



## THE NEW LITERARY PROJECT

### 2021 Joyce Carol Oates Prize Winner Announced

#### **DANIELLE EVANS: WINNER OF 2021 JOYCE CAROL OATES PRIZE**

#### **Author Wins Fifth Annual \$50,000 Fiction Prize for Mid-Career Writers**

#### **Offered by the New Literary Project**

**Oakland, CA, April 26, 2021**—Danielle Evans, award-winning author of *The Office of Historical Corrections* (Riverhead) and other powerful, influential works of fiction, has been named 2021 Joyce Carol Oates Prize Recipient by nonprofit the New Literary Project (formerly the Simpson Literary Project). The Prize annually honors a midcareer author of fiction who has earned a distinguished reputation and the widespread approbation and gratitude of readers.

The Prize recognizes emerged and continually emerging authors of major consequence—short stories and/or novels—at the relatively middle stage of a burgeoning career. Prize winners receive a \$50,000 award to encourage and support forthcoming work. The Prize is administered by the New Literary Project, which appreciates the trust of generous individuals as well as altruistic family foundations and corporate donors who subscribe to its vision and sustain its multifaceted programs.

Danielle Evans is the author of the story collections *The Office of Historical Corrections* and *Before You Suffocate Your Own Fool Self*. Her first book won the PEN American Robert W. Bingham Prize, the Hurston-Wright award for fiction, and the Paterson Prize for fiction; her second was a finalist for The Story Prize, The Los Angeles Times Book Prize for fiction, and The Aspen Words Literary Prize. She was a 2020 National Endowment for the Arts fellow and a 2011 National Book Foundation 5 under 35 honoree. Her work has appeared in magazines and anthologies including *The Best American Short Stories* and *New Stories from The South*. She teaches in The Writing Seminars at Johns Hopkins University.

Ms. Evans will appear under auspices of the New Literary Project in Bay Area events during 2021–2022, and she will take up short-term residency at University of California Berkeley during the Spring Semester of 2022. She will also be featured in a virtual Meet the Joyce Carol Oates Prize Winner event on May 5, 2021, 4:00 Pacific/7:00 Eastern, in conversation with Joyce Carol Oates, co-hosted by the Project and the Lafayette Library and Learning Center; register here: [llcf.org/jco2021](http://llcf.org/jco2021)

*Danielle Evans has more to teach us than we may be prepared to learn. Her subtle control of character and language enthralls us, and her stories dazzle with wit, passion, and insight. As we know, in Hebrew and Christian scriptures there is a Book of Daniel. He is a visionary who is dispatched into that famous den of lions by a corruptible, self-serving ruler, with every expectation he will be torn to pieces. He is miraculously spared, however—angels may have played a role—and he returns to the light of day with new stories, new prophecies. In the Books of Danielle, Danielle Evans that is, something related seems to have occurred. She published her Office of Historical Corrections during the election season of 2020, a period of unprecedented vexation and political turmoil. In the course of her marvelous career this author returns again and again from danger with prophetic stories of her own, radiant with intensity and conviction and grace. Lions never have a chance.*

—**Joseph Di Prisco**, Chair, The New Literary Project

Ms. Evans is the fifth winner of the yearly prize, which was awarded today in a private ceremony by Executive Director Diane Del Signore, who expressed fervent hope that Ms. Evans and the Prize would provide “a glimmering of great good news at a vexing, perilous time for the nation and the arts.”

*In the single decade of her exciting publishing career, Danielle Evans has produced two of the finest short story collections in America. Evans is more than just a great story writer, though; she is one of our best writers, period. She fits the emotional scope of an entire novel into the space of a couple dozen pages. She*

*offers readers a nuanced reflection of the human condition and the world in which we live, and still has room for sly humor and a breathtaking plot twist. She gifts us with her innate understanding of the proximity between grief and humor, making us laugh and cry at the very same time. Her fiction has the rare capacity to simultaneously entertain and change us – to clarify our experience of the world. I am so pleased to see Danielle Evans receive the Joyce Carol Oates Prize, an honor she richly deserves.*

—**Sarah McGrath**, Senior Vice President, Editor in Chief of Riverhead Books

The Joyce Carol Oates Prize is named for the eminent author, who serves as an honorary member of the Project’s Board of Directors, and who has served as the Project Writer-in-Residence. In naming the Prize, the Project gratefully acknowledges her inspiring lifelong impact as a teacher and writer without peer, a writer beloved for decades by legions of students, writers, and readers around the country and the world. She embodies the Project’s most deeply held commitments to teaching and writing, to teachers and writers across the generations.

