



GRIFFIN POETRY PRIZE

Press Release

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THE GRIFFIN POETRY PRIZE ANNOUNCES THE 2023 SHORTLIST

TORONTO - April 19, 2023 – The Griffin Poetry Prize is pleased to announce the 2023 Shortlist.

Judges Nikola Madzirov (Macedonia), Gregory Scofield (Canada), and Natasha Trethewey (USA) each read 602 books of poetry, including 54 translations from 20 languages, submitted by 229 publishers from 20 different countries.

The Threshold • **Robyn Creswell**, USA

Translated from the Arabic written by **Iman Mersal**, Egypt/Canada
Farrar, Straus and Giroux

The Hurting Kind • **Ada Limón**, USA
Corsair Poetry

Exculpatory Lilies • **Susan Musgrave**, Canada
McClelland & Stewart

Best Barbarian • **Roger Reeves**, USA
W. W. Norton

Time Is a Mother • **Ocean Vuong**, Vietnam/USA
Cape Poetry, and Penguin Press

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Marek Kazmierski
Michael Ondaatje
Robin Robertson
Jo Shapcott
Colm Tóibín
David Young

The winner will be announced at the Griffin Poetry Prize Readings and will be awarded \$130,000. The other finalists will each be awarded \$10,000 for their participation.

The Readings will be held at Koerner Hall on Wednesday, June 7 and the evening will include a selection of readings by the five shortlisted poets, this year's Lifetime Recognition Award recipient, and the Canadian First Book Prize winner, who will be announced on Wednesday, May 17 at 10.00 a.m. Tickets are now on sale and can be purchased at the box office of Koerner Hall, 273 Bloor Street West, or online at <https://rcmusic.com/events-and-performances/2023-griffin-poetry-prize-readings>.

General Admission, with 2023 Anthology – \$30.00
Senior/Student, with 2023 Anthology – \$25.00



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2023 Griffin Poetry Prize Longlist

Tasos Livaditis – Poems, Volume II • **Manolis Aligizakis**, Canada
Translated from the Greek written by **Tasos Livaditis**, Greece
Libros Libertad

The Study of Human Life • **Joshua Bennett**, USA
Penguin Books

The Threshold • **Robyn Creswell**, USA
Translated from the Arabic written by **Iman Mersal**, Egypt/Canada
Farrar, Straus and Giroux

The Jaguar • **Sarah Holland-Batt**, Australia
University of Queensland Press

The Hurting Kind • **Ada Limón**, USA
Corsair Poetry

Exculpatory Lilies • **Susan Musgrave**, Canada
McClelland & Stewart

Balladz • **Sharon Olds**, USA
Alfred A. Knopf

Best Barbarian • **Roger Reeves**, USA
W. W. Norton

Bless the Daughter Raised by a Voice in Her Head • **Warsan Shire**, Somali/UK
Penguin Canada

Time Is a Mother • **Ocean Vuong**, Vietnam/USA
Cape Poetry, and Penguin Press

NOTE TO BOOKSELLERS: Griffin Poetry Prize book stickers are supplied free of charge. Please contact Ruth Smith to place an order.

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Shortlisted Publishers' web sites:

Cape Poetry: penguin.co.uk
Corsair Poetry: littlebrown.co.uk
Farrar, Straus and Giroux: us.macmillan.com
McClelland & Stewart: penguinrandomhouse.ca
W. W. Norton: wwnorton.com
Penguin Press: penguin.com

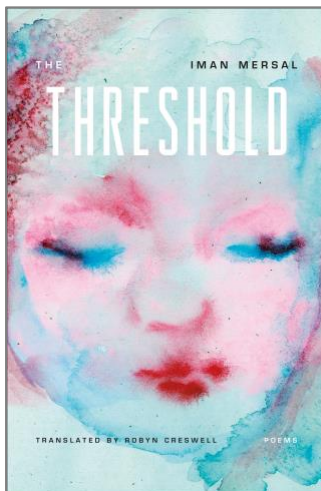
Photograph Credits:

Annette Hornischer (Robyn Creswell)
Lesung & Gespr (Iman Mersal)
Ana Schwartz (Roger Reeves)
Tom Hines (Ocean Vuong)



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THE 2023 GRIFFIN POETRY PRIZE SHORTLIST



***The Threshold* • Robyn Creswell**

Translated from the Arabic written by **Iman Mersal**

Farrar, Straus and Giroux

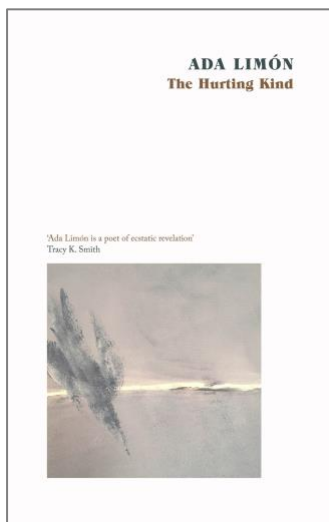
Biographies: Robyn Creswell teaches comparative literature at Yale University and is a consulting editor for poetry at Farrar, Straus and Giroux. He is the author of *City of Beginnings: Poetic Modernism in Beirut* and contributes regularly to *The New York Review of Books*.

