

Graywolf Press

Rights List

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FICTION

***The House of Rust* by Khadija Abdalla Bajaber**

Novel / October 2021 / World: Graywolf

Rights sold: Italy (66th & 2nd), Arabic (Al Alamya)

***Winner of the Graywolf Press Africa Prize**

An enchanting debut novel about a Hadrami girl in Mombasa

When her fisherman father goes missing, Aisha takes to the sea on a magical boat made of a skeleton to rescue him. She is guided by a talking scholar's cat—and soon crows, goats, and other animals all have their say, too. On this journey Aisha meets three terrifying sea monsters. After she survives a final confrontation with Baba wa Papa, the father of all sharks, she rescues her own father, and hopes that life will return to normal. But at home, things only grow stranger.

Caught between her grandmother's wish to safeguard her happiness with marriage and her own desire for adventure, Aisha is pushed toward a match with a sweet local boy that she doesn't want. Before she can fight her way to independence—as embodied in the book by the mirage-like House of Rust—she must first gain experience and skills to vanquish Almassi, the imprisoned snake-demon ruler of Mombasa.



Praise for *The House of Rust*

“An exhilarating journey into the imagination of an author for whom the fantastic is not only written about, it is performed on the page. Khadija Abdalla Bajaber has infused new life into the age-old story of adventure on the high seas—with this heroic first novel she has struck deep into that mythic realm explored by everyone from Homer to Hemingway.”

—A. Igoni Barrett, Graywolf Press Africa Prize judge

Khadija Abdalla Bajaber is a poet and novelist with a degree in journalism. A Kenyan of Hadrami descent, she writes about the ill-documented history of the Hadrami diaspora. Her work has been published in *Brainstorm Kenya* and the *Enkare Review*. She lives in Mombasa, Kenya.

***The Swank Hotel* by Lucy Corin**

Novel / October 2021 / World English: Graywolf / Translation: Janklow & Nesbit

A stunningly ambitious, prescient novel about madness, generational trauma, and cultural breakdown

At the outset of the 2008 financial crisis, Em has a dependable, dull marketing job generating reports of vague utility while she anxiously waits to hear news of her sister, Ad, who has gone missing—again. Em’s days pass drifting back and forth between her respectably cute starter house (bought with a “responsible, salary-backed, fixed-rate mortgage”) and her dreary office. Then something unthinkable, something impossible happens and she begins to see how madness permeates everything around her while the mundane spaces she inhabits are transformed, through Lucy Corin’s idiosyncratic magic, into shimmering sites of the uncanny.

The story that swirls around Em moves through several perspectives and voices. There is Frank, the tart-tongued, failing manager at her office; Jack, the man with whom Frank has had a love affair for decades; Em and Ad’s eccentric parents who live in a house that is perpetually being built; and Tasio, the young man from Chiapas who works for them and falls in love with Ad. Through them Corin portrays porousness and breakdown in individuals and families, in economies and political systems, in architecture, technology, and even in language itself.

The Swank Hotel is an acrobatic, unforgettable, surreal, and unexpectedly comic novel that interrogates the illusory dream of stability that pervaded early twenty-first century America.



Praise for *The Swank Hotel*

“Vivid, turbulent, intense, *The Swank Hotel* affirms, blow-by-blow, our loneliness, madness, and longing for a place to settle down. Lucy Corin’s promiscuous gaze illuminates the impossibility of repairing the breakdown by rebuilding the house from the outside in rather than from the inside out.”—**Rikki Ducornet**

Lucy Corin is the author, most recently, of *One Hundred Apocalypses and Other Apocalypses*. She is the recipient of an American Academy of Arts and Letters Rome Prize and a National Endowment for the Arts Literature Fellowship. She lives in Berkeley, California.

If an Egyptian Cannot Speak English by Noor Naga
Novel / April 2022 / World: Graywolf
Rights sold: Italian (66th & 2nd)

***Winner of the Graywolf Press Africa Prize**

A lyrical and formally innovative novel about a fateful romance between two unnamed narrators: an Egyptian American woman from New York and an Egyptian man from the village of Shobrakheit

Boy documented the Egyptian Revolution quite lucratively as a photographer, but in the crushing aftermath of the uprising he finds himself unemployed and addicted to cocaine. Girl has come to Cairo to “connect with her roots” but does not quite realize the power she will wield there as an American. The two meet through friends, and before long are in a heated if mutually punitive relationship. Boy abandons his roof-top shack and moves in to Girl’s fancy apartment, and things unravel from there.

