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Kevin Young wins the Griffin Poetry Prize for his 'melancholic and haunting' Night Watch

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Kevin Young has won the Griffin Poetry Prize for his book *Night Watch*, a bluesy collection of experiences addressing the generative cycle of loss and renewal.

The international award given out annually by Canada's Griffin Trust for Excellence in Poetry is worth \$130,000 to Young, a Harvard-educated Nebraskan who is poetry editor of *The New Yorker* magazine and a New York University professor. He was presented with the prize at a gala event at Toronto's Koerner Hall



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“melancholic and haunting collection of sequence poems that layers multiple literary traditions with a dexterity that amounts to a provocation of sonic and epic proportions.”

haunting collection of sequence poems.'

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Each of the other shortlisted finalists were awarded \$10,000.

Canadian poets talked tough at Griffin Poetry Prize town hall: 'Our time has come, but our visibility has not'

In arriving to their decision, Griffin judges Andrea Cote (Colombia), Luke Hathaway (Canada) and Major Jackson (U.S.) each read 461 books of poetry, including 34 translations from 19 languages, submitted by 219 publishers from 42 different countries.

The winning collection published by Alfred A. Knopf previously earned Young the National Book Critics Circle Award in Poetry, a U.S.-based international prize recognizing books and reviews published in English.

Young's *Night Watch* was written over the span of 16 years. The poems from the former director of the Smithsonian Museum of African American History and Culture were inspired by such people as Millie and Christine McCoy, conjoined twins from North Carolina who were born into enslavement and later toured the world as harmony-singing free women. They are referenced in Young's *The Two-Headed Nightingale*: “As one we sang, /we spake – / She was the body / I the soul / Without one / Perishes the whole.”

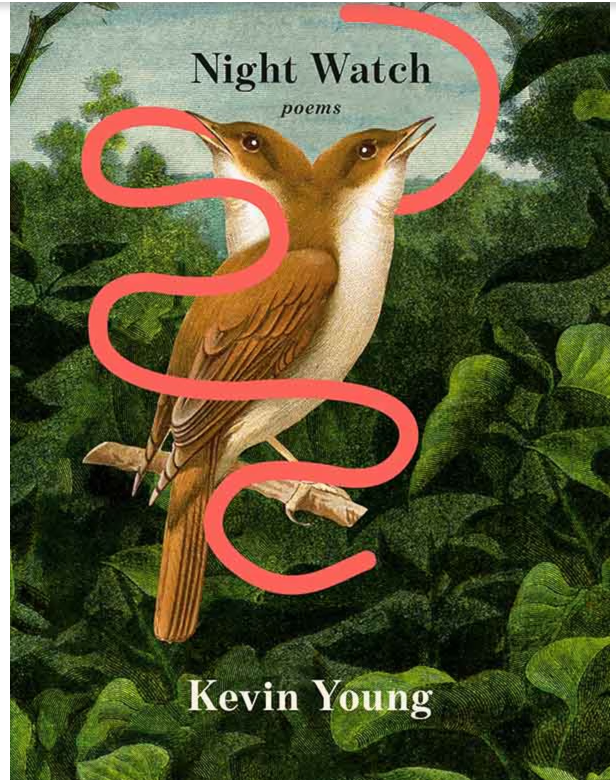
The judges singled out the poem as the “zenith of a book whose resilient, soulful spirit enchants even as it faces its most anguished, spiritual questions.” Other poems in Young's collection were motivated by Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Rembrandt's painting *The Night Watch* and seminal blues artist Robert Johnson.

including *African American Poetry: 250 Years of Struggle & Song* and *A Century of Poetry in The New Yorker: 1925–2025*.

Last month, Raúl Zurita was announced as the recipient of the Griffin's annual Lifetime Recognition Award. On Wednesday, the Chilean poet received his \$25,000 prize.

In other literary news, the Writers' Trust of Canada announced this week that Renato Gandia, Julia Cottrelle and Graham Slaughter were the winners of the RBC Bronwen Wallace Award for Emerging Writers. Each of them receives \$10,000 and access to career-building skills development and mentorship opportunities

Calgary-based Gandia won the poetry prize for the collection *Psalmody for the Estranged*. The short fiction winner is Toronto's Cottrelle, for *The Old Turtle Climb*. Toronto's Slaughter took home the creative nonfiction award for his piece *The Perfect Home For Your Child*.



Young's *Night Watch* was written over the span of 16 years.

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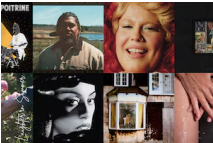
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The international award given out annually by Canada’s Griffin Trust for Excellence in Poetry is worth \$130,000.



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Booker Prize semi-finalists include former winners Marlon James, Douglas Stuart

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