

Jason Mott and Tiya Miles win National Book Awards

NEW YORK, Nov 22, (AP): Jason Mott's "Hell of a Book," a surreal meta-narrative about an author's promotional tour and his haunted past and present, has won the National Book Award for fiction — a plot twist Mott did not imagine for himself.

"Hell of a Book" is a satirical take on a Black writer's adventures on the road for a promotional tour — Mott himself had his share of experiences while talking up such previous works as his debut novel "The Returned" — and a stark and disorienting tale of racial violence and identity, drawing on recent headlines and the author's childhood.

"I would like to dedicate this award to all the other mad kids, to all the outsiders, the weirdos, the bullied, the ones so strange they had no choice but to be misunderstood by the world and those around them," Mott, 43, said in his acceptance speech.

He also cited "the ones who, in spite of this, refuse to outgrow their imagination, refuse to abandon their dreams, refused to deny, diminish their identity, or their truths, or their loves — unlike so many others."

Tiya Miles' "All That She Carried: The Journey of Ashley's Sack, a Black Family Keepsake" was the winner for nonfiction.

Malinda Lo's "Last Night at the Telegraph Club" — a story of same-sex, cross-cultural love set in the 1950s — won for young people's literature.

The poetry prize was awarded to Martín Espada's "Floaters," and best translation went to Elisa Shua Dusapin's "Winter in Sokcho," translated from the French by Aneesa Abbas Higgins.

Winners in the competitive categories last Wednesday night each receive \$10,000.

Two honorary prizes were presented: Author-playwright Karen Tei Yamashita received a lifetime achievement medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters, and author-librarian-NPR commentator Nancy Pearl was given the Litterarian Award for Outstanding Service to the American Literary Community.

The 72nd annual awards were presented by the non-profit National Book Foundation. While other literary events such as PEN America's annual gala were held in person this fall, the Foundation decided in September to have a virtual ceremony for the second straight year, citing the complications of organizing a gathering of "authors, publishers, and guests traveling from all over the country."

Attacks

Yamashita and Pearl were among the honorees who spoke of a precarious present, worrying about the wave of efforts to censor books at schools and libraries and about violent attacks against racial minorities. Some finalists, fiction and nonfiction, looked for meaning in the distant past, whether Nicole Eustace's historical work "Covered with Night: A Story of Murder and Indigenous Justice in Early America," or such novels as Lauren Groff's 12th-13th century narrative "Matrix" and Robert Jones, Jr.'s slavery story.

Both Groff and Jones say that exploring a previous time is an inspiring way to understand the present. Groff's novel is based in part on the medieval author Marie de France, an outcast from the French royal court who takes over a rundown abbey in England and helps build it into an economic and social force. Men are almost entirely absent, and unmentioned, in "Matrix," which centers on Marie's upending of religious and other patriarchal institutions.

"I was deeply impressed by how the contemporary moment and that period of history were speaking to each other, from almost a millennium apart," Groff, a three-time National Book Award final-

ist, said in a recent interview. "I saw in that time the seeds of how we got to where we are and how we treat women — the way we still have a lot of ambivalence about female power."

Jones invented — entirely — a love story between two enslaved men in Mississippi, Isaiah and Samuel. While such famed slavery novels as Toni Morrison's "Beloved" draw on historical records for their plots, Jones acknowledged he had no basis for Isaiah and Samuel beyond his certainly that men like them went undocumented. He remembered watching a video of the British journalist Esther Armah, who said that her Ghanaian father and great-grandfather and others in their community did not categorize relationships by sexuality.

"It was all considered natural and normal," he said. "And that gave me the courage to write about people like Samuel and Isaiah. People like Samuel and Isaiah must have existed."

The event was hosted by actor-writer-comedian Phoebe Robinson, who praised books as a "passport" to the greater world even as she joked that her own books didn't bring her to the rarefied place of awards finalists. Actor Dion Graham of "The Wire" served as the main announcer, with Kerry Washington and Rita Moreno among those who helped introduce individual categories.

