

Texas Institute of Letters

November/December 2008

Four Texan finalists for National Book Awards; two of them named winners

Last year two Texas Institute of Letters members, Lawrence Wright and Cormac McCarthy, won Pulitzer Prizes for the best non-fiction and fiction books of 2007 (Wright for *The Looming Tower* and McCarthy for *The Road*). It was a year to be remembered for TIL and the state's writers.

This year already has proven to be another great one for Texas writers. Four of them were finalists in the four categories for the 2008 National Book Awards. Two of these four were named winners in a ceremony in November in New York City. Annette Gordon-Reed, who was born in Livingston and grew up in Conroe, won the non-fiction category for her book, *The Hemingses of Monticello: An American Family* (W.W. Norton & Co.), a group biography of the famous family of slaves owned by Thomas Jefferson.

Mark Doty, who teaches at the University of Houston, won first place in poetry for his *Fire to Fire: New and Collected Poems* (Harper-Collins).

Just one of the four nominees is a TIL member. He is Reginald Gibbons, professor of English at Northwestern University and director of the Center for the Writing Arts. Gibbons was a finalist in the poetry competition with his eleventh poetry collection, *Creatures of a Day*, published by LSU Press. Gibbons, as was the case for all finalists, was presented with a medal for his work.

Gibbons graduated from Spring Branch High School in Houston, and although he left the state at the age of 18 he said that "Texas has had a pervasive influence on my life—it is present in some way in each of my books."

He published yet another book this year, a translation entitled *Sophocles, Selected Poems: Odes and Fragments* (Princeton University Press).

Gibbons became a TIL member in 1984, and he has won TIL awards for the best book of poetry ((2003), best short story (1986), and best novel (1995).

The fourth National Book Award nominee, Kathi Appelt, was a finalist in the young people's literature category. Her book, *The Underneath* (Atheneum), is the story of a lonely hound dog and mother cat who come to depend on each other for survival in East Texas.

Ironically, Appelt attended the same high school, Spring Branch in Houston, as Gibbons. She graduated from Texas A&M in College Station, where she still lives.

Gordon-Reed was the first African American author to win the National Book Award since Orlando Patterson in 1991. Her first book on Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings seemed to prove the relationship between the two. She is a professor of law at New York University and a professor of history at Rutgers University. An earlier book, co-written with Vernon Jordan and entitled *Vernon Can Read*, also received considerable attention.

Doty, the poetry winner, divides his time between New York and Houston. At the University of Houston he is the John and Rebecca Moores professor in the graduate program. The United Kingdom edition of his book is on the short list there for the T.S. Eliot Prize.

Start planning now for TIL's annual meeting in Waco on April 17-18

Our annual meeting, reception, and awards program will be held this year in Waco.

The Friday night reception, 6 to 8 p.m., April 17, will be at the Dr Pepper Museum, and the readings, reception and banquet will be Saturday afternoon and Saturday evening at the Hilton Waco Hotel.

The Dr Pepper Museum, 300 S. 5th Street, is located in the first building dedicated to the manufacture of the soft drink, and the first bottling plant used in 1906 is one of the exhibits.

Most members will be surprised to learn that Dr Pepper is the oldest major soft drink in America, being—yes—one year older than the venerable Coca-Cola, having started in Waco in 1885. The museum contains the greatest collection of soft drink memorabilia in the world.

The Hilton Waco Hotel, headquarters for our meeting, is at 1135 S. University Park Drive overlooking the Brazos River.

Reservations may be made by calling the Hilton directly at 1-254-754-8484 or 1-800-234-5244. Be sure to ask for the TIL special rate of \$113.05 plus tax.

Finalists for the TIL awards will be announced in the next newsletter, and the winners will be named at the Saturday night banquet in Waco. Banquet tickets are \$50 each. Members may include this amount on their dues payments.

News of members and others

Hot off the TCU Press—*Notes From Texas: On Writing in the Lone Star State*, edited by W.C. Jameson and containing essays by TIL members **Bob Flynn, Don Graham, Rolando Hinojosa-Smith, Paulette Jiles, Elmer Kelton, Larry L. King, James Ward Lee, Clay Reynolds, Carlton Stowers, Fran Vick, and Judy Alter.**

There's more from TCU Press. They've started a new series of Texas Small Books—4-1/2 x 6-1/2, 96 pp., laminate case, priced under \$10. So far most of them are by TIL members: **Judy Alter** is the author of two of them—*Extraordinary Texas Women and Great Texas Chefs*; **Carlton Stowers** has done *Texas Football Legends: Greats of the Game*; **Don Graham**, *State Fare: An Irreverent Guide to Texas Movies*, and **James**

Ward Lee and Phil Fry collaborated on *Texas Country Singers*.

TIL members who attended readings by new members last April in Dallas will recall the delightful reading by new member **Emily Fox Gordon** from her forthcoming novel. Now Emily, who has published two memoirs, reports that her book, her first novel, will be published in early March by Spiegel and Grau, a new imprint of Random House. Its title is *It Will Come to Me*, a comedy of academic manners set on the campus of a southern university.

