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TEN WRITERS OF EXCEPTIONAL PROMISE EACH RECEIVE \$50,000 WHITING WRITERS' AWARD

Margaret Atwood Gives Keynote Speech at 25th Anniversary Event

New York, October 28 – The Mrs. Giles Whiting Foundation today named ten recipients of the 2009 Whiting Writers' Awards. The awards, which are \$50,000 each, totaling \$500,000, have been given annually since 1985 to writers of exceptional talent and promise in early career.

The program, which marks its 25th anniversary this year, has awarded more than \$6 million to 250 poets, fiction and nonfiction writers, and playwrights. Among the past recipients who have gone on to achieve acclaim and prominence in their field are Denis Johnson, Mona Simpson, Tony Kushner, Jorie Graham, Gretel Ehrlich, Michael Cunningham, Alice McDermott, William T. Vollman, Ian Frazier, David Foster Wallace, Suzan-Lori Parks, Mark Doty, Jeffrey Eugenides, C.D. Wright, and Colson Whitehead.

This year's winners include several who have just published or will soon publish a first book. Although some were born in such far-flung places as Vietnam, South Korea, Puerto Rico, and The United Kingdom, they are now all living and working in this country, from California to Florida, to Nevada, to Alaska, and New York.

"This group of writers brings delightful surprises and pleasures," says Barbara Bristol, the Director of the Writers' Program. "Two transcendent non-fiction writers, one preoccupied with the fascinations of the insect world, and the other with the vibrant life

of an ancient Beijing neighborhood; four fearless, dazzling writers of novels and short fiction; three fresh poetic voices; and a provocative, risk-taking playwright. We warmly welcome them into our now distinguished 25-year roster of Whiting Award recipients and look forward to these writers enriching American letters for many years to come.”

The 2009 recipients were announced at a ceremony at the Morgan Library & Museum in New York on Wednesday, October 28. Dr. Robert L. Belknap, President of the Foundation, and trustee Kate Douglas Torrey presented the ten writers with their awards.

The keynote speaker of the evening was the brilliant, visionary writer **Margaret Atwood**, whose new novel, *The Year of the Flood*, was just published to wide critical acclaim. Ms. Atwood is the author of more than forty books of fiction, poetry, children’s books and critical essays. Her novels include *The Handmaid’s Tale*; *Cat’s Eye*, shortlisted for the Booker Prize; *Alias Grace*, which won the Giller Prize in Canada; *The Blind Assassin*, winner of the 2000 Booker Prize; and *Oryx and Crake*, shortlisted for the 2003 Booker Prize. Long considered one of Canada’s pre-eminent writers, she lives in Toronto.

The ten writers recognized this year for their extraordinary talent and promise are:

Jericho Brown, poetry. *Please* is his first book, published by New Issues Poetry & Prose in 2008. He lives in San Diego.

Jay Hopley, poetry. His first collection, *Green Squall*, was published by Yale University Press in 2005. He lives in Tampa, Florida.

Adam Johnson, fiction. He is the author of *Emporium* (Viking 2002) and *Parasites Like Us* (Viking, 2003). He lives in San Francisco.

Rajiv Joseph, plays. His productions include *Animals out of Paper*, *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo* and the forthcoming *Gruesome Playground Injuries*. He lives in Brooklyn.

Joan Kane, poetry. *The Cormorant Hunter’s Wife*, her first collection, will be published by NorthShore Press this fall. She lives in Anchorage.

Michael Meyer, nonfiction. *The Last Days of Old Beijing: Life in the Vanishing Backstreets of a City Transformed*, was published by Walker & Company in 2008. Soon to return to China, he lives in New York City.

Nami Mun, fiction. *Miles from Nowhere*, a novel, was published by Riverhead in 2009. Born in Seoul, South Korea, she lives in Chicago.

Hugh Raffles, nonfiction. He is the author of *In Amazonia: A Natural History* (Princeton University Press, 2002), and *The Illustrated Insectopedia*, which Pantheon will publish in the spring of 2010. A Professor of Anthropology at The New School, he lives in New York City.

Salvatore Scibona, fiction. *The End*, his first novel, was published by Graywolf Press in 2008 and shortlisted for the National Book Awards. He lives in Provincetown, Massachusetts.

Vu Tran, fiction. This accomplished short story writer has an as-yet-untitled first novel forthcoming from W.W. Norton. Born in Viet Nam, he now lives in Las Vegas, Nevada.

More detailed biographies of the winners are attached.

