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Contact:

Katrina Reynolds

kreynolds@resnicow.com

212.671.5184

Fritzi Bodenheimer

fbodenheimer@bklynlibrary.org

718.230.2402

Brooklyn Public Library Announces 2019 Literary Prize Winners

Nonfiction Prize Awarded to Dr. Tressie McMillan Cottom for

Thick: And Other Essays

Fiction and Poetry Prize Awarded to Miriam Toews for *Women Talking*

Brooklyn, NY – November 4, 2019 – Brooklyn Public Library (BPL) announced today the winners of the fifth annual **Brooklyn Public Literary Prize**, awarding **Miriam Toews** the 2019 Fiction and Poetry Prize for *Women Talking* and **Dr. Tressie McMillan Cottom** the 2019 Nonfiction Prize for *Thick: And Other Essays*. Nominees and winners for the Prize are selected by a team of BPL librarians.

“The Brooklyn Public Library Literary Prize awards the year’s top contemporary writers. Drawing on their extensive knowledge of literature and representing Brooklyn’s avid readers, our librarians selected Dr. Tressie McMillan Cottom’s *Thick: And Other Essays* and Miriam Toews’s *Women Talking*,” said **Linda E. Johnson, President and CEO, Brooklyn Public Library**. “We are delighted to honor these authors for their remarkable work, which are sure to become among the most popular books in our collection.”

Nominations for the prize were made by 13 librarians working throughout BPL’s 59 branches. Each year, BPL’s librarians draw on their extensive knowledge of contemporary literature and insight into the changing tastes of library patrons, to select the nominees. The prize comes with a \$5000 award.

In *Thick: And Other Essays*, **Dr. Tressie McMillan Cottom**, acclaimed author of *Lower Ed* and award-winning sociology professor, offers eight piercing explorations of beauty, media, and money, effortlessly fusing the political, the social, and the personal to explore what it means to be a black woman in America. Serving up a healthy portion of clever prose and southern aphorisms, Cottom covers everything from “Saturday Night Live,” LinkedIn, and BBQ Becky to sexual violence, infant mortality, and Trump rallies.

“I always advise people never to mess with librarians. They are as feisty and formidable as they are brilliant and generous. They are warriors for our public knowledge, nurturers of our imaginations, and organizers of our intellect,” said **Dr. Tressie McMillan Cottom**. “To be honored by the band of heroes and heroines who make the Brooklyn Public Library possible is gratifying beyond words. So much of who I am—a complicated scholar, a voracious reader, a

devoted writer—is because libraries are. The best of the public good lives in libraries and that is why all who care about justice must make every effort to make sure libraries live in us.”

Miriam Toews’s *Women Talking* is a masterful novel about eight women in a remote Mennonite colony facing an agonizing decision in the aftermath of a series of unspeakable sexual crimes. Based on real events and told through the minutes of the women’s all-female symposium, Toews’s masterful novel uses wry, politically engaged humor to relate this tale of women claiming their own power to decide.

“I’m absolutely thrilled to receive this prize from the Brooklyn Public Library, and honoured to be in the company of these outstanding co-nominees,” said **Miriam Toews**. “I’m especially grateful for this prize because it’s a library prize and libraries are the last and best of our disappearing public spaces that stand for democracy, reason, enlightenment, empathy and human connectedness. Once again, I am absolutely thrilled! Thank you so much!”

In addition to Miriam Toews, the 2019 shortlist nominees for fiction and poetry were **Fatimah Asghar** for *If They Come for Us: Poems*, **Terrance Hayes** for *American Sonnets for My Past and Future Assassin*, and **N.K. Jemisin** for *How Long ‘til Black Future Month?: Stories*. The other nominees for non-fiction included **Aaron Bobrow-Strain** for *The Death and Life of Aida Hernandez: A Border Story*; **Nick Estes** for *Our History Is the Future: Standing Rock Versus the Dakota Access Pipeline, and the Long Tradition of Indigenous Resistance*, and **Nathaniel Rich** for *Losing Earth: A Recent History*.

A celebration for the authors will take place on November 8 at the Brooklyn Public Library Classic, a signature event of the Brooklyn Eagles, a group of young professionals who support the library through volunteering and fundraising.

The Brooklyn Public Library Literary Prize was established in 2015. Previous winners include Jeanne Theoharis, Carmen Maria Machado, Tommy Pico, Richard Rothstein, Mary. E. Buser, Idra Novey, DW Gibson and Atticus Lish.

The Brooklyn Public Library Literary Prize is generously underwritten by the Peck Stacpoole Foundation, with additional support from City Point.

About Brooklyn Public Library

Brooklyn Public Library (BPL) is an independent library system for the 2.5 million residents of Brooklyn. It is the sixth largest library system in the United States with 59 neighborhood libraries located throughout the borough. BPL offers free programs and services for all ages and stages of life, including a large selection of books in more than 30 languages, author talks, literacy programs and public computers. BPL’s eResources, such as eBooks and eVideos, catalog information and free homework help, are available to customers of all ages 24 hours a day at our [website](#).