*Danielle Evans is that rare combination: a writer of lovingly crafted, often poetic and introspective prose whose subjects are as timely as today’s headlines—disturbing, provocative, enigmatic, resisting summary or paraphrase. She has a wickedly sharp eye and ear for hypocrisy and is very funny about pretentiousness in private life as in public life. Her combustible story “Boys Go to Jupiter” is satire edged with sympathy, as “Alcatraz” is tragedy irradiated with sympathy. Her most ambitious work, “The Office of Historical Corrections,” is a novella-length examination of the very heart of contemporary American darkness—the systemic racism embedded and protected in American institutions, approached here with a Kafkaesque literalness and heart-tripping suspense. For all its sharpness and unflinching candor, Danielle Evans’s “voice” is confiding, forgiving. She can make us laugh, and then she can warn us, in the concluding words of the story “Why Don’t Women Just Say What They Want” that we might “not fathom yet how real and how necessary her ruthlessness would be.”*

—**Joyce Carol Oates**

*I am thrilled and honored to receive this year's prize, and to find myself in the wonderful company of this year's finalists and the Joyce Carol Oates Prize's previous winners. An award like this gives the gift of time and confidence, and I will use both as I work on my next book, a novel about celebrity, the shifting media landscape, the price of becoming an icon, and the ways our culture often simultaneously celebrates, mourns, and makes demands of Black women. Just before the start of our strange pandemic year, I was at a beach by the Pacific Ocean reading a stack of books that included Joyce Carol Oates's *Blonde* and thinking about how writers I admire have approached writing about celebrity. Winning this prize as we are (hopefully) emerging from this disrupted and isolated year feels like being called back to my work in progress, and also provides a welcome chance to get back to the West Coast, where I am very much looking forward to being in residency and to being in conversation and community with the young writers in the Project's workshops.*

—**Danielle Evans**

Three other deeply accomplished and important shortlist finalists were considered by the Board of Directors after an anonymous jury confidentially deliberated upon a longlist nominated by critics, authors, professors, booksellers, book reviewers, and publishers around the country. The Project thanks them for their good will and their distinctive, impressive contributions to literature. When in the future they publish their next book of fiction, they will be longlisted and considered again for the Prize.

**Jenny Offill**, author of *Weather* (Knopf)

**Lysley Tenorio**, author of *The Son of Good Fortune* (Ecco)

**Darin Strauss**, author of *The Queen of Tuesday* (Random House)

The New Literary Project was created in 2016 as the Simpson Literary Project, the product of an evolving innovative private/public partnership between the University of California, Berkeley, English Department and the Lafayette Library and Learning Center Foundation. **The New**

**Literary Project invests in students and teachers, readers and authors, to inspire and equip writers across generations to write their hearts out.**

The Project offers high-school age writers writing workshops at no cost, led by Simpson Fellows, UC Berkeley creative writing instructors; in 2021 six workshops are now taking place at Contra Costa County Juvenile Hall (two workshops), Girls Inc-Alameda County (two workshops), Northgate High School, and Cal Prep. Ninety+ per cent of workshop students come from underserved communities.

In addition, the Project edits a nationally distributed annual anthology of Project-related artists, including Prize finalists and other nationally celebrated authors alongside younger writers appearing in print for the first time. Forthcoming is *Simpsonistas: Tales from the Simpson Literary Project Vol. 3* (Rare Bird, Spring 2021).

Previous award-winners are expected to continue their supportive efforts and engagements with the New Literary Project:

2017: **T. Geronimo Johnson**, author of *Welcome to Braggsville* (HarperCollins)

2018: **Anthony Marra**, author of *The Tsar of Love and Techno* (Hogarth)

2019: **Laila Lalami**, author of *The Other Americans* (Pantheon)

2020: **Daniel Mason**, author of *A Registry of My Passage Upon the Earth* (Little, Brown)

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For more information, please contact: Diane Del Signore, 510-919-0970,

[diane@newliteraryproject.org](mailto:diane@newliteraryproject.org)

[newliteraryproject.org](http://newliteraryproject.org)