Whiting Writers' Awards candidates are proposed by about a hundred anonymous nominators from across the country whose experience and vocations give them knowledge about individuals of extraordinary talent. Winners are chosen by a small anonymous selection committee of recognized writers, literary scholars, and editors, appointed annually by the Foundation. At four meetings over the course of the year, the selectors discuss the candidates' work and gradually winnow the list. They then recommend up to ten writers for awards to the Foundation's Trustees. The Foundation accepts nominations only from the designated nominators.

The Mrs. Giles Whiting Foundation was established in 1963 by Flora E. Whiting. In 1972, her unrestricted bequest of over \$10 million enabled the Foundation to establish the Whiting Fellowships in the Humanities for doctoral candidates in their dissertation year. In the years since, the Foundation has annually awarded grants to Bryn Mawr, University of Chicago, Columbia, Harvard, Princeton, Stanford, and Yale to fund these Fellowships, the recipients of which are selected by each institution. The Foundation created the Whiting Writers' Awards in 1985 under the direction of Gerald Freund, who organized and led the program until his death in 1997.

To learn more about the Whiting Foundation and the selection process for the Whiting Writers' Awards visit the website at: www.whitingfoundation.org.

Jericho Brown

New Issues Poetry & Prose published Jericho Brown's first book, *Please*, in 2008. Mr. Brown worked as the speechwriter for the Mayor of New Orleans before receiving his PhD in Creative Writing and Literature from the University of Houston. He also holds an MFA from the University of New Orleans and a BA from Dillard University. The recipient of a Bunting Fellowship from the Radcliffe Institute at Harvard University and two travel fellowships to the Krakow Poetry Seminar in Poland, he has served as poetry editor at *Gulf Coast* and assistant poetry editor at *Callaloo*. His poems have appeared in *The Iowa Review*, *jubilat*, *New England Review*, *Oxford American*, and several other journals and anthologies. Mr. Brown teaches creative writing as an Assistant Professor of English at the University of San Diego.

Jay Hopley

Green Squall, Jay Hopley's first collection of poems, was chosen by Louise Glück as the winner of the 2005 Yale Series of Younger Poets Award. His work has appeared, or is forthcoming, in numerous magazines and journals, including *The American Poetry Review*, *The Kenyon Review*, *The New Yorker*, and *Ploughshares*. Born in San Juan, Puerto Rico, he has earned degrees from New York University, The Johns Hopkins University Writing Seminars, and the Iowa Writers' Workshop. Mr. Hopley is also the editor of a literary anthology of writings about hit men, entitled *The Killing Spirit: An Anthology of Murder-for-Hire*, and next year Yale University Press will bring out his *Yale Anthology of Younger American Poets*. He is Assistant Professor of English at the University of South Florida in Tampa.

Adam Johnson

Adam Johnson is the author of the story collection *Emporium* (Viking, 2002) and the novel *Parasites Like Us* (Viking, 2003), which won a California Book Award as well as earned him a Discover-a-Great-New-Writer Award from Barnes and Noble. His fiction has appeared in *Tin House*, *Esquire*, *Harper's*, *Paris Review*, and *Best American Short Stories*. He received his BA in Journalism from Arizona State University and his MA in English as well as MFA in Creative Writing from McNeese State University. He holds a PhD in English from Florida State University. He currently is a Senior Jones Lecturer in creative writing at Stanford University. He's at work on a new novel that is set in North Korea.

Rajiv Joseph

Playwright Rajiv Joseph is the author of *Animals Out of Paper*, produced at the Second Stage Theatre and published by Dramatists Play Service; *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo*, produced at the Center Theatre Group's Kirk Douglas Theater in Los Angeles and named Outstanding New American Play by the National Endowment for the Arts; and *Gruesome Playground Injuries*, scheduled for production in 2010 at the Alley Theatre in Houston and at Washington's Woolly Mammoth Theatre. He has received a Paula Vogel

Award from the Vineyard Theatre and has been a Kesselring, a Lark Playwriting, and a Dramatists Guild fellow. Mr. Joseph received his BA from Miami University and his MFA from NYU's Tisch School of the Arts. He is a founding member of the Fire Department Theater Company and lecturer in NYU's Expository Writing Program. He served for three years in the Peace Corps in Senegal and now lives in Brooklyn.

