

NATIONAL BOOK CRITICS CIRCLE ANNOUNCES FINALISTS; Sandrof Award to Toni Morrison

BY ADMIN | Jan-19-2015

NATIONAL BOOK CRITICS CIRCLE ANNOUNCES ITS FINALISTS FOR PUBLISHING YEAR 2014

Ivan Sandrof Lifetime Achievement Award is given to Toni Morrison

New York, NY (January 20, 2015) Today, the NBCC announced its 30 finalists in six categories-- autobiography, biography, criticism, fiction, general nonfiction, and poetry--for the best books of 2014. The winners of an additional three prizes were announced as well. The National Book Critics Circle Awards, founded in 1974 at the Algonquin Hotel and considered among the most prestigious in American letters, are the sole prizes bestowed by a jury of working critics and book-review editors. The awards will be presented on March 12, 2015 at the New School, in a ceremony that is free and open to the public.

For the first time in NBCC history a single book has been nominated in two categories: Claudia Rankine's *Citizen: An American Lyric* published by Graywolf Press is a nominee in both Poetry and Criticism. "Claudia Rankine's *Citizen* is a book of prose poetry whose inventive composition and topical content invite readers to consider different avenues toward the urgent conversation about race and politics in America. Rankine's appearance on two separate categories is a testament to her book's complexity, narrative reach and artistry," says Rigoberto Gonzalez, Chair of the Poetry committee.

The recipient of the Ivan Sandrof Lifetime Achievement Award is Toni Morrison. Morrison, 83, has been a powerful catalyst in reshaping literary culture over the past half century. Her lifetime of achievement includes much more than her canonical novels, honored with the 1977 NBCC fiction award for *Song of Solomon*, the 1988 Pulitzer for *Beloved*, and the 1993 Nobel Prize in Literature. During two decades as a book editor, Morrison brought into print the landmark narrative *The Black Book* (1974) and the work of Toni Cade Bambara and Gayl Jones, among others. From her post-graduate days in the late 1950s, when she taught at her alma mater, Howard University, until 2006, when she retired from Princeton, Morrison has influenced generations of students. Her work as a cultural critic includes *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* and *What Moves at the Margin: Selected Nonfiction* (2008); she edited *Burn This Book: PEN Writers Speak Out on the Power of the Word* and serves on the editorial board of *The Nation*. As a frequent public spokesperson for freedom of expression, the power of the written word, and the role of the artist, Toni Morrison has articulated a vision of the role of the writer that is both courageous and inspiring.

Phil Klay's short story collection *Redeployment* (Penguin Press) is the recipient of the John Leonard Prize, established in 2014 to recognize outstanding first books in any genre. Named to honor the

memory of founding NBCC member John Leonard, the prize is uniquely decided by a direct vote of the organization's 700 members nationwide, whereas the traditional awards are nominated and chosen by the elected 24-member board of directors.

The recipient of the 2014 Nona Balakian Citation for Excellence in Reviewing is Alexandra Schwartz. Ms. Schwartz is an assistant editor at the New Yorker and a regular contributor to the magazine's website. Her writing has also appeared in The Nation, The New York Times, and The New Republic. She was previously a member of the editorial staff of the New York Review of Books, and, before that, lived and worked in France. She grew up in New York City and lives in Brooklyn. For the third time in its 28-year history, the Balakian Citation carries with it a \$1,000 cash prize, generously endowed by NBCC board member Gregg Barrios.

National Book Critics Circle Finalists

Publishing Year 2014

AUTOBIOGRAPHY:

Blake Bailey, *The Splendid Things We Planned: A Family Portrait* (W.W. Norton & Co.)

Roz Chast, *Can't We Talk About Something More Pleasant?* (Bloomsbury)

Lacy M. Johnson, *The Other Side* (Tin House)

Gary Shteyngart, *Little Failure* (Random House)

Meline Toumani, *There Was and There Was Not* (Metropolitan Books)

BIOGRAPHY:

Ezra Greenspan, *William Wells Brown: An African American Life* (W.W. Norton & Co.)

