

**FOR RELEASE
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**JOAN DIDION TO RECEIVE THE MEDAL FOR
DISTINGUISHED CONTRIBUTION TO AMERICAN LETTERS
FROM THE NATIONAL BOOK FOUNDATION**

**TERRY GROSS, HOST OF NPR'S "FRESH AIR,"
TO RECEIVE THE LITERARIAN AWARD FOR
OUTSTANDING SERVICE TO THE AMERICAN LITERARY COMMUNITY**

**To Be Honored on November 14 at the 2007
National Book Awards Ceremony hosted by Fran Lebowitz**

***Camille Paglia to Announce National Book Award Finalists
From the Library Company of Philadelphia on October 10***

New York, New York – The National Book Foundation, presenter of the National Book Awards, will bestow its 2007 Medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters on **Joan Didion** in recognition of her outstanding achievements as a novelist and essayist. An incisive observer of American politics and culture for more than forty-five years, her distinctive blend of spare, elegant prose and fierce intelligence has earned her books a place in the canon of American literature as well as the admiration of generations of writers and journalists. She won the National Book Award in 2005 for her last book, *The Year of Magical Thinking*. Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist **Michael Cunningham** will present the Medal at the 58th National Book Awards Ceremony and Benefit Dinner in New York City on Wednesday, November 14. Writer and humorist **Fran Lebowitz** will host the evening for the second consecutive year.

Also that evening, The National Book Foundation will award **Terry Gross**, host and executive producer of National Public Radio's "Fresh Air," The Literarian Award for Outstanding Service to the American Literary Community. This award recognizes the important contribution she has made to the world of books – and to our understanding of literature and the writing process – through her probing and intelligent interviews with

authors. **Ira Glass**, host and producer of public radio's "This American Life," will present the Award.

In making the announcements, Harold Augenbraum, executive director of the Foundation, said, "These two women are icons in the literary world and their contributions are now legendary – Joan Didion as one of the keenest observers and finest prose stylists of our time and Terry Gross as one of the most intelligent voices on the airwaves and one of the few who devotes hundreds of hours a year to talking about books and literature. Both women are fearless in their questioning and their insights on the page and on the air have informed our understanding of America and of America's writers for decades. Our Board of Directors is honored that they will accept these awards and grace our gala with their presence."

Joan Didion is the eighteenth recipient of the Medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters, which has been bestowed on such literary luminaries as Saul Bellow, Eudora Welty, Toni Morrison, John Updike, and Norman Mailer. This year's ceremony marks the third year that the Foundation has presented the Literarian Award, which was established to recognize individuals whose life's work has enhanced the literary world. Previous winners are Robert Silvers and Barbara Epstein (2006) and Lawrence Ferlinghetti (2005). *Note: more detailed biographies of Joan Didion, Terry Gross, Michael Cunningham, and Ira Glass follow at the end of the release.*

Camille Paglia to Announce Finalists on October 10 in Philadelphia

The eagerly-awaited announcement of the twenty Finalists for the 2007 National Book Awards will take place on October 10 at the Library Company of Philadelphia, the oldest public library in America, founded by Benjamin Franklin in 1731. Philadelphia-based author and social critic, Camille Paglia, will make the announcement. "As the National Book Foundation travels each year to different regions of America to announce our Finalists, it is fitting that we go to the country's oldest public library in the heart of one of our greatest cities," said Augenbraum, who will co-host the announcement.

Paglia will announce the Finalists at approximately 9:30 a.m. est. The National Book Awards are presented in four categories: Fiction, Nonfiction, Poetry, and Young

People's Literature. The winner in each category will be announced at the National Book Awards Ceremony and Benefit Dinner at the Marriott Marquis Hotel in Times Square in New York City on Wednesday, November 14. The Awards, which have been given since 1950, are the country's foremost symbol of literary excellence, given to writers by writers. For more information about the Finalists Announcement and the invitation-only Awards dinner, please contact Camille McDuffie at Goldberg McDuffie Communications (212)446-5106. For more information about the National Book Awards and the National Book Foundation, go to www.nationalbook.org. For more information on the Library Company, go to www.librarycompany.org.

