

Competition Results

2009



Frances Ya-Chu Cowhig, a graduate of the James A. Michener Center for Writers, won the 2009 Keene Prize for Literature, for her play “Lidless,” in which a former Guantanamo detainee dying of liver disease journeys to the home of his female interrogator to demand half her liver for the damage she wreaked on his body and soul during her interrogations.

“Political without being propagandistic, moving without being sentimental, ‘Lidless’ uses theatrical space, physical bodies and talismanic objects to create a bold and timely imaginative intervention into the debate about torture,” said Elizabeth Cullingford, Chair of the Keene Prize Jury.

In addition to the Keene Prize “Lidless” has been selected by playwright Sir David Hare as the winner of the 2009 Yale Emerging Playwrights Prize. The play was produced at UT’s Lab Theatre and has been given staged readings at Houston’s Alley Theatre, Ojai Playwrights Conference and Yale Repertory Theatre. It will be published by Yale University Press.

Finalist Malachi Black, master’s of fine arts candidate at the Michener Center, for a collection of sonnets, “Cantos from Insomnia.” The committee admired this poet’s technical ambition, his free but respectful modernization of the sonnet form, his witty internal and external rhymes (“vodka/sonata”), and his attention to rhythm and cadence. They appreciated his delightfully original conceits, such as “anxious as a phone / About to ring” or “turn the doorknob of a corner.”

Finalist



Sarah Cornwell, master’s of fine arts candidate at the Michener Center, for her short stories “Mr. Legs,” “Champlain,” and “Other Wolves on Other Mountains.” The committee was impressed with the range and variety of Cornwell’s subject matter, her emotional and psychological insights, her intimate characterization of a boy with dyspraxia, her vivid evocation of the contagion spread by an accusation of sexual abuse, and her taut, often poetic use of language and metaphor—for example, the image of the lost wolf that opens and closes the last story.



Sarah Smith, master’s of fine arts candidate at the Michener Center, for a collection of poetry: “Enormous Sleeping Women.” These witty, clever, and often surreal poems captivated the judges with their juxtapositions between the exotic and the mundane. Debating the value of rarity and impermanence, “Sturgeon” ranges from caviar through quails eggs, from Russia to the Ohio River; while the title poem modulates from the vivid description of country life to sudden menace, and ends with an apparently inconsequential freckle. “Quirky, original, and linguistically rich, ‘Enormous Sleeping Women’ is a pleasure to read,” noted the committee.