



THE GRIFFIN TRUST
For Excellence In Poetry

Press Release

**THE GRIFFIN POETRY PRIZE ANNOUNCES
THE 2021 INTERNATIONAL AND CANADIAN SHORTLIST**

Trustees:

Mark Doty
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David Young

TORONTO - April 14, 2021 – Scott Griffin, on behalf of the trustees of The Griffin Trust For Excellence In Poetry, is pleased to announce the International and Canadian shortlist for this year's prize.

Judges Ilya Kaminsky (Ukraine), Aleš Šteger (Slovenia), and Souvankham Thammavongsa (Canada) each read 682 books of poetry, including 55 translations from 28 languages, submitted by 231 publishers from 14 different countries.

The two winners, to be announced via our social media channels (website, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram) on Wednesday, June 23, will each be awarded \$65,000. The other finalists – 3 International, and 2 Canadian, will be awarded \$10,000.

Trustees Emeriti:

Margaret Atwood
Robert Hass
Michael Ondaatje
Robin Robertson
Jo Shapcott
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International

Obit • Victoria Chang
Copper Canyon Press

Music for the Dead and Resurrected • Valzhyna Mort
Farrar, Straus and Giroux

Underworld Lit • Srikanth Reddy
Wave Books

My Name Will Grow Wide Like a Tree • Tracy K. Smith and Changtai Bi,
translated from the Chinese written by Yi Lei
Graywolf Press

Canadian

The East Side of It All • Joseph Dandurand
Nightwood Editions

*The Dyzgraph*st* • Canisia Lubrin
McClelland & Stewart

Pluviophile • Yusuf Saadi
Nightwood Editions



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NOTE TO BOOKSELLERS: Griffin Poetry Prize book stickers are supplied free of charge by The Griffin Trust. Please contact info@griffinpoetryprize.com to place an order. Winner book stickers will be available after June 30, 2021.

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Links: Shortlisted Publishers' websites:

Copper Canyon Press: coppercanyonpress.org

Farrar, Straus and Giroux: fsgbooks.com

Graywolf Press: graywolfpress.org

McClelland & Stewart: penguinrandomhouse.ca

Nightwood Editions: nightwoodeditions.com

Wave Books: wavepoetry.com

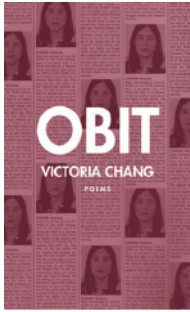




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THE 2021 GRIFFIN POETRY PRIZE SHORTLIST
BIOGRAPHIES AND CITATIONS

International



***Obit* • Victoria Chang**
Copper Canyon Press

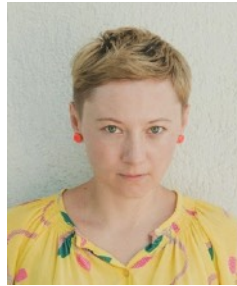
Biography: Victoria Chang’s prior books are *Barbie Chang*, *The Boss*, *Salvinia Molesta*, and *Circle*. She has received a Guggenheim Fellowship, a Sustainable Arts Foundation Fellowship, the Poetry Society of America’s Alice Fay di Castagnola Award, a Pushcart Prize, a Lannan Residency Fellowship, and a MacDowell Colony Fellowship. She lives in Los Angeles and is the program chair of Antioch’s low-residency MFA program.

Judges’ Citation: “Victoria Chang’s *Obit* achieves a new form for grief and sorrow. Using the familiarity of the obituary, she repurposes the form with the truth that death makes clear, absurd, and funny. Death is not something that happens to someone else – it is yours too, up close and personal, and deeply particular. It is not just a name or person or relation that dies – it is a frontal lobe, language inside the phone, the voicemail, the view and experience, the language they made or didn’t make, their sounds too. The self that knew them. Privacy, friendships, gait, logic, optimism, ambition, tears, reason, a chair. Every bit of a lived life gets a spot. In this book ‘grief takes many / forms, as tears or pinwheels...’ ‘dying lasts forever / until it stops’ and ‘our sadness is plural, but grief is / singular.’”