Iman Mersal is the author of five books of poems and a collection of essays, *How to Mend: Motherhood and Its Ghosts*. In English translation, her poems have appeared in *The Paris Review*, *The New York Review of Books*, *The Nation*, and other publications. Her most recent prose work, *Traces of Enayat*, received the Sheikh Zayed Book Award for Literature in 2021. She is a professor of Arabic language and literature at the University of Alberta, Canada.

Judges' Citation: "*The Threshold* by Iman Mersal is a powerful collection of poetry that dissects the fluid architecture of identity, hidden memory, and language. Mersal, an Egyptian-Canadian poet and writer living in Edmonton, Alberta, weaves together personal experiences, cultural references, and philosophical musings to create a vivid and eloquent poetic narrative. The poems in *The Threshold*, translated beautifully by Robyn Creswell, are deeply personal, reflecting the loss of her father, and her struggles with displacement and belonging, as she navigates different cultures and languages. She says that these poems mark the end of an era in her life and her relation to Cairo, the moment of leaving the life she knows behind: 'A walk in Cairo, tracing its topography, becomes an elegy, as well as a celebration of the beloved city.' When Mersal left Egypt for the first time, an aunt who had never left her home province sent her off with an Egyptian expression: 'May it be a happy threshold'. *The Threshold* is a place of rebirth where one must undergo a ritual or transformation in order to cross over into a new world, a new horizon of life, and new borders of awakening."



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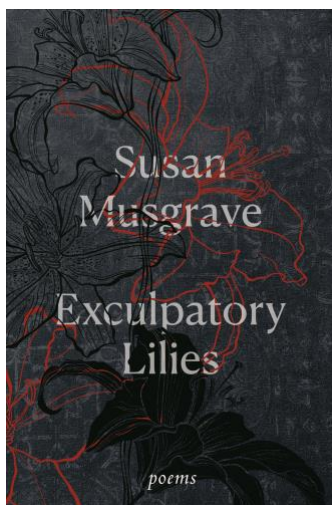
The Hurting Kind • Ada Limón Corsair Poetry

Biography: Ada Limón is the author of six books of poetry, including *The Carrying*, which won the National Book Critics Circle Award and was named a finalist for the PEN/Jean Stein Book Award. Her book *Bright Dead Things* was nominated for the National Book Award, the National Book Critics Circle Award, and the Kingsley Tufts Poetry Award. Her work has been supported most recently by a Guggenheim Fellowship. She is the new host of American Public Media’s weekday poetry podcast, *The Slowdown*. She grew up in Sonoma, California and now lives in Lexington, Kentucky where she writes and teaches remotely. She is the 24th Poet Laureate of the United States.

Judges’ Citation: “Again and again the clarity of vision and depth of emotion in this lovely book turns the ordinary on its head, asking us to slow down, to see the world askew, and thus anew. Tinged with grief and longing, and buoyed by wonder in the natural world and the possibility of human connection, these are poems that seem to move effortlessly – in the way that only a deft touch can do. The precision of syntax – at once plainspoken and fiercely lyrical – unfolds its revelations masterfully and with a kind of grace that is often heartbreaking. *The Hurting Kind* is a marvel.”



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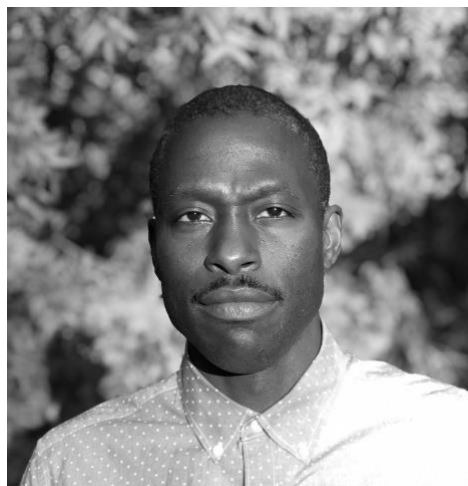
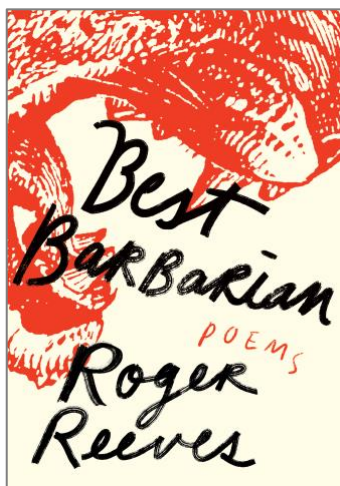
Exculpatory Lilies • Susan Musgrave McClelland & Stewart