Joan Didion

Joan Didion was born in Sacramento, California in 1934 and has been a novelist, essayist and screenwriter for more than three decades.

Her five novels are *Run River* (1963), *Play It As It Lays* (1970), *A Book of Common Prayer* (1977), *Democracy* (1984), and *The Last Thing He Wanted* (1996). Her nonfiction books are *Slouching Towards Bethlehem* (1968), *The White Album* (1978), *Salvador* (1983), *Miami* (1987), *After Henry* (1992), *Political Fictions* (2001), *Where I Was From* (2003) and *The Year of Magical Thinking* (2005), a memoir, which won the National Book Award. Ms. Didion adapted her memoir into a Broadway play starring Vanessa Redgrave. She is a contributor to The New York Review of Books and The New Yorker. Ms. Didion and her late husband, John Gregory Dunne, co-authored several screenplays. In 2005, Didion received the Gold Medal for Belles Lettres from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, which is the highest honor the Academy awards to a writer. She lives in New York City.

Terry Gross

Terry Gross is the host and co-executive producer of "Fresh Air," National Public Radio's weekday magazine of contemporary arts and issues. The program is heard by

more than four and a half million people on nearly 500 public radio stations. Over the years her guests have included America's most interesting and celebrated writers.

Gross began her radio career in 1973 at public radio station WBFO in Buffalo, New York. Two years later Terry Gross began hosting and producing "Fresh Air," when it was a local program broadcast by WHYI in Philadelphia. NPR has distributed the daily program since 1987. In 1994, "Fresh Air" received a Peabody Award, which cited Gross for her "probing questions and unusual insights." In 1999, America Women in Radio and Television gave Gross a Gracie Award in the category National Network Radio Personality. In 2003, Gross received the Edward R. Murrow Award from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. Her book, *All I Did Was Ask: Conversations with Writers, Actors, Musicians and Artists*, which was published in 2004. She was born and raised in Brooklyn, New York.

Michael Cunningham

Michael Cunningham was born in Cincinnati and grew up in La Canada, California. He received his B.A. in English literature from Stanford University and his M.F.A. in creative writing from the University of Iowa. He is the author of four novels, all published by Farrar, Straus and Giroux: *A Home at the End of the World* (1990), *Flesh and Blood* (1995), *The Hours* (1999), for which he won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction and the PEN/Faulkner Award, and most recently, *Specimen Days* (2005). He lives in New York City.

Ira Glass

Ira Glass is the host and producer of the public radio program, "This American Life." The show had its premier on Chicago's public radio station WBEZ in 1995 and is now heard on more than 500 public radio stations each week. In March 2007, the television

adaptation of “This American Life” premiered on Showtime to critical acclaim. Under Glass’s direction, the show has won the highest honors for broadcasting and journalistic excellence, including the Peabody and DuPont-Columbia awards, as well as the Edward R. Murrow and the Overseas Press Club awards. In 2001, Time magazine named Glass “Best Radio Host in America.”

Camille Paglia

Camille Paglia is the University Professor of Humanities and Media Studies at the University of the Arts in Philadelphia, where she has taught since 1984. Her books include: *Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson* ; *Sex, Art, and American Culture*; *Vamps & Tramps: New Essays* and *The Birds*, a study of Alfred Hitchcock and, most recently, *Break, Blow, Burn: Camille Paglia Reads Forty-Three of the World's Best Poems*. She is a contributing editor at Interview Magazine and is a columnist at Salon.com, of which she was a co-founding contributor, beginning with its debut issue in 1995.

Fran Lebowitz

Fran Lebowitz is the author of two critically acclaimed books of comic essays, *Metropolitan Life* and *Social Studies*, both of which were New York Times bestsellers and which are currently available in *The Fran Lebowitz Reader*. She is also the author of a children’s book, illustrated by Michael Graves, *Mr. Chas and Lisa Sue Meet the Pandas*, and has written for a number of publications including *Interview*, *Vogue*, *Vanity Fair* and *The New York Times*. Her next book, *Progress*, will be published by Knopf.