Joan Kane

Joan Kane's first collection of poems, *The Cormorant Hunter's Wife*, will be published by NorthShore Press in Alaska this fall and will include poems that have appeared in *Barrow Street*, *absent*, and *The Northwest Review*. She is Inupiaq Eskimo with family from King Island and Mary's Igloo, Alaska and now lives in Anchorage. She received a B.A. from Harvard, and an M.F.A. from Columbia's School of the Arts, which she earned with the assistance of a Columbia University Writing Fellowship. A winner of the John Haines Award, a semi-finalist for the Walt Whitman Award, a Rasmuson Foundation Individual Artist Award recipient, and a finalist for the Ruth Lilly Fellowship, she won the Anchorage Museum theater award for her first play, *The Gilded Tusk*. She is at work on a second poetry collection.

Michael Meyer

A native of Minnesota, Michael Meyer had a degree in education from the University of Wisconsin at Madison when, in 1995, he joined the Peace Corps and was sent to rural China. In 2005, following graduate school at the University of California-Berkeley and Tsinghua University, he settled in Beijing's oldest neighborhood just south of Tiananmen Square in a shared courtyard home on a *hutong*, in the type of neighborhood being bulldozed as the city modernized ahead of the 2008 Summer Olympics. Mr. Meyer volunteered as an English teacher at the local elementary school and recorded the *hutong's* vibrant life in his first book, *The Last Days of Old Beijing: Life in the Vanishing Backstreets of a City Transformed*, published by Walker & Company in 2008. Meyer is at work on a second book, *In Manchuria*, which details changes in rural China, as seen through life on a family rice farm in the country's northeast. A frequent contributor to *The New York Times* and other publications, Mr. Meyer currently resides in New York City, and is moving back to China this fall.

Nami Mun

Born in Seoul, South Korea, Nami Mun grew up there and in the Bronx, New York. Her first book, *Miles From Nowhere* (Riverhead, 2009), tells the story of Joon, a thirteen-year-old Korean-American runaway living on the streets of 1980's New York, and was shortlisted for the Orange Award for New Writers in the UK. Her work has been published or is forthcoming in *Granta*, *The Iowa Review*, *Tin House*, *2007 Pushcart Prize* anthology, and other journals. Ms. Mun, who has worked as a street vendor, an Avon Lady, a photojournalist, a bartender, and a criminal defense investigator, graduated from UC Berkeley, and has an MFA from University of Michigan. She currently teaches creative writing at Columbia College Chicago.

Hugh Raffles

Hugh Raffles is a professor of Anthropology at The New School. His first book, *In Amazonia: A Natural History* (Princeton University Press, 2002) won the Victor Turner Prize for Ethnographic Writing and was selected as a *Choice* Outstanding Academic Title by The American Library Association. In March 2010, Pantheon will publish his new book, *The Illustrated Insectopedia*, a compendium of history, biology, geography and personal anecdote, which investigates human - insect interactions through a series of essays. He holds a BA from the University of Warwick, an MA from the University of London and a Doctorate from the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies.

Salvatore Scibona

Salvatore Scibona's first book, *The End*, is a novel about a single day in 1953 as lived by six people in an Ohio carnival crowd. Published in 2008 by Graywolf Press, it was the winner of the New York Public Library's Young Lions Fiction Award and a finalist for the National Book Award. Riverhead released a paperback edition earlier this month.

Mr. Scibona's work has been published in *The New York Times*, *The Threepenny Review*, and *The Pushcart Book of Short Stories*. A graduate of the Great Books Program at St. John's College, where he earned his BA, he also has an MFA from the Iowa Writers' Workshop. He lives in Provincetown, Massachusetts, where he administers the Writing Fellowships at the Fine Arts Work Center.

Vu Tran

The short stories of Vu Tran have appeared in such journals as the *Harvard Review*, *Southern Review*, *Glimmer Train*, and the *Antioch Review* and have been selected for inclusion in the 2007 *O. Henry Prize Stories*, *Best American Mystery Stories 2009*, *The Best of Fence: The First Nine Years*, and *Las Vegas Noir*. Born in Viet Nam and a refugee at the age of five, he and his family were relocated to Oklahoma where he grew up and earned a BA and MA from the University of Tulsa. Mr. Tran also has an MFA from the Iowa Writers' Workshop and a PhD as a Glenn Schaeffer Fellow at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. He writes often of Vietnamese and Vietnamese-Americans and of the immigration experience. Mr. Tran's first novel is forthcoming from W.W. Norton. He currently teaches at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas and also works as a free-lance editor.