Noor Naga examines power, tenderness, and accountability in relationships as well as in narrative. She asks: What are the new forms of colonial violence? How does one survive when one autocrat is replaced by another? Who suffers, and how? And who can tell these stories?

Noor Naga is an Alexandrian writer who was born in Philadelphia, raised in Dubai, and studied in Toronto. Her work has been published in *Granta*, the *Walrus*, the *Common*, *Poetry*, and elsewhere. Her verse-novel *Washes, Prays* was published by McClelland & Stewart in 2020.

***Walking on Cowrie Shells* by Nana Nkweti**
Stories / June 2021 / World: Graywolf
Rights sold: UK/Commonwealth (Indigo)

A standout debut collection that roves across genres and styles, by a finalist for the Caine Prize

Nana Nkweti's virtuosity is on full display in *Walking on Cowrie Shells*, as she mixes deft realism with clever inversions of genre. In the Caine Prize finalist story "It Takes a Village, Some Say," she skewers racial prejudice and the practice of international adoption, delivering a sly tale about a teenage girl who leverages her adoptive parents to fast-track her fortunes. In "The Devil Is a Liar," a pregnant pastor's wife struggles with the collision of Western Christianity and her mother's traditional Cameroonian belief system as she worries about her unborn child.

In other stories, Nkweti vaults past realism, upending genre expectations in a satirical romp about a jaded PR professional trying to spin a zombie outbreak in West Africa, and in a mermaid tale about a Mami Wata who forgoes her power by remaining faithful to a fisherman she loves. In between these two ends of the spectrum there's everything from an aspiring graphic novelist at a comic con, to a murder investigation driven by statistics, to a story organized by the changing hairstyles of the main character.

Pulling from mystery, horror, realism, myth, and graphic novels, Nkweti showcases the complexity and vibrance of characters whose lives span Cameroonian and American cultures. A dazzling, inventive debut, *Walking on Cowrie Shells* announces the arrival of a superlative new voice.



Praise for *Walking on Cowrie Shells*

"What an intoxicating book! Magical, funny, inventive and joyous, Nana Nkweti's tales remind us what storytelling can be."—**Andrew Sean Greer**

"Nana Nkweti's ambitious, amphibious tales capture the diverse and complex experience of 'hyphenated Americans' who, like Nkweti, have deep roots in Africa and America. It would be impossible to overstate how much I love this book, and its author."—**Karen Russell**

Nana Nkweti is a Caine Prize finalist and alumna of the Iowa Writers' Workshop. Her work has garnered fellowships from MacDowell, Kimbilio, Ucross, and the Wurlitzer Foundation, among others. She is a professor of English at the University of Alabama.

BACKLIST HIGHLIGHT

***This Mournable Body* by Tsitsi Dangarembga**

Novel / August 2018 / World: Graywolf

Rights sold: UK/Commonwealth, ex. Southern Africa (Faber & Faber), Southern Africa (Jacana Media), French (Memoire d'Encrier), German (Orlanda), Russian (Eksmo), Swedish (Tranan)

***Shortlisted for the 2020 Booker Prize**

A searing novel about the obstacles facing women in Zimbabwe, by one of the country's most notable authors

Anxious about her prospects after leaving a stagnant job, Tambudzai finds herself living in a run-down youth hostel in downtown Harare. For reasons that include her grim financial prospects and her age, she moves to a widow's boarding house and eventually finds work as a biology teacher. But at every turn in her attempt to make a life for herself, she is faced with a fresh humiliation, until the painful contrast between the future she imagined and her daily reality ultimately drives her to a breaking point.

In *This Mournable Body*, Tsitsi Dangarembga returns to the protagonist of her acclaimed first novel, *Nervous Conditions*, to examine how the hope and potential of a young girl and a fledgling nation can sour over time and become a bitter and floundering struggle for survival. As a last resort, Tambudzai takes an ecotourism job that forces her to return to her parents' impoverished homestead. This homecoming, in Dangarembga's tense and psychologically charged novel, culminates in an act of betrayal, revealing just how toxic the combination of colonialism and capitalism can be.

Tsitsi Dangarembga is the author of two previous novels, including *Nervous Conditions*, winner of the Commonwealth Writers' Prize. She won the 2021 PEN Award for Freedom of Expression. She is also a filmmaker, playwright, and the director of the Institute of Creative Arts for Progress in Africa Trust. She lives in Harare, Zimbabwe.