The National Book Awards were established in 1950, and have gone through several evolutions, with categories expanded for a time to more than 20 and reduced to as few as four. In recent years, the book foundation added a category for books in translation and began announcing long lists of 10 in each category before paring them to five.

Judging panels looked through more than 1,800 submitted books. This year's judges included such acclaimed authors as Eula Biss, Ilya Kaminsky and Charles Yu, winner in 2020 of the National Book Award for fiction.

Books

Variety



BTS performs 'Butter' at the American Music Awards on Sunday, Nov. 21, 2021 at Microsoft Theater in Los Angeles. (AP) — See Also Page 13

Music

Taylor Swift, Ed Sheeran win top honors

Hitmakers BTS stamp their authority on AMAs

NEW YORK, Nov 22, (AP): South Korean superstars BTS were crowned artist of the year at the American Music Awards on Sunday, brushing aside challenges from Taylor Swift, Drake and The Weeknd as they took home a total of three awards and teamed up with Coldplay for a raucous "My Universe" and closed the show with "Butter."

"Seven boys from Korea, united by love for music, met the love and support from all the armies all over the world," said BTS' RM after the group won their artist of the year for the first time. "This whole thing is a miracle. Seriously, we would never take this for granted."

The band was also named favorite pop duo or group and got the favorite pop song award for "Butter."

BTS and Coldplay — two of the biggest groups on Earth — teamed up Sunday for a live and raucous version of their cosmic collaboration "My Universe" as the American Music Awards celebrated the best popular music for a second pandemic year.

The show celebrated the best popular music for a second pandemic year with a mix of live and pre-taped performances. Silk Sonic's Bruno Mars and Anderson .Paak kicked off the awards on a funky, R&B and pre-taped note with their "Smokin Out the Window" and Jennifer Lopez pre-taped her "On My Way" from her upcoming romantic comedy "Marry Me."

An earlier scheduled performance of "Butter" by BTS and Megan Thee Stallion was scrapped after the rapper cited personal reasons for dropping out Saturday. She turned out to be a big winner: named favorite female hip-hop artist, her "Good News" winning for favorite hip-hop album and her "Body" was crowned favorite trending song, a new award this year.

Olivia Rodrigo came into the night with a leading seven nominations but only took home the crown for favorite new artist of the year. "Writing songs is my favorite thing in the whole world and I am so grateful for everyone who has embraced my music," she said.

Rodrigo lost favorite pop album to Taylor Swift's "evermore." In a taped speech, Swift told her fans: "I'm so lucky to be in your life." Swift also won for favorite female pop artist, giving her a career total of 34, the record for the most awarded artist in AMA history.

Rodrigo performed her hit "traitor" live on a stage covered with flowers and Carrie Underwood and Jason Aldean brought a little country to the stage when they sang their pre-taped duet "If I Didn't Love You." With a little help from Julieta Venegas and Tainy, Bad Bunny performed their hit "Lo Siento BB :/."

Performances

Among live performances, Italian band Måneskin made their US awards show debut with their viral hit "Beggina." Chlöe of Chloe x Halle floated down onto the stage to perform her hit debut single as a soloist "Have Mercy," swinging her hair and twerking. Mickey Guyton got loud cheers while singing her patriotic song "All American" in a silver dress, periodically screaming out "How y'all doing?"

The fan-voted awards show aired live from Los Angeles on ABC. Nominees were based on streaming, album and digital sales, radio airplay and social activity, and reflect the time period of Sept. 25, 2020, through Sept. 23, 2021.

Becky G won for favorite female Latin artist and thanked the Latinx community. "You are not alone," she said. "We are the American dream."

Machine Gun Kelly grabbed the favorite rock artist award. "I want to accept this for all the as-

piring musicians, the one who desires to play an instrument, wants to rap, wants to sing — not just the rock artists, but all the artists," he said.

Earlier Sunday, in awards announced before the show, Swift was named favorite female pop artist, Ed Sheeran got the favorite male award and Doja Cat featuring SZA on "Kiss Me More" was named collaboration of the year. Kanye West was named favorite gospel artist.

