



PEN/FAULKNER

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2011 PEN/FAULKNER AWARD NOMINEES ANNOUNCED

Washington, DC—Judges have selected five books published in 2010 as finalists for the 2011 PEN/Faulkner Award for Fiction, America's largest peer-juried prize for fiction. The nominees are **Jennifer Egan** for *A Visit From The Goon Squad* (Knopf); **Deborah Eisenberg** for *The Collected Stories of Deborah Eisenberg* (Picador); **Jaimy Gordon** for *Lord of Misrule* (McPherson & Co.); **Eric Puchner** for *Model Home* (Scribner); and **Brad Watson** for *Aliens in The Prime of Their Lives* (W.W. Norton). The announcement was made today by the directors of the PEN/Faulkner Foundation, Susan Richards Shreve and Robert Stone, Co-Chairmen.

The judges—Laura Furman, William Kittredge, and Helena Maria Viramontes—considered approximately 320 novels and short story collections by American authors published in the US during the 2010 calendar year. Submissions came from over 125 publishing houses, including small and academic presses. There is no fee for a publisher or writer to submit a book.

The winner, who will receive \$15,000, will be announced on March 15; 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 **31st Annual PEN/Faulkner Award ceremony** at the Folger Shakespeare Library, located at 201 East Capitol Street, SE on **Saturday, May 7, at 7pm**.

Tickets are \$100 for the reading ceremony and buffet dinner, and can be purchased by phoning the Folger Box Office at (202) 544-7077 or online at www.penfaulkner.org.

About the selection process, judge **Laura Furman** says, "There's a little sound a hardback book makes when it's first opened, not exactly a squeak but almost, and that sound became familiar. When I felt unsure, groggy, or worst, compromising, my fellow judges were there--as were the best of the books—to remind me to keep to the strictest of standards, those of my heart, instinct, and intelligence."

About the Finalists

Jennifer Egan's *A Visit From The Goon Squad* is a novel comprised of 13 interlocking chapters, each a self-contained story, which spans 40 years from 1979 into the scientifically futuristic 2020. Praised for its masterful handling of multiple perspectives, tones, settings, and characters, the novel's innovative form mixes chronology, and with a seeming glance attaches one technically accomplished chapter to the next. The book's central characters are Bennie Salazar, a failing record producer and aging punk rocker, and Sasha, his former assistant, whom we meet at age 35, struggling against kleptomania. Through a gradual almost choral accretion of incident and impact, the reader follows this unhappy pair, as well as a vivid cast of adjunct characters, back and forth through struggling adolescence and struggling adulthood. The novel's landscape is unforgiving and frequently dangerous, yet unifying themes of music (with which the novel is richly informed) and the search for an authentic identity despite the thug-like inevitability of time find expression in sharply-rendered episodes of unexpected beauty. Whether expressed in second person narrative, through memory, or in a 70-page PowerPoint chapter, the intersection of these lives results in an ample and deeply compassionate work. The author of three previous novels, including *Look at Me*, a National Book Award Finalist in 2001, and a short fiction collection, Jennifer Egan is also an accomplished journalist. She lives in Brooklyn, New York.

The Collected Stories of Deborah Eisenberg brings together four volumes of Eisenberg's work: *Transactions in a Foreign Currency*, *Under the 82nd Airborne*, *All Around Atlantis*, and *Twilight of the Superheroes*, which was a PEN/Faulkner Finalist in 2007. Eisenberg's stories have long been admired for their exceptional language and nuanced evocation of thought and emotion. In story after story, the dialogue is crisp, idiosyncratic, and revelatory, yet what is frequently revealed is, as Jean Thompson for the *New York Times* puts it, "her characters' well-rendered and profound unease at inhabiting an uneasy world." The difficulty of harnessing words so they say what we mean is a core concern in Eisenberg's work: For example, about his family the protagonist in "Some Other, Better Otto" says, "The truth is, they've *never* sanctioned my way of life. Or, alternately, they've always *sanctioned* it. Oh, what on earth good is it to have a word that means only itself and its opposite!" With this plentiful volume, readers will appreciate the opportunity to chart the trajectory of Eisenberg's narratives over two decades, and the varying intentions and surprises among them. The recipient of a MacArthur Genius Grant, a Whiting Writer's Award, and a Guggenheim Fellowship, Deborah Eisenberg has also taught at the University of Virginia since 1994.