NONFICTION

***Just Us: An American Conversation* by Claudia Rankine**

Essay / September 2020 / World: Graywolf

Rights sold: UK/Commonwealth (Penguin), German (Spector), Portuguese/Brazil (Todavia), Italian (66th & 2nd), world Spanish (Eterna Cadencia/Seven Stories)

A perceptive and relevant new work of nonfiction by the author of *Citizen*

Revelatory, funny, and ingeniously written, the essays in *Just Us* take place in transitional spaces—on airplanes, at a diversity training session, in a therapist’s office, at a dinner party, after a play, on the internet—where presumed neutrality gives way to American culture’s overwhelming whiteness. Claudia Rankine questions what it means in these spaces to interrogate white privilege, well-meaning liberal politics, white male aggression, the implications of blondness, and white supremacy in the White House, the Brett Kavanaugh hearings, and the alarming move toward Brexit.

With a brilliant interplay between text and visuals, *Just Us* examines intimacy and friendship, and brings us into a necessary conversation about what we don’t know.



Praise for *Just Us*

“Rankine has emerged as one of America’s foremost scholars on racial justice. . . . [To] a past we have avoided reckoning, Rankine will be helping America understand itself, one conversation at a time.”—**The Associated Press**

Claudia Rankine is the author of *Citizen* and four previous books, including *Don’t Let Me Be Lonely*. Her work has appeared recently in the *Guardian*, the *New York Times Book Review*, the *New York Times Magazine*, and the *Washington Post*. She is a MacArthur Fellow and teaches at Yale University.

***Names for Light: A Family History* by Thiiri Myo Kyaw Myint**
Memoir/Essay / August 2021 / World English: Graywolf / Translation: Wylie Agency

***Winner of the 2018 Graywolf Press Nonfiction Prize**

A lyrical meditation on family, place, and inheritance

Names for Light traverses time and memory to weigh three generations of a family’s history against a painful inheritance of postcolonial violence and racism. In spare, lyric paragraphs framed by white space, Thiiri Myo Kyaw Myint explores home, belonging, and identity by revisiting the cities in which her parents and grandparents lived. As she makes inquiries into their stories, she intertwines oral narratives with the official and mythic histories of Myanmar. But while her family’s stories move into the present, her own story—that of a writer seeking to understand who she is—moves into the past, until both converge at the end of the book.

Born in Myanmar and raised in Bangkok and San Jose, Myint finds that she does not have typical memories of arriving in the United States; instead, she is haunted by what she cannot remember. By the silences lingering around what is spoken. By a chain of deaths in her family line, especially that of her older brother as a child. For Myint, absence is felt as strongly as presence. And, as she comes to understand, naming those absences, finding words for the unsaid, means discovering how those who have come before have shaped her life. *Names for Light* is a moving chronicle of the passage of time, of the long shadow of colonialism, and of a writer coming into her own as she reckons with her family’s legacy.



Praise for *Names for Light*

“History, like light, is porous, multitudinous, endlessly haunted. *Names for Light* gives form to the unresolved and inaccessible remnants of the past, all of the ghosts that are proliferated just by our moving. We are constantly ghastly and ghostly, the text reminds us, and the indeterminacy of flesh is the indeterminacy of family and legacy. Thiiri Myo Kyaw Myint is one of the most remarkable writers of our time, and *Names for Light* is a piercing and heartbreaking revelation.”—Janice Lee

Thiiri Myo Kyaw Myint was born in Yangon, Myanmar, and grew up in Bangkok, Thailand, and San Jose, California. She is the author of *The End of Peril*, *the End of Enmity*, *the End of Strife*, *a Haven*. She teaches at Amherst College.

On Compromise: Art, Politics, and the Fate of an American Ideal

by Rachel Greenwald Smith

Essays / August 2021 / World: Graywolf

A strident argument about the dangers of compromise in art, politics, and everyday life

On Compromise is an argument against contemporary liberal society's tendency to view compromise as an unalloyed good—politically, ethically, and artistically. In a series of clear, convincing essays, Rachel Greenwald Smith discusses the dangers of thinking about compromise as an end, rather than as a means. To illustrate her points, she recounts her stint in a band as a bass player, fighting with her bandmates about “what the song wants,” and then moves outward to Bikini Kill and the Riot Grrrl movement, the Iowa Writers' Workshop, *Poetry* magazine, the resurgence of fascism, and other wide-ranging topics.