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International



***Music for the Dead and Resurrected* • Valzhyna Mort**
Farrar, Straus and Giroux

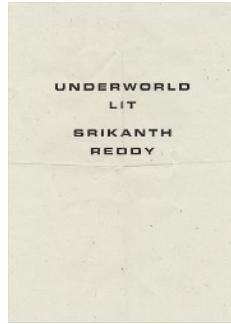
Biography: Valzhyna Mort is the author of *Factory of Tears* and *Collected Body*. Her work has been honoured with the Lannan Literary Fellowship for Poetry, an Amy Clampitt Residency, the Bess Hokin Prize from *Poetry* magazine, and the Glenna Luschei Prairie Schooner Award. She is a recipient of the Gulf Coast Prize in Translation and a National Endowment for the Arts grant in translation projects. Born in Minsk, Belarus, she writes in English and Belarusian.

Judges' Citation: "Here, history comes to an end / like a movie / with rolling credits of headstones,' writes Valzhyna Mort, though the history doesn't end, but takes deep and memorable residence in the music of these poems. The collection offers many different kinds of poetry: from elegies to protest poems to moments of lyric intimacy. But in all of them there's an unmistakable emotion embodied in craft, one that continues to echo in our minds long after we finish the book. And this is perhaps the reason why Mort's striking pages about Belarus are ultimately poems about all of us: they set our remembering and our grief to inimitable music."



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International



***Underworld Lit* • Srikanth Reddy** Wave Books

Biography: Srikanth Reddy's previous book, *Voyager*, was named one of the best books of poetry in 2011 by *The New Yorker*, *The Believer*, and National Public Radio; his first collection, *Facts for Visitors*, received the 2005 Asian American Literary Award for Poetry. Reddy's poetry and criticism have appeared in *Harper's*, *The Guardian*, *The New York Times*, *Poetry*, and numerous other venues; his book of criticism, *Changing Subjects: Digressions in Modern American Poetry*, was published in 2012. A recipient of fellowships from the Creative Capital Foundation, the Guggenheim Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Arts, he is currently professor of English and Creative Writing at the University of Chicago.

Judges' Citation: "Seldom a poetry book questions its limits in a way as intriguing and inventive as *Underworld Lit* by Srikanth Reddy. Seriousness and laughter, academic boredom and surreal tour de force, precision and playfulness, the living and the dead move in this book unusually close. A multiverse, a few novels packed in one poetry collection, a delightful and ironic autobiography of a university professor of literature, a book full of disturbingly poetic moments and ironic quizzes, a guided tour to hell. Beautifully balanced and elegantly wild, this prose epic takes us where we truly belong - to the unknown. Reddy - like Dante - knows: If we want to say anything relevant about our world, we have to embark first on a profound tour of the underworld."



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International



My Name Will Grow Wide Like a Tree • Tracy K. Smith and Changtai Bi, translated from the Chinese written by Yi Lei
Graywolf Press

Biography: Tracy K. Smith is the author of four collections of poetry, including *Wade in the Water* and *Life on Mars*, winner of the Pulitzer Prize. She is also the author of a memoir, *Ordinary Light*, which was a finalist for the National Book Award. Smith served as the twenty-second Poet Laureate of the United States. She teaches at Princeton University and lives in New Jersey.

Changtai Bi, born in Tianjin, China, is a poetry translator who is currently a university teacher. He was responsible for the first draft of the English translation of *Selected Poems of Yi Lei*.

Yi Lei, born Sun Gui-zhen in Tianjin, China, in 1951, was one of the most influential figures of Chinese Poetry in the 1980s. Sent to the countryside to work on a farm in 1969, two years later she became a reporter for the Liberation Army and a staff member of the newspaper the Railway Corps. Yi Lei studied creative writing at the Lu Xun Academy and earned a BA in Chinese literature from Peking University. In 1991 she moved to Moscow, where she lived and wrote for a number of years. A recipient of the Zhuang Zhongwen Literature Prize, Yi Lei's work has been translated into English, Japanese, French, Italian, and Russian. She died in 2018.

Judges' Citation: "One of shortest poems in *My Name Will Grow Wide Like a Tree* creates--in just five lines!--a lasting theological perspective: 'When life ends, / Memory endures. / When memory ends, / What persists / Attests to the spirit.' Such larger-than-life--and yet also such delicate--approach distinguishes this collection as it gathers poems of eros and grief, each page bursting with attentiveness to our world. 'Each blade of grass is a glorious eye,' Yi Lei writes, echoing, and also revising, Whitman. In very beautiful versions by Tracy K. Smith and Changtai Bi, Yi Lei's voice here becomes invigorating, lasting poetry in English."