Described by writer Susan Salter Reynolds as a novel that has "pushed the limits of style — explored the empty places in her articulate characters and works — so that language drags meaning behind it like a fur coat trailing blood," **Jaimy Gordon's *Lord of Misrule*** is the Winner of this year's National Book Award. This novel of dazzling language is set in the ramshackle world of a second-rate racetrack, Indian Mound Downs, downriver from Wheeling, West Virginia. Saturated in racetrack idiom, the novel's world is ominously decrepit, peopled with con men, loan sharks, mystical grooms, trainers, and jockeys. At the center of the novel is Tommy Hansel, owner of a failing stable, who arrives at Indian Mound Downs with four horses, a money-making scheme, and his vibrant girlfriend, groomer Maggie Koderer. Characters like trainer Joe Dale Bigg, old lady Deucey Gifford, and financier Two-Tie are complimented by the equally exotic quartet of horses who run the four races around which the novel is structured. Among them is the high spirited Lord of Misrule, alternately called 'Devil' and 'King Death,' by potion master Medicine Ed. Though we know trouble and misery will befall the novel's characters, tragedies are balanced by keen, hard-edged observation and linguistic verve. Jaimy Gordon is the author of three previous novels, including *Bogeywoman*, which was on the *Los Angeles Times'* list of best fiction of 2011. She teaches at Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo.

Eric Puchner's debut novel, *Model Home*, tells the tragicomic story of the disintegrating Ziller family in 1980s southern California. Drawn by the promise of a booming real estate market, Warren Ziller moves his wife, Camille, and their three children from Wisconsin to the fringes of L.A., investing the family's savings in a housing development in the desert. When the venture fails, and tragedy befalls them, the Zillers take up residence in an empty house, on an empty street, the sole family to settle in Warren's doomed real-estate dream. In writer Daniel Handler's words, the book is, "1980s California in a nutshell: bright and frantic, giddy and broke, desperate and strong and always, always moving." The novel is also family in a nutshell, a fusion of nuanced daily observation, pained hilarity, absurd circumstance, and heartbreaking dislocation. As Camille Ziller herself observes within the novel's pages, "The mystery of life was not how it started... It was how people with every reason to be close could grow distant as satellites." It is the fraught terrain of that distance that Eric Puchner charts so perceptively. A former Wallace Stegner Fellow and author of a previous collection of short stories, Puchner lives in Los Angeles and teaches at Claremont McKenna College.

Brad Watson's collection, *Aliens in the Prime of Their Lives*, delivers twelve stories of family strife, personal loss, physical trauma and emotional reckoning. Steeped in the Southern gothic tradition, Watson steps beyond the borders of the traditional south to inflect even southern California with the lush trauma of its influence and the absurdity of its humor. His prose is sure enough to carry this mantle, and his plots are brutal enough to earn it. The beautifully wrenching "Water Dog God," tells the story of a teenage girl in Alabama, raped by her brothers, impregnated by her father, fleeing their tortured company in the wake of a tornado to seek refuge in the house of her cousin and the company of a pack of stray dogs. It's stories like this that prompted the *New York Times* to identify Watson's great gift to be his portrayal of, "the hardscrabble lives of odd but everyday people, their relationships to the surrounding land freighted with privately held histories and traumas." And yet, Watson's real gift is the humor and restraint that accompany these portrayals. His characters come to their own slow terms with life, providing us a reading experience both searing and hilarious. Watson is the author of a previous short story collection that won the Sue Kauffman Award for First Fiction, as well as a novel that was a finalist for the National Book Award. He lives in Wyoming, where he teaches at the University of Wyoming-Laramie.

About these five remarkable books, judge **William Kittridge** writes, "The chance to help with judging the 2010 PEN/Faulkner contest was a gift, a chance at renewal, at re-educating myself. All those books, those nights with them. Glory, glory, what luck. I was so happy to be involved."

About PEN/Faulkner

Celebrating the 31st 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 the 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**, honoring excellence in the short story; and the **Writers in Schools** program, which brings nationally and internationally-acclaimed authors to public high school classrooms, and to book groups of teen parents, and of incarcerated youth in Washington, DC.

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