Underwood won for favorite inspirational artist and favorite female country artist and Doja Cat also won two other awards: favorite female R&B artist and her "Planet Her" was named favorite R&B album.

Luke Bryan was named favorite country artist and Bad Bunny was the favorite male Latin artist. The Weeknd was crowned favorite male R&B artist and Drake won the favorite male hip-hop artist. Gabby Barrett took home the favorite country album for "Goldmine" and favorite country song for "The Good Ones."

For the older viewers, New Edition and New Kids on the Block performed together. The Boston-based groups took turns with the hits, trading hits: "You Got It (The Right Stuff)," "Candy Girl," "Step By Step," "Mr. Telephone Man" and uniting for "Can You Stand the Rain," "Is This the End," "Hangin' Tough" and "If It Isn't Love."

The favorite Latin album went to Bad Bunny's "El Último Tour Del Mundo."

Host Cardi B, wearing a constant stream of new outfits, revved up the crowd. Later her song "Up" was named favorite hip-hop song. The Associated Press was not able to transmit images of Cardi B while she was onstage because her representatives required approval, a restriction the AP would not accept.

LOS ANGELES: Busting ghosts is still a fairly lucrative business after almost 40 years.

Heading into Thanksgiving weekend, the latest attempt to revive "Ghostbusters" drew a sizable audience to theaters, while the awards darling "King Richard," like most dramas in the pandemic era, is struggling.

With a reverence for nostalgia and a few high-profile cameos in its arsenal, "Ghostbusters: Afterlife" opened above industry expectations with \$44 million in ticket sales from 4,315 locations, according to studio estimates Sunday. The Sony movie directed by Jason Reitman and starring Paul Rudd, Finn Wolfhard and McKenna Grace is playing exclusively in theaters.

"Afterlife's" first weekend is actually trailing that of Paul Feig's "Ghostbusters" with Melissa McCarthy and Kristen Wiig, which had a \$46 million opening in June 2016. Aside from the somewhat unpredictable pandemic-era movie-going habits, the crucial difference is that "Afterlife" cost about half as much to make.

"It's a really solid number," said Paul Dergarabedian, Comscore's senior media analyst. "Part of that is the theatrical exclusive release. This shows that this brand is really powerful even some 37 years after the original became a cultural phenomenon."

The weekend's other high-profile offering didn't fare as well. "King Richard," the well-reviewed drama starring Will Smith as the father of tennis greats Venus and Serena Williams, earned \$5.7 million from 3,302 locations, missing its modest expectations by almost half. The Warner Bros. film was released simultaneously on HBO Max and in theaters.

"It really is have and have nots," said Jeff Goldstein, Warner Bros. head of domestic distribution. "Clearly the avid moviegoers are starting to come back, but more casual moviegoers are more reluctant."

Although traditional blockbuster have managed to draw decent audiences, dramas have disproportionately struggled during the pandemic. Most have debuted in the \$3 million range. One of the more successful launches was the Aretha Franklin biopic "Respect,"

which opened to \$8.8 million.

But the outlook could be promising for "King Richard" with its 92% fresh rating on Rotten Tomatoes, A CinemaScore from audiences and long awards season runway. In 2018, "Green Book" opened on Thanksgiving weekend to only \$5.5 million, but by the end of awards season it had



Wiig



Rudd

grossed \$85 million.

Meanwhile, in limited release from A24, Mike Mills' "C'mon C'mon" had the best limited platform debut since February 2020 with \$134,447 from five screens. The film stars Joaquin Phoenix as man looking after his 9-year-old nephew.

The box office is still far from

where it was pre-pandemic. The weekend leading into Thanksgiving usually gets around \$200 million in ticket sales, but this weekend will net out around \$83 million.

At this point, the 2021 North American box office could net out with around \$4 billion. In 2019 it was \$11.4 billion. And there are

still some major movies on the horizon in December, like "West Side Story," "Spider-Man: No Way Home" and "The Matrix Resurrections."

"The Matrix Resurrections" is an upcoming American science fiction action film produced, co-written, and directed by Lana Wachowski. (AP)