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Canadian



The East Side of It All • Joseph Dandurand Nightwood Editions

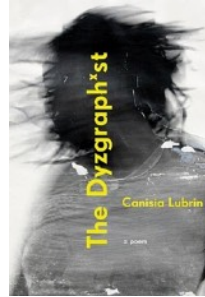
Biography: Joseph Dandurand is a storyteller, poet, playwright and member of Kwantlen First Nation located on the Fraser River about twenty minutes east of Vancouver. He resides there with his three children. Dandurand is the director of the Kwantlen Cultural Centre, artistic director of the Vancouver Poetry House and author of three other books of poetry, *I Want* (2015), *Hear and Foretell* (2015), and *SH:LAM (The Doctor)* (2015). Dandurand was Vancouver Public Library's 2019 Indigenous storyteller in residence.

Judges' Citation: "Joseph Dandurand is a poet-storyteller. Portraying Vancouver's Downtown Eastside's prostitutes, heroin addicts, alcoholics and abused, his autobiographical poems could easily drown in the brutality and tragedy they capture – but instead they heal. These are deeply moving spiritual invocations, extricated from poisoned air by a fallen angel. Dandurand is a member of Kwantlen First Nation, located on the Fraser river near Vancouver. His origin and roots are the sources of wisdom and myths, which he masterly embeds in a drama of a dysfunctional modern society. His crystalline clear and remarkably multilayered poems are written in an unforgettable voice of someone who is telling a story in order to survive and to go on. A story of a man who has become a sasquatch, through writing."



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Canadian



The Dyzgraph^xst • Canisia Lubrin
McClelland & Stewart

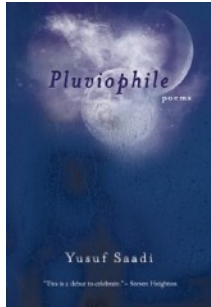
Biography: Canisia Lubrin is a writer, editor, and teacher published and anthologised internationally, including translations of her work into Italian and Spanish. Lubrin’s debut poetry collection, *Voodoo Hypothesis*, was named a CBC Best Poetry Book, longlisted for the Gerald Lampert Memorial Award and the Pat Lowther Memorial Award, and shortlisted for the Raymond Souster Award. Her work has been nominated for, among others, the Toronto Book Award, Journey Prize, and bpNichol Chapbook Award. 2019 Writer in Residence at Queen’s University, Lubrin holds an MFA from the University of Guelph.

Judges’ Citation: “*The Dyzgraph^xst* is Canisia Lubrin’s spectacular feat of architecture called a poem. Built with ‘I’ – a single mark on the page, a voice, a blade, ‘a life-force soaring back’ – and assembled over seven acts addressing language, grammar, sentence, line, stage, and world, the poet forms, invents, surprises, and sharpens life. Generous, generating, and an abundance of rigour. A wide and widening ocean of feeling are the blueprints of this book. It is shaped to be ‘the shape of the shape / of the shape of a thing that light curves over time / length to width to depth and all of us its information.’”



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Canadian



Pluviophile • Yusuf Saadi Nightwood Editions

Biography: Yusuf Saadi won the *Malahat Review's* 2016 Far Horizons Poetry Award and the 2016 *Vallum* Chapbook Award. At other times, his writing has appeared (or is forthcoming) in magazines including *Brick*, the *Malahat Review*, *Vallum*, *Grain*, *CV2*, *Prairie Fire*, *PRISM international*, *Hamilton Arts & Letters*, *This*, and *untethered*. He is also an executive editor at *Sewer Lid* magazine. He holds an MA in English from the University of Victoria and currently resides in Montreal.

Judges' Citation: "'There are whispers in the letters,' writes Yusuf Saadi in poems that search everywhere for mystery, for magic, for beauty. And beauty speaks back, renews itself (and us) in these pages. Where other poets find moon, Saadi sees 'moon's kneecap,' where others see mere daffodils, Saadi asks: 'Do daffodils dissolve in your / unpractised inner eye?' This is the poet who is unafraid of play: 'Outside of Kantian space and time, do you miss dancing / in dusty basements where sex was once phenomenal?' This, too, is the poet unafraid of the daily grind, of 'writing poetry at night / with the rust of our lives'. *Pluviophile* is a beautiful, refreshing debut."