Biography: Susan Musgrave lives off Canada’s West Coast, on Haida Gwaii, where she owns and manages Copper Beech House. She teaches in University of British Columbia’s Optional Residency School of Creative Writing. She has published more than thirty books and been nominated or received awards in six categories—poetry, novels, non-fiction, food writing, editing, and books for children. The high point of her literary career was finding her name in the index of *Montreal’s Irish Mafia*.

Judges’ Citation: “The sheer humanity and gift to show our fragile, broken selves is nothing less than prayer, as spoken in Musgrave’s *Exculpatory Lilies*. That she brings us to the sacred ground of loss and grief, and then lifts us toward our own humility is a ceremony. A ceremony wherein we must bow down our heads to the fragility of all we know, the darkness and light we all must carry.”



GRIFFIN POETRY PRIZE



***Best Barbarian* • Roger Reeves**

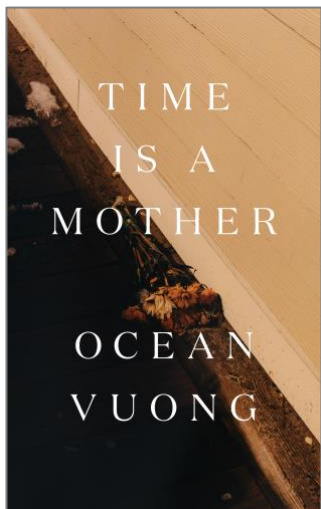
W. W. Norton

Biography: Roger Reeves is the author of *King Me* and the recipient of a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship, a Ruth Lilly and Dorothy Sargent Rosenberg Fellowship from the Poetry Foundation, and a 2015 Whiting Award, among other honours. His work has appeared in *Poetry*, *The New Yorker*, *The Paris Review*, and elsewhere. He lives in Austin, Texas.

Judges' Citation: "Among the many remarkable poems in *Best Barbarian* is 'Journey to Satchidananda' in which the poet writes: The Japanese call it Kintsugi. / Where the vessel broken, only gold will permit / Its healing. Its history. The beauty of that repair, which does not hide nor erase the evidence of trauma – of history – but transforms it, is the abiding metaphor in this capacious and wide-ranging meditation. At the intersections of history and myth, elegy and celebration, these poems chart the ruptures and violences enacted across time and space – particularly against black humanity – while leaning always toward beauty. Beauty and tenderness abound in this collection that dares to risk both: a brilliant and ambitious book."



GRIFFIN POETRY PRIZE



***Time Is a Mother* • Ocean Vuong**
Cape Poetry, and Penguin Press

Biography: Ocean Vuong is the author of the critically acclaimed poetry collection *Night Sky with Exit Wounds* and *The New York Times* bestselling novel *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*. A recipient of the 2019 MacArthur “Genius Grant,” he is also the winner of the Whiting Award and the T. S. Eliot Prize. His writings have been featured in *The Atlantic*, *Harper’s Magazine*, *The Nation*, *The New Republic*, *The New Yorker*, and *The New York Times*. Born in Saigon, Vietnam, he currently lives in Northampton, Massachusetts.

Judges’ Citation: “*Time Is a Mother* is a breathtaking poetry book that rediscovers the voice of loss and the fragile layers of identity. Vuong's writing is visceral, shaped like a relief map of unpredictable past and present. One of the most striking aspects of his poetry is the way in which he captures the passage of time, placing the seed of new worlds into time’s womb. He reflects on the ways in which memory becomes our body, and how the past can walk alongside us and open the doors of non-inherited grief and love. *Time Is a Mother* was written after the death of his mother — his silent muse and protector from the sharp edges of new borders and languages. He once said: ‘As a woman of color, an Asian woman, in the world, she taught me how to be vigilant. How people’s faces, posture, tone, could be read. She taught me how to make everything legible when language was not.’ Her death opened the window of eternal dialogue between them. Behind the shadows of loss, grief, and abandonment, his poetry reflects the strong echo of a ritualistic celebration of life and hope.”