry Prize was founded in 2000 to encourage and celebrate excellence in poetry. The prize is for first edition books of poetry written in, or translated into, English and submitted from anywhere in the world.

During the evening, renowned poet and writer Derek Walcott was honoured with **The Griffin Trust For Excellence In Poetry's 2015 Lifetime Recognition Award**. Trustee Carolyn Forché paid tribute to Derek Walcott.

The awards ceremony, attended by some 350 invited guests, was held in the Fermenting Cellar in The Distillery Historic District. Scott Griffin, founder of the prize, and trustees Mark Doty, Carolyn Forché, Michael Ondaatje, Robin Robertson, Karen Solie, Colm Tóibín and David Young hosted the event where the guests enjoyed a reading by Ayo Akinfenwa, 2015 English Stream Finalist of Poetry In Voice/Les voix de la poésie.

The Judges for the 2015 Griffin Poetry Prize are Timothy Bowling (Canada), Fanny Howe (US) and Piotr Sommer (Poland). These distinguished writers and poets each read 560 books of poetry, received from 42 countries around the globe, including 24 translations. The trustees of The Griffin Trust For Excellence In Poetry select the judges annually.



The 2015 Griffin Poetry Prize shortlist features collections by four international and three Canadian poets:

- Eleanor Goodman's translation from the Chinese of *Something Crosses My Mind* by Wang Xiaoni, published by Zephyr Press
- Marek Kazmierski's translation from the Polish of *Finite Formulae & Theories of Chance* by Wioletta Greg, published by Arc Publications
- Michael Longley's *The Stairwell*, published by Jonathan Cape
- Spencer Reece's *The Road to Emmaus*, published by Farrar, Straus and Giroux
  
- Shane Book's *Congotronic*, published by House of Anansi Press
- Jane Munro's *Blue Sonoma*, published by Brick Books
- Russell Thornton's *The Hundred Lives*, published by Quattro Books

On June 3 the poets read excerpts from their books at the Shortlist Readings for 1,000 people in Toronto in Koerner Hall at The Royal Conservatory, TELUS Centre for Performance and Learning. Trustee Mark Doty presented each poet with a leather-bound edition of their book and a \$10,000 honorarium for their participation in the Readings.

**The Griffin Poetry Prize Anthology: A Selection of the 2015 Shortlist**, edited by Tim Bowling and published by House of Anansi Press, is now available at most retail bookstores and [online](#). Royalties generated from the anthologies, published annually, are donated to UNESCO's World Poetry Day that was created to support linguistic diversity through poetic expression and to offer endangered languages the opportunity to be heard in their communities.

- 30-

For further information please contact:

Press:

Melissa Shirley

Email: [publicity@griffinpoetryprize.com](mailto:publicity@griffinpoetryprize.com)

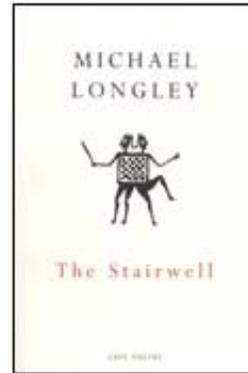
General Inquiries:

Ruth Smith, Manager

Email: [info@griffinpoetryprize.com](mailto:info@griffinpoetryprize.com)



2015 International Winner



***The Stairwell* • Michael Longley**  
Jonathan Cape

**Judges' Citation:** "Part of the excitement and pleasure of Michael Longley's *The Stairwell* comes from the quiet unpredictability of what his language does. It is modest and unassuming, yet bold in its deceptively small meditations. His sentences achieve their goals through sophisticatedly simple means: Longley loves to understate (or underplay), retard (and see how far he can go), imply, question, and enumerate (long enumeration in short poems is part of his signature). This book, including the elegy sequence that comprises the whole second section, is a masterly realization of the light touch he brings to serious subjects, as if sentences were his way of breathing. And they do not behave conventionally, despite his life-long study of such basic things as love, friendship, death, experience, memory, historical memory included, and of some other disciplines that go along with them, like learning to know nature for instance. There's also a lot to learn from Michael Longley—part of the pleasure is the detailed knowledge and wisdom the poems bring. While greatly attached to certain classical rules, Longley has always paid homage to them so interestingly, simultaneously mastering and subverting them. *The Stairwell* is a book by a major poet writing at the height of his powers."

**Biography:** Michael Longley was born in Belfast in 1939. He has published nine collections of poetry including *Gorse Fires* (1991) which won the Whitbread Poetry Award, and *The Weather in Japan* (2000) which won the Hawthornden Prize, the T.S. Eliot Prize and the *Irish Times* Poetry Prize. In 2001 he received the Queen's Gold Medal for Poetry and in 2003 the Wilfred Owen Award. He was awarded a CBE in 2010 and was Ireland Professor of Poetry, 2007-2010.

**Summary:** The psychologically suggestive word 'stairwell' is in itself ambiguous. In his tenth collection of poems Michael Longley writes of birth as well as death, childhood and age, nature and art, the animal and human worlds, tenderness and violence, battlefield and 'homeland'. Longley has built this collection on intricate doublings; the second part of the book is a powerful sequence of elegies for his twin brother, Peter, and elsewhere the dominant mood is elegiac.



2015 Canadian Winner



***Blue Sonoma* • Jane Munro**  
Brick Books

**Judges' Citation:** "Somewhere between the directness and clarity of haiku and Yeats's 'An aged man is but a paltry thing' moves Jane Munro's hauntingly candid explorations of the hard truths of growing old. But *Blue Sonoma* unflinching as its poems are in their wrestling with a partner's Alzheimer's, with memory, death, and dying, and with the inexorable advance of time, achieves an engaging liveliness as a result of the poet's earthy voice, colloquial wit, and acute descriptive powers. For Munro, language, travel, and art are the 'props/in a little, local theatre of light', and this theatre's relationship to other worlds, other possible states of consciousness, repeatedly leavens *Blue Sonoma*'s painful content with wisdom and delicacy. In primarily short lines of impressive transparency, Munro's writing, replete with natural images of Canada's west coast, celebrates, even as it confronts with blunt honesty, the sensuous passage through the years towards whatever transition must follow. 'And us, were we substance or reflection?' The question hovers over this gathering of deeply meditative and viscerally felt poems and leads us, with gentleness but no apology, into the realm of riveting and ultimate contemplation."

**Biography:** Jane Munro is the author of five previous books of poetry, most recently *Active Pass* (2010) and *Point No Point* (2006). Her work has received the Bliss Carman Poetry Award, the Macmillan Prize for Poetry and been nominated for the Pat Lowther Award. She is a member of Yoko's Dogs (Jan Conn, Mary di Michele, Susan Gillis, Jane Munro), a poetry collective whose first book *Whisk* was published in 2013. After living for twenty years on the southwest coast of Vancouver Island, she has now returned to Vancouver.

**Summary:** In *Blue Sonoma*, award-winning poet Jane Munro draws on her well-honed talents to address what T.S. Eliot called "the gifts reserved for age". A beloved partner's crossing into Alzheimer's is at the heart of this book and his "battered blue Sonoma" is an evocation of numerous other crossings: between empirical reportage and meditative apprehension, dreaming and wakefulness, Eastern and Western poetic traditions. Rich in both pathos and sharp shards of insight, Munro's wisdom here is deeply embedded, shot through with moments of wit and candour. In the tradition of Taoist poets like Wang Wei and Po-Chu-i, her sixth and best book opens a wide poetic space and renders difficult conditions with the lightest of touches.