Smith's arguments are complex and yet have a simplicity to them, as she writes in a concise, cogent style that is eminently readable. By weaving examples drawn from literature, music, and other art forms with political theory and first-person anecdotes, she shows the problems of compromise in action. And even as Smith demonstrates the many ways that late capitalism demands individual compromise, she also holds out hope for the possibility of lasting change through collective action. Closing with a piercing discussion of the uncompromising nature of the COVID-19 pandemic and how global protests against racism and police brutality after the murder of George Floyd point to a new future, *On Compromise* is a necessary and vital book for our time.

Rachel Greenwald Smith is the author of *Affect and American Literature in the Age of Neoliberalism* (Cambridge UP, 2015) and is a professor of English at St. Louis University.

***Shelter: A Tale of Homeland, Baltimore* by Lawrence Jackson**
Nonfiction / April 2022 / World English: Graywolf / Translation: Serendipity

A personal exploration of the history of Baltimore, through the lens of homeownership and real estate

When Lawrence Jackson returns to his childhood home of Baltimore for a teaching job at Johns Hopkins, he decides to live in a somewhat wealthier (and whiter) and bourgeois neighborhood called Homeland, rather than the gentrifying neighborhood around the university where people seem to expect him to live.

With his search for a new home as a starting point, Jackson explores the history of not just his neighborhood, but of Baltimore and Maryland generally, revealing their Southern roots and how much they are still governed by the legacy of slavery. One chapter focuses on a boat trip Jackson takes down the shore to find one of the places where Frederick Douglass—a native Baltimorean—was enslaved. Other chapters trace Jackson’s on and off relationship to church-going, and his family’s history in the black Episcopal church in Baltimore; his involvement with a jazz concert in the Hopkins neighborhood of Homewood; and his efforts at home improvement.

Throughout, Jackson asks what it means to be from a place but outside of its history, and wonders about the proper (or available) responses to brutality while securing safety and security and a place for oneself and one’s family.

Lawrence Jackson is a professor at Johns Hopkins University, where he teaches literature and history, focusing on African American culture. He is the author of *Chester B. Himes: A Biography* (Norton), *The Indignant Generation* (Princeton), *My Father’s Name* (University of Chicago), and *Ralph Ellison: Emergence of Genius* (University of Georgia). He lives in Baltimore.

POETRY

***The Wild Fox of Yemen* by Threa Almontaser**

April 2021 / World: Graywolf

Rights sold: UK/Commonwealth (Picador)

***Winner of the Walt Whitman Award from the Academy of American Poets**

An incendiary debut that asks how mistranslation can be a form of self-knowledge and survival

A love letter to the country and people of Yemen, a portrait of young Muslim womanhood in New York after 9/11, and an extraordinarily composed examination of what it means to carry in the body the echoes of what came before, Threa Almontaser's polyvocal collection sneaks artifacts to and from worlds, repurposing language and adapting to the space between cultures. Half-crunk and hungry, speakers move with the force of what cannot be contained by the limits of the American imagination, and instead invest in troublemaking and trickery, navigate imperial violence across multiple accents and anthems, and apply gang signs in henna, utilizing any means necessary to form a semblance of home. In doing so, *The Wild Fox of Yemen* fearlessly rides the tension between carnality and tenderness in the unruly human spirit.



Praise for *The Wild Fox of Yemen*

“Formally and linguistically diverse, these bold, defiant declarations of ‘reckless’ embodiment acknowledge the self’s nesting identities, proclaiming the individual’s intricate relations to others. . . . They ask how to belong to others without losing oneself, how to be faithful to oneself without forsaking others.”—**Harryette Mullen**

“With counterpoints of old and new worlds, and full love and care for possibility, in brilliant rushes of language, these poems know it’s so hard to be all we are, but they rise to every occasion.”—**Naomi Shihab Nye**

Threa Almontaser is a Yemeni American author from New York City. Her work can be found in the *Adroit Journal*, *Passages North*, *Diode Poetry Journal*, the *Rumpus*, *wildness*, and elsewhere. She lives in Raleigh, North Carolina.

