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▶ Entertainment • Books

Tanya Tagaq, Ian Williams among finalists for \$60,000 Amazon Canada First Novel Award

By **Deborah Dundas** Books Editor
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Books published by small indie presses are equally represented along with books from one big publishing house in the Amazon Canada First Novel Award. The short list was announced Friday morning.

Marking the 43rd annual presentation, the prize is a prestigious one, having helped launch the careers of writers including Michael Ondaatje, Joy Kogawa and Katherena Vermette, among others. The winner will receive \$60,000 and each of the six finalists will receive \$6,000 in prize money.



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Tanya Tagaq, author of *Split Tooth*, which is a finalist for the Amazon Canada First Novel Award. (REBECCA WOOD)

The finalists are:

- [The Amateurs](#) by Liz Harmer (Knopf Canada), about which the Star's reviewer said, "And like all good

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hometown to write a profile of his father, a former NHL enforcer.

- [Little Fish](#) by Casey Plett (Arsenal Pulp Press), which the Star said “promises to add a strong and necessary voice to trans writing in this country.”
- [Split Tooth](#) by Tanya Tagaq (Viking Canada). It’s a powerful book, a hybrid of novel and memoir with stories about young love as well as sexual abuse. Tagaq said, “I ended up being able to go back through these pieces, to flesh them out and breathe new life into old memories that had collected dust. It was a really exhilarating process and a peaceful one.”
- [Jonny Appleseed](#) by Joshua Whitehead (Arsenal Pulp Press). About his book, Whitehead told the Star, “I think we’re on the precipice of new modes of storytelling. Bringing it back to the body, and bringing the idea of sexuality and gender and sex into these conversations.”
- [Reproduction](#) by Ian Williams (Penguin Random House Canada), about which the Star’s reviewer said, “at its best, *Reproduction* serves as a literary representation of the various intersections of culture, race and gender in contemporary Canada; it is a mirror with graffiti/social commentary both humorous and powerful scrawled all over it.”

Knopf Canada and Viking Canada are imprints of Penguin Random House Canada.

Sitting on the jury were Diane Schoemperlen, a Governor General’s Award-winning author of 14 books, including *This Is Not My Life: A Memoir of Love, Prison, and Other Complications* (2016); Dimitri Nasrallah, winner of the Quebec Writers’ Federation’s Hugh MacLennan and First Book prizes, and author of three novels, most recently *The Bleeds* (2018); and Doretta Lau, author of the short-story collection *How Does a Single Blade of Grass Thank the Sun?* (2014).

Initially established in 1976 and now supported by Amazon, the First Novel Award has been won by some of Canada’s best writers, including Ondaatje, Vermette, Kogawa, Joan Barfoot, W.P. Kinsella, Nino Ricci, Rohinton Mistry, Michael Redhill, Mona Awad and Michael Kaan.

The winner will be announced at an event in Toronto on May 22.

Deborah Dundas is the Star’s Books editor. She is based in Toronto. Follow her on Twitter: [debdundas](#)

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