Prudence Mackintosh, architectural historian and preservationist Virginia Savage McAlester, architect Willis Winters, and photographer Steve Clicque, have produced a rather magnificent coffee table book, *The Homes of the Park Cities*, first in a series from Abbeville Press called Great American Suburbs. The huge book, profusely and beautifully illustrated as well as authoritatively and provocatively written, documents two of the nation's most famous and richest suburbs, Highland Park and University Park, both island communities within the City of Dallas. Prudence says her part was "relatively small," consisting of "quirky" essays sprinkled throughout the work.

The book offers historical information on the development of the two suburbs that make up the Park Cities. It highlights styles of architecture and the architects who employed them in building the "Bubble." It has approximately 350 illustrations, and is thoroughly indexed. Homes are identified by original owners. It also contains valuable appendices which will allow many residents to identify the year their houses were built and the architect.

In recent months this newsletter has highlighted two TCU Press books, *Literary Austin*, and *Literary Dallas*, naming on both occasions the many TIL members whose works are represented in them. A third book, *Literary El Paso*, soon will appear, and with its publication one TIL member will have the unique distinction of having appeared in all three. How unfortunate, then, that we failed to mention this author, **Pat LittleDog**. An explanation is due. Pat LittleDog adopted that name eighteen years ago, and the stories in those books were written under her previous name, Pat Ellis Taylor. For the past eleven years Pat has lived in the little town of Dale, Caldwell County.

News of members, continued

Good news from **Jane Roberts Wood**. The University of North Texas Press is reprinting her novel, *Grace and Roseborough*, which means that all her novels will be in print, including her children's book, *Mocha*. When her fine novel, *The Train from Estelline*, was published she was told that its shelf life would be from six weeks to six months. Now, over twenty years later, it is still in print.

Will he never rest? **H.W. Brands** has another new biography. It's *Traitor to His Class: The Privileged Life and Radical Presidency of Franklin Delano Roosevelt*, published by Doubleday. This is the 22nd book he has written, not counting two that he co-authored and four that he edited. The native of Oregon and graduate of Stanford (where he studied math and history as an undergraduate) revealed to a newspaper in Oregon that his series of biographies is part of his plan to write a history of the United States through a series of linked biographies. Those completed thus far include biographies of Benjamin Franklin, Andrew Jackson, Theodore Roosevelt, and Franklin Roosevelt.

A few more words about Henry William Brands. After getting his undergraduate degree from Stanford, he became a traveling salesman with a territory through the western states. Next, he taught math and history in high school and community college for nine years before earning graduate degrees in math and history. Then came his PhD in history from the University of Texas at Austin. After teaching history at Texas A&M for 17 years he returned to UT-Austin, where he is the Dickson Allen Anderson Centennial Professor of History and Professor of Government.

The American Wind Power Center in Lubbock, Tex., recently recognized **T. Lindsay Baker**, who became a TIL member last year, with the Billie Wolfe Award for the preservation of wind power heritage. Baker is director of the W.K. Gordon Center for Industrial History of Texas, part of Tarleton State University. T. Lindsay, who also teaches at Tarleton State, has written on wind power history since the 1970s. The author of six books on the subject, he also has edited the quarterly *Windmillers' Gazette* newsletter on wind power history since 1982.

In November, Baker joined Tarleton State University police sergeant Jonathan Hutson in talking at Fort Worth's Central Public Library about the 1933 Texas & Pacific Mail Robbery, which took place in Fort Worth on February 21, 1933. The \$71,000 heist was the largest armed robbery in the history of the city up to that time.

Recently the *New York Times* published its list of the ten best books of 2008. Which publisher do you think had the most titles represented? The answer: Alfred Knopf with seven of the ten titles. The venerable house was less dominant in the list of the 100 most notable books of 2008, although it could boast of 16 of them, half in the fiction category and eight more in non-fiction books.

This is rather old news, but you may have missed it. In *The New Yorker* of Oct. 20, 2008, under the title of "Late Bloomers," an article by Malcolm Gladwell about late-blooming geniuses, our own TIL member **Ben Fountain** was identified as one of the "late bloomers." Funny, Ben, we had always put you in the youthful category. Anyway, it was a very interesting article and very complimentary of Ben and his great work in writing fiction.

Things to remember:

Check the TIL website at <http://texasinstituteofletters.org/>

Send your news, please, to dpayne@smu.edu for inclusion in the newsletter. Other members want to hear about you.

See the next page for the form for submitting your TIL membership dues. They're due now.

It's also time to make your reservations for our April 16-17 annual meeting in Waco. See information on the second page of this newsletter.

Please use this form for remitting your dues for 2009.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ Fax _____

E-Mail _____

TIL dues for the year 2009 _____ \$50.00

Paisano Fund _____

Fred Whitehead Memorial Endowment Fund _____

Scholarly Book Award Endowment Fund _____

O. Henry Award Endowment Fund _____

Stanley Walker Award Endowment Fund _____

April 18 banquet tickets, \$50 per person _____

TOTAL ENCLOSED _____

Make check payable to Texas Institute of Letters and send to:

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