25 Years of Exceptional Talent:
Recipients of the Whiting Writers' Awards

2008

Mischa Berlinski (fiction)
Rick Hilles (poetry)
Donovan Hohn (nonfiction)
Douglas Kearney (poetry)
Laleh Khadivi (fiction)

Manuel Muñoz (fiction)
Dael Orlandersmith (plays)
Benjamin Percy (fiction)
Julie Sheehan (poetry)
Lysley Tenorio (fiction)

2007

Sheila Callaghan (plays)
Ben Fountain (fiction)
Paul Guest (poetry)
Brad Kessler (fiction)
Cate Marvin (poetry)

Tarell Alvin McCraney (plays)
Carlo Rotella (nonfiction)
Dalia Sofer (fiction)
Peter Trachtenberg (nonfiction)
Jack Turner (nonfiction)

2006

Sherwin Bitsui (poetry)
Charles D'Ambrosio (fiction)
Stephen Adly Guirgis (plays)
Tyehimba Jess (poetry)
Suji Kwock Kim (poetry)

Yiyun Li (fiction)
Micheline Aharonian Marcom (fiction)
Nina Marie Martínez (fiction)
Bruce Norris (plays)
Patrick O'Keeffe (fiction)

2005

Sarah Shun-lien Bynum (fiction)
Thomas Sayers Ellis (poetry)
Nell Freudenberger (fiction)
Rinne Groff (plays)
Ilya Kaminsky (poetry)

Seth Kantner (fiction)
John Keene (fiction/poetry)
Dana Levin (poetry)
Spencer Reece (poetry)
Tracy K. Smith (poetry)

2004

Daniel Alarcon (fiction)
Kirsten Bakis (fiction)
Catherine Barnett (poet)
Dan Chiasson (poetry)
Allison Glock (nonfiction)

Elana Greenfield (plays)
A. Van Jordan (poetry)
Victor LaValle (fiction)
John Jeremiah Sullivan (nonfiction)
Tracey Scott Wilson (plays)

2003

Courtney Angela Brkic (fiction/nonfiction)
Alexander Chee (fiction)
Christopher Cokinos (nonfiction)
Trudy Dittmar (nonfiction)
Major Jackson (poetry)

Agymah Kamau (fiction)
Ann Pancake (fiction)
Lewis Robinson (fiction)
Jess Row (fiction)
Sarah Ruhl (plays)

	2002	
Jeffery Renard Allen (fiction)		Melissa James Gibson (plays)
Elizabeth Arnold (poetry)		Michelle Huneven (fiction)
Justin Cronin (fiction)		Danzy Senna (fiction)
Kim Edwards (fiction)		Evan Smith (plays)
David Gewanter (poetry)		Joshua Weiner (poetry)
	2001	
Judy Blunt (nonfiction)		Brighde Mullins (plays)
Joel Brouwer (poetry)		Akhil Sharma (fiction)
Emily Carter (fiction)		Jason Sommer (poetry)
Kathleen Finneran (nonfiction)		Samrat Upadhyay (fiction)
Matthew Klam (fiction)		John Wray (fiction)
	2000	
Robert Cohen (fiction)		Andrew X. Pham (nonfiction)
Samantha Gillison (fiction)		James Thomas Stevens (poetry)
Lily King (fiction)		Kelly Stuart (plays)
John McManus (fiction)		Colson Whitehead (fiction)
Albert Mobilio (poetry)		Claude Wilkinson (poetry)
	1999	
Gordon Grice (nonfiction)		Ben Marcus (fiction)
Michael Haskell (poetry)		Yxta Maya Murray (fiction)
Ehud Havazelet (fiction)		ZZ Packer (fiction)
Terrance Hayes (poetry)		Margaret Talbot (nonfiction)
Naomi Iizuka (plays)		Martha Zweig (poetry)
	1998	
Michael Byers (fiction)		Ralph Lombreglia (fiction)
Nancy Eimers (poetry)		D.J. Waldie (nonfiction)
Daniel Hall (poetry)		Anthony Walton (nonfiction/poetry)
W. David Hancock (plays)		Charles Harper Webb (poetry)
James Kimbrell (poetry)		Greg Williamson (poetry)
	1997	
Jo Ann Beard (nonfiction)		Suketu Mehta (fiction/nonfiction)
Connie Deanovich (poetry)		Ellen Meloy (nonfiction)
Erik Ehn (plays)		Josip Novakovich (fiction/nonfiction)
Forrest Gander (poetry)		Melanie Rae Thon (fiction)
Jody Gladding (poetry)		Mark Turpin (poetry)
	1996	
Anderson Ferrell (fiction)		Chris Offutt (fiction/nonfiction)
Cristina Garcia (fiction)		Elizabeth Spires (poetry)
Molly Gloss (fiction)		Patricia Storage (poetry/nonfiction)
Brigit Pegeen Kelly (poetry)		Judy Troy (fiction)
Brian Kiteley (fiction)		A.J. Verdelle (fiction)

