



# PEN/FAULKNER

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## 2014 PEN/FAULKNER AWARD FINALISTS ANNOUNCED

Washington, DC—Judges have selected five books published in 2013 as finalists for the 2014 PEN/Faulkner Award for Fiction, America's largest peer-juried prize for fiction. The nominees are Daniel Alarcón for *At Night We Walk in Circles* (Riverhead Books); Percival Everett for *Percival Everett by Virgil Russell* (Graywolf Press); Karen Joy Fowler for *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves* (G.P. Putnam's Sons); Joan Silber for *Fools* (W.W. Norton & Company); and Valerie Trueblood for *Search Party: Stories of Rescue* (Counterpoint Press). The announcement was made today by the directors of the PEN/Faulkner Foundation, Susan Richards Shreve and Robert Stone, Co-Chairwoman and Co-Chairman.

This year's judges—Madison Smartt Bell, Manuel Muñoz, and Achy Obejas—considered more than 420 novels and short story collections by American authors published in the US during the 2013 calendar year. Submissions came from 132 publishing houses, including small and academic presses. There is no fee for a publisher to submit a book.

The winner, who will receive \$15,000, will be announced on April 2; the four finalists will receive \$5,000 each. In a ceremony that celebrates the winner as "first among equals," all five authors will be honored during the 34<sup>th</sup> annual PEN/Faulkner Award ceremony at the Folger Shakespeare Library, located at 201 East Capitol Street, SE on Saturday, May 10, at 7pm. Tickets are \$100 for the reading ceremony and seated buffet dinner, and can be purchased by phoning the Folger Box Office at (202) 544-7077 or online at [www.penfaulkner.org](http://www.penfaulkner.org).

About the selection process, judge Madison Smartt Bell reports that, "The problem becomes not being able to reward all the books that deserve it... all of us were drawn most to work that was truly innovative and surprising in some way—and there was a generous amount of that to choose from."

### About the Finalists

**Daniel Alarcón's** *At Night We Walk in Circles* is a mystery, a character study, and a political parable exploring the nature of art, love, language and the distorting effects of war. This richly layered second novel begins in the seaside capital of an unnamed Latin American country where Nelson, a recent graduate of drama school, is invited to join a subversive guerrilla theatre troupe. As Nelson and two compatriots—including Nelson's hero, playwright Henry Nuñez—make their way through the countryside on a revival tour of Nuñez's play "The Idiot President," the lines between character and actor grow ever thinner. As the unreliable narrator of the novel pieces

together Nelson's story, he also paints a portrait of a troubled society in which the horrors of the past have left the hearts of the country's people scarred like the hillsides that bear evidence of a long civil war. A heady follow-up to his lyrical story collection and first novel, *At Night We Walk in Circles* has garnered comparisons to Borges, Bolaño, Beckett, and Kafka. Reviewing for the *New York Times*, Ana Menendez hailed the book, writing: "Alarcón fulfills the promise of his two earlier books [...] delivering a vibrant, ambitiously political story that derives its power from the personal." His previous books are the story collection *War By Candlelight* and the novel *Lost City Radio*. The recipient of a Fulbright fellowship, a Guggenheim Fellowship, a Whiting award, and recognized as one of the *New Yorker's* 20 under 40, Alarcón currently lives in San Francisco.

Within the first pages of **Percival Everett's** *Percival Everett by Virgil Russell*, a father tells his son "I've written something for you [...] Not to you, but for you. It's something you would write, if you wrote." Suffused with references to western philosophy, art, film, politics, and even ranch life, the central relationship of this labyrinthine novel is between father and son, though it's not always clear just who is narrating the story. Tellingly, the first section of the novel is titled "Hesperus" and the second "Phosphorus"—two names given by the ancients to Venus as it appeared in the morning and evening sky. Just as Venus was once thought to be two distinct entities, Everett implies that the distance and differences between father and son matter little in the face of big love and devastating loss. It is the story that matters most, not who is telling it. And what a story it is. Writing for the *Washington Post*, Mark Athiakis called the novel, "a potent and thoughtful exploration of the bonds between fathers and children." The author of over 20 books, Everett is the recipient of an Academy Award in Literature from The American Academy of Arts and Letters, the Hurston/Wright Legacy Award for Fiction, the Dos Passos Prize, and many other honors. He lives in Los Angeles where he is a Distinguished Professor of English at the University of Southern California.

