

VILCEK FOUNDATION

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Contact:
Elizabeth Boylan
The Vilcek Foundation
212-472-2500 or elizabeth.boylan@vilcek.org

Vilcek Foundation Awards \$250,000 in Literature Prizes to Immigrant Authors

Literary luminary Edwidge Danticat is announced as the recipient of the 2020 Vilcek Prize for Literature. Rising stars Yaa Gyasi, Valeria Luiselli, and Jenny Xie are the recipients of Vilcek Prizes for Creative Promise in Literature

New York, NY, February 3, 2020—The Vilcek Foundation has announced the recipients of the 2020 Vilcek Foundation Prizes in the arts and humanities, awarded this year to immigrants who have made outstanding contributions in contemporary literature. The prizes honor the foundation’s mission to acknowledge the value and impact of foreign-born persons’ work in the arts and humanities in the United States.

Edwidge Danticat is the recipient of the 2020 Vilcek Prize in Literature for her dazzling prose and genre-spanning work that explores the Haitian diaspora and other personal narratives. The winners of the 2020 Vilcek Prizes for Creative Promise in Literature are Yaa Gyasi, Valeria Luiselli, and Jenny Xie.

“The winners of the 2020 Vilcek Prizes in Literature deftly explore themes of identity, agency, and belonging across a span of genres,” says Marica Vilcek, cofounder and vice chairman of the Vilcek Foundation. “The power of literature as an art form is the immersive experience it provides—the reader has the opportunity to see the world from another perspective, through the lens of the author or narrator.”

Danticat’s work surveys intersecting themes of national and cultural identity, immigration and diaspora, women’s experiences, and Haitian American lives. She has written more than 15 books, including the memoir *Brother, I’m Dying*, which won the National Book Critics Circle Award for Autobiography in 2008; *Krik? Krak!*, a collection of short stories and a finalist for a 1995 National Book Award; as well as *Breath, Eyes, Memory*; *The Farming of Bones*; *The Dew Breaker*; *Create Dangerously*; *The Art of Death*; and *Everything Inside*. Danticat has also published several books for children and young adults. In 2009, she was granted a MacArthur Fellowship. In 2018, she voiced the Creole audio recording for the ACLU’s “We Have Rights” campaign, which provides information to immigrants who face unexpected visits by ICE officials. Danticat was born in Port-au-Prince, Haiti.

The Vilcek Prizes for Creative Promise in Literature are bestowed upon foreign-born authors whose early work demonstrates exceptional promise, and evidences profound insight and skill in conveying complex themes through the written word.

Yaa Gyasi is a novelist and the author of *Homegoing*, which explores family ancestry, the impact of the transatlantic slave trade, and its generational trauma. This debut novel has been lauded for its intimate portrayal of the experiences of persons in the Ghanaian and black diasporas and won the National Book Critics Circle’s John Leonard Prize for best first book and the American Book Award in 2017. Gyasi is a 2016 National Book Foundation “5 Under 35” honoree, and her writing has

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appeared in *Granta*, *Guernica*, *The Guardian*, and other publications. Gyasi was born in Mampong, Ghana.

Valeria Luiselli is the author of the award-winning novels *Faces in the Crowd* and *The Story of My Teeth*, and the essay collections *Sidewalks* and *Tell Me How It Ends: An Essay in Forty Questions*. *Tell Me How It Ends* was described by *The Texas Observer* as “the first must-read book of the Trump era,” and was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award for Criticism in 2017. Her 2019 novel *Lost Children Archive* was longlisted for the Booker Prize and the Women’s Prize for Fiction, and shortlisted for the Simpson Literary Prize, in 2019. Luiselli is a finalist for a 2020 Carnegie Medal for Excellence in Literature and the recipient of a 2019 MacArthur Fellowship. Luiselli was born in Mexico City and grew up in South Korea, South Africa, and India.

Jenny Xie’s poetry probes perception and the boundaries of selfhood, entangled with larger questions about power, language, and the unseen. Her poems have appeared in *Poetry*, *The New York Times Magazine*, and *The Kenyon Review*, among other publications. She has published a chapbook and a full-length collection of poetry. Her chapbook, *Nowhere to Arrive*, won the 2016 Drinking Gourd Poetry Prize; *Eye Level*, her debut collection, received the 2017 Walt Whitman Award of the Academy of American Poets, and was a finalist for the 2018 National Book Award, along with other honors. *Eye Level* has been praised for its insightful and introspective analysis of travel and displacement, migration, and the private self. Xie was born in Anhui, China.

The foundation has also announced the recipients of the 2020 Vilcek Foundation Prizes in Biomedical Science and the recipient of the 2020 Vilcek Prize for Excellence in the Administration of Justice. All of the prizewinners will be celebrated at the Vilcek Foundation Prizes Gala in New York in April 2020.

The Vilcek Foundation

The Vilcek Foundation was established in 2000 by Jan and Marica Vilcek, immigrants from the former Czechoslovakia. The mission of the foundation, to honor immigrant contributions to the United States, and more broadly, to foster appreciation of the arts and sciences, was inspired by the couple’s respective careers in biomedical science and art history. The foundation awards annual prizes to immigrant biomedical scientists and artists, sponsors cultural programs, and manages the Vilcek Foundation Art Collections. To learn more, please visit vilcek.org.