- 1995**
- André Aciman (nonfiction)
Michael Cunningham (fiction)
Lucy Grealy (nonfiction/poetry)
Suzannah Lessard (nonfiction)
Reginald McKnight (fiction)
- James McMichael (poetry)
Mary Ruefle (poetry)
Russ Rymer (nonfiction)
Matthew Stadler (fiction)
Melanie Summer (fiction)
- 1994**
- Mark Doty (poetry)
Louis Edwards (fiction)
Kennedy Fraser (nonfiction)
Mary Hood (fiction)
Randall Kenan (fiction/nonfiction)
- Wayne Koestenbaum (poetry/nonfiction)
Rosemary Mahoney (nonfiction)
Claudia Roth Pierpont (nonfiction)
Mary Swander (poetry/nonfiction)
Kate Wheeler (fiction)
- 1993**
- Jeffrey Eugenides (fiction)
Dagoberto Gilb (fiction)
Kevin Kling (plays)
Mark Levine (poetry)
Nathaniel Mackey (poetry/fiction)
- Dionisio D. Martínez (poetry)
Sigrid Nunez (fiction)
Janet Peery (fiction)
Kathleen Peirce (poetry)
Lisa Shea (fiction)
- 1992**
- Roger Fanning (poetry)
Eva Hoffman (nonfiction)
R.S. Jones (fiction)
J.S. Marcus (fiction)
Jane Mead (poetry)
- Suzan-Lori Parks (plays)
Katha Pollitt (poetry/nonfiction)
Keith Reddin (plays)
José Rivera (plays)
Damien Wilkins (fiction)
- 1991**
- Stanley Crouch (nonfiction)
Rebecca Goldstein (fiction)
Allegra Goodman (fiction)
John Holman (fiction)
Cynthia Kadohata (fiction)
- Scott McPherson (plays)
Thylas Moss (poetry)
Rick Rofihe (fiction)
Anton Shammas (fiction/nonfiction)
Franz Wright (poetry)
- 1990**
- Emily Hiestand (poetry)
Tony Kushner (plays)
Yannick Murphy (fiction)
Lawrence Naumoff (fiction)
Dennis Nurkse (poetry)
- Mark Richard (fiction)
Harriet Ritvo (nonfiction)
Christopher Tilghman (fiction)
Amy Wilentz (nonfiction)
Stephen Wright (fiction)
- 1989**
- Ellen Akins (fiction)
Russell Edson (poetry)
Ian Frazier (nonfiction)
Mary Karr (poetry)
Natalie Kusz (nonfiction)
- Luc Sante (nonfiction)
Timberlake Wertenbaker (plays)
Marianne Wiggins (fiction)
Tobias Wolff (nonfiction/fiction)
C.D. Wright (poetry)

1988

Michael Burkard (poetry)
Lydia Davis (fiction)
Bruce Duffy (fiction)
Gerald Early (nonfiction)
Jonathan Franzen (fiction)

Mary La Chapelle (fiction)
Li-Young Lee (poetry)
Sylvia Moss (poetry)
Geoffrey O'Brien (nonfiction)
William T. Vollmann (fiction)

1987

Mindy Aloff (nonfiction)
Joan Chase (fiction)
Mark Cox (poetry)
Pam Durban (fiction)
Gretel Ehrlich (nonfiction)

Deborah Eisenberg (fiction)
Alice McDermott (fiction)
Reinaldo Povod (plays)
Michael Ryan (poetry)
David Foster Wallace (fiction)

1986

John Ash (poetry)
Hayden Carruth (poetry)
Kent Haruf (fiction)
Denis Johnson (fiction)
Darryl Pinckney (nonfiction/fiction)

Padgett Powell (fiction)
Mona Simpson (fiction)
Frank Stewart (poetry)
Ruth Stone (poetry)
August Wilson (plays)

1985

Raymond Abbott (fiction)
Douglas Crase (poetry)
Stuart Dybek (fiction)
Jorie Graham (poetry)
Linda Gregg (poetry)

Wright Morris (fiction/nonfiction)
Howard Norman (fiction)
James Robison (fiction)
James Schuyler (poetry)
Austin Wright (fiction/nonfiction)