**Karen Joy Fowler** brings new meaning to the axiom, "Each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way" in *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves*. Rosemary Cooke, the novel's twenty-two-year-old narrator, comes from what seems an ordinary enough 1970's Midwestern family: two scientist parents—her father is a psychology professor at Indiana University—and three children. Taking the advice her father often dispensed when she was a loquacious child ("Skip the beginning. Start in the middle."), Rosemary begins her story after grief over her lost sister, Fern, has fissured her family. Rosemary has just been arrested on her college campus; her runaway brother is wanted by the FBI; and her family has still never approached the topic of Fern, who disappeared when Rosemary was five. A quarter of the way through her story, Rosemary reveals a strange truth, deftly hidden from the reader up until that point: Fern is a chimpanzee, and she and Rosemary were twinned as the subjects of a behavioral psychology experiment conducted by Rosemary's father and gone terribly awry. To explain why she didn't share this detail sooner, Rosemary says, "I tell you Fern is a chimp and, already, you aren't thinking of her as my sister. You're thinking instead that we loved her as if she were some kind of pet." Writing for *The New York Times*, Barbara Kingsolver praises the novel as "so readably juicy and surreptitiously smart, it deserves all the attention it can get.... Fowler is a trustworthy guide through many complex territories." The author of six previous novels, including *The Jane Austen Book Club* and *Sister Noon*, which was a finalist for the 2002 PEN/Faulkner Award for Fiction, Fowler lives in Santa Cruz, California.

**Joan Silber's** story collection, *Fools*, presents six interconnected stories featuring characters walking the line between wisdom and foolishness. At the collection's center is Vera, the narrator of the title story who entertains her young daughters with the story of her youth in mid-1920s New York, a time when she shared a Greenwich Village apartment with a group of anarchists. Later, in "Two Opinions," Vera's now-grown daughter attempts to fit in with World War II-era

patriotic fervor by distancing herself from her parents' outspoken anti-war views. Meanwhile, "Hanging Fruit," follows the son of another of Vera's anarchist cohort who, after a series of romantic misadventures takes a tragic turn, retreats to the alluring combination of alcohol and Paris, only to be brought back to sobriety, in part, by his mother's first husband. Writing for *The Boston Globe*, Michael Patrick Brady notes, "The links between the stories are not just convenience or a contrivance. With brief nods to the Catholic Worker movement and Occupy Wall Street, Silber indicates that our personal happiness is intertwined with a broader social responsibility—that we are all in this together." Joan Silber is the author of six previous works of fiction, as well as the nonfiction work *The Art of Time in Fiction*. Her short fiction has been chosen for an O. Henry Prize three times—most recently in the 2013 collection—and twice for a Pushcart Prize. She currently teaches fiction at Sarah Lawrence College and lives on the Lower East Side of Manhattan.

**Valerie Trueblood's** story collection, *Search Party: Stories of Rescue*, plumbs the nature of loss and need with 13 stories that surprise in their perspectives on what it means to search and who is in need of rescue. Sometimes brief and consistently revelatory, these stories burrow deep into a range of psyches: a young babysitter caring suddenly for a sick child, a homeless family walking through empty houses, a nurse's aid with thwarted artistic aspirations. In an aching story titled, "Think Not Bitterly of Me," Trueblood introduces us to an older woman, Abby, who was the young victim of an abduction during the Depression. When this event becomes the subject of a film years later, Abby proudly attends the premier only to slip into a disorienting spiral of nostalgia and disgust as she watches the reel's fragmented interpretation of her experience. She is haunted by what she has shared, and what she has withheld. "The diamond-sharp stories in Trueblood's second collection dazzle," wrote *Publisher's Weekly*. "Trueblood tells these stories from unusual angles, with precision and a depth of insight and empathy that enfold the reader into the characters' lives." Valerie Trueblood is the author of a previous collection of short stories, *Marry or Burn*, a novel, *Seven Loves*, which was selected for Barnes & Noble's Discover Great New Writers program, as well as numerous essays and works of journalism. She is a co-trustee of the Denise Levertov Literary Trust and is a contributing editor of *The American Poetry Review*. She lives in Seattle, Washington.

### About PEN/Faulkner

Celebrating the 34th year of this Award, The PEN/Faulkner Foundation is committed to building audiences for exceptional literature and bringing writers together with their readers. This mission is accomplished through a reading series at Folger Shakespeare Library by distinguished writers who have won the respect of readers and writers alike; the PEN/Faulkner Award, the largest peer-juried award for fiction in the United States; the PEN/Malamud Award, which annually honors excellence in the short story; and the Writers in Schools program, which brings nationally and internationally acclaimed authors to public high school classrooms in Washington, DC and Baltimore, MD.

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