***The Renunciations* by Donika Kelly**
Poetry / May 2021 / World: Graywolf

An extraordinary collection of endurance and transformation by the award-winning author of *Bestiary*

The Renunciations is a book of resilience, survival, and the journey to radically shift one’s sense of self in the face of trauma. Moving between a childhood marked by love and abuse and the breaking marriage of that adult child, Donika Kelly charts memory and the body as landscapes to be traversed and tended. These poems construct life rafts and sanctuaries even in their most devastating confrontations with what a person can bear, with how families harm themselves. With the companionship of “the oracle”—an observer of memory who knows how each close call with oblivion ends—the act of remembrance becomes curative, and personal mythologies give way to a future defined less by wounds than by possibility.

In this gorgeous and heartrending second collection, we find the home one builds inside oneself after reckoning with a legacy of trauma—a home whose construction starts “with a razing.”



Praise for Donika Kelly

“Kelly is a descendant of Sylvia Plath by way of the wintry Louise Glück—her poems are animated by roiling, mostly dark emotion, but they’re spare, composed and often quite short. . . . The fantastical creatures in *Bestiary* are almost all hybrids—mermaids, minotaurs, griffins—as opposed to mere monsters, and their in-betweenness calls attention equally to the danger of dissolution and the possibility of unity. Kelly is drawn to both outcomes, and her uncertainty gives her writing its peculiar magnetism.”—*The New York Times Book Review*

“[A] wonderful and important first collection. . . . Donika Kelly invites us to look not only at the stories in the poems but to inevitably shine a light on our own stories. . . . These poems are artful and joyous and tragic, interested in the importance of seeing and naming the effects of how hard lives can be, and the beauty they can create with their existence. . . . Kelly’s humor and language are the collection’s argument and song.”—*Orion Magazine*

Donika Kelly is the author of *Bestiary*, winner of the Cave Canem Poetry Prize, the Hurston/Wright Award for poetry, and the Kate Tufts Discovery Award, and longlisted for the National Book Award. She teaches at the University of Iowa.

BACKLIST HIGHLIGHT

***Deaf Republic* by Ilya Kaminsky**

March 2019 / World: Graywolf

Rights sold: UK/Commonwealth (Faber & Faber), Germany (Hanser), Spain/Mexico/Colombia (Valparaiso), Italy (La Nave di Teseo), France (Christian Bourgois), Turkey (Harfa), Estonia (Loomingu Raamatukogu), Sweden (Ramus); film rights optioned

***Winner of the National Jewish Book Award**

*** Finalist for the National Book Award, the National Book Critics Circle Award, the T. S. Eliot Prize, the Forward Prize, the PEN/Jean Stein Book Award, the Kingsley Tufts Prize, the Los Angeles Times Book Prize**

Ilya Kaminsky's astonishing parable in poems asks us, What is silence?

Deaf Republic opens in an occupied country in a time of political unrest. When soldiers breaking up a protest kill a deaf boy, Petya, the gunshot becomes the last thing the citizens hear—all have gone deaf, and their dissent becomes coordinated by sign language. The story follows the private lives of townspeople encircled by public violence: a newly married couple, Alfonso and Sonya, expecting a child; the brash Momma Galya, instigating the insurgency from her puppet theater; and Galya's girls, heroically teaching signs by day and by night luring soldiers one by one to their deaths behind the curtain. Ilya Kaminsky's *Deaf Republic* confronts our time's vicious atrocities and our collective silence in the face of them.



Praise for *Deaf Republic*

“Evident throughout [*Deaf Republic*] is a profound imagination, matched only by the poet's ability to create a republic of conscience that is ultimately ours, too, and utterly his own—a map of what it means to live ‘in a peaceful country.’”—*The New Yorker*

Ilya Kaminsky was born in the former Soviet Union. He is the author of a previous poetry collection, *Dancing in Odessa*, and coeditor of *The Ecco Anthology of International Poetry*. His work has been translated into more than twenty languages.

Recent acquisitions/forthcoming publications

Brickmakers by Selva Almada (Agencia Literaria CBQ)
Pilgrim Bell by Kaveh Akbar (Wylie Agency)
The Sky over the Roof by Nathacha Appanah (Gallimard)
Abundance by Jakob Guanzon (Janklow & Nesbit)
Ten Planets by Yuri Herrera (MB Agencia)
Nervous System by Lina Meruane (Rogers, Coleridge & White)
The Myth of Freedom by Maggie Nelson (Janklow & Nesbit)
Wild Swims by Dorthe Nors (Ahlander Agency)
Men in My Situation by Per Petterson (Oslo Literary Agency)
Virus and Revolution by Paul Preciado (Casanovas & Lynch)
When I Sing, Mountains Dance by Irene Solà (Anagrama)