S.C. Gwynne, *Rebel Yell: The Violence, Passion and Redemption of Stonewall Jackson* (Scribner)

John Lahr, *Tennessee Williams: Mad Pilgrimage of the Flesh* (W.W. Norton & Co.)

Ian S. MacNiven, "Literchoor Is My Beat": A Life of James Laughlin, Publisher of New Directions (Farrar, Straus & Giroux)

Miriam Pawel, The Crusades of Cesar Chavez: A Biography (Bloomsbury)

CRITICISM:

Eula Biss, On Immunity: An Innoculation (Graywolf Press)

Vikram Chandra, Geek Sublime: The Beauty of Code, the Code of Beauty (Graywolf Press)

Claudia Rankine, Citizen: An American Lyric (Graywolf Press)

Lynne Tillman, What Would Lynne Tillman Do? (Red Lemonade)

Ellen Willis, The Essential Ellen Willis, edited by Nona Willis Aronowitz (University of Minnesota Press)

FICTION:

Rabih Alameddine, An Unnecessary Woman (Grove Press)

Marlon James, A Brief History of Seven Killings (Riverhead Books)

Lily King, Euphoria (Atlantic Monthly Press)

Chang-rae Lee, On Such a Full Sea (Riverhead Books)

Marilynne Robinson, Lila (Farrar, Straus and Giroux)

GENERAL NONFICTION:

David Brion Davis, The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Emancipation (Alfred A. Knopf)

Peter Finn and Petra Couvee, *The Zhivago Affair: The Kremlin, the CIA, and the Battle over a Forbidden Book* (Pantheon)

Elizabeth Kolbert, *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History* (Henry Holt & Co.)

Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, translated from the French by Arthur Goldhammer (Belknap Press/Harvard University Press)

Hector Tobar, *Deep Down Dark: The Untold Stories of 33 Men Buried in a Chilean Mine, and the Miracle that Set Them Free* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux)

POETRY:

Saeed Jones, *Prelude to Bruise* (Coffee House Press)

Willie Perdomo, *The Essential Hits of Shorty Bon Bon* (Penguin Books)

Claudia Rankine, *Citizen: An American Lyric* (Graywolf Press)

Christian Wiman, *Once in the West* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux)

Jake Adam York, *Abide* (Southern Illinois University Press)

NONA BALAKIAN CITATION FOR EXCELLENCE IN REVIEWING

Alexandra Schwartz

Finalists:

Charles Finch

Barbara K. Fischer

Benjamin Moser

Lisa Russ Spaar

IVAN SANDROF LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

Toni Morrison

JOHN LEONARD PRIZE

Phil Klay, *Redeployment* (Penguin Press)

Winners of the National Book Critics Circle awards will be announced on Thursday, March 12, 2015 at 6:00 p.m. at the New School's Tishman Auditorium. A finalists' reading will be held on March 11, also at 6:00 p.m. at the same location. Both events are free and open to the public.

ABOUT THE NATIONAL BOOK CRITICS CIRCLE

The National Book Critics Circle was founded in 1974 at New York's legendary Algonquin Hotel by a group of the most influential critics of the day, and awarded its first set of honors in 1975, 40 years ago. Comprising more than 700 working critics and book-review editors throughout the country, the NBCC annually bestows its awards in six categories, honoring the best books published in the past year in the United States. It is considered one of the most prestigious awards in the publishing industry. The finalists for the NBCC awards are nominated, evaluated, and selected by the 24-member board of directors, which consists of critics and editors from some of the country's leading print and online publications, as well as critics whose works appear in these publications. For more information about the history and activities of the National Book Critics Circle and to learn how to become a supporter, visit <http://www.bookcritics.org> You can join the NBCC on Facebook, Twitter and Tumblr.

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