

# FRIENDS OF AMERICAN WRITERS

May 13, 2020 Fawchicago.org



Next Year's tentative meeting dates.  
9/25/2020, 10/21/2020, 11/11/2020,  
12/9/2020 and 1/13/2021, 2/10/2021,  
3/10/2021, 4/14/2021 and 5/07/2021.

**Literature Awards  
September 25, 2020.**

It is never too late to contribute to the Patrons Fund. You may contribute through the FAW website, or mail a check to:

Friends of American Writers  
Vivian Mortenson  
506 Rose Ave.  
Des Plaines, IL 60016

Please be sure to include the name of the individual(s) you are honoring, or special instructions about allocation of donation. Check Payable to Friends of American Writers Patrons Fund

## Message from the President

I would like to thank everyone who contributed to our Patrons Fund. Your generosity is especially appreciated during this time of national crisis. We hope everyone is doing well and continues to do so in the months to come. As you know, our awards luncheon was canceled in May and will be rescheduled for the 25th of September. Our Awards luncheon is always a fun event and we hope you can all join us. I thank all of you for your appreciation these past two years of my tenure as President. Starting in September, Tammie Bob will be the new FAW President. Tammie will bring her own brand of leadership and I am excited for her to take the helm. I guarantee that she will do a wonderful job.

Stay healthy and watch for Newsletters and updates on the FAW website.

*Christine Spatara*

## The FAW Literature Award Winners

### 2020 Literature Awards

- ★ **Seth Fried** for *The Municipalists* (Penguin Books) \$2,500
- ★ **Andrew Ridker** for *The Altruists* (Viking) \$2,500

### Young People's Literature Awards

- ★ **Jessie Ann Foley** for *Sorry For Your Loss* (Quill Tree Books) \$1,650
- ★ **Ann Schoenbohm** for *Rising Above Shepherdsville* (Beach Lane Books) \$1,650
- ★ **Jasmine Warga** for *Other Words for Home* (Balzer + Bray) \$1,650

## News

We are a social society where interacting with family and friends plays an important part of our life. I miss a casual get-together with neighbors, movies out with friends, book club, delicious meals at a restaurant and of course the FAW meetings at the Fortnightly. It's disappointing to miss celebrating a birthday, postpone a retirement party or forgo happy hour with friends; but social-distancing takes on an entirely new meaning when you can no longer visit family/friends in their residential care facility, or to not be allowed to see a loved one in the hospital. These are real hardships. Hang in there with FAW as we navigate this new normal. The FAW board is putting together ideas for our meetings in the 2020 - 2021 year, and hopefully we will be able to meet at the Fortnightly and enjoy a delicious luncheon again. Stay with us during this time. Our thoughts are with you.

→Watch for your membership renewal letter in later June.

→Did you know FAW has a Facebook page?

→Theater lovers – The Stratford Festival is presenting a free film festival to entertain you during this time of social isolation. For more details visit: <https://www.stratfordfestival.ca/>

→Free on-line author interviews from the National Writers Series. They also have a library of older interviews on YouTube. For more details visit: <https://nationalwritersseries.org/>

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## **Review of *Avery Colt is a Snake, a Thief, a Liar* By Ron A. Austen**

Reviewed by Tammie Bob

*Avery Colt is a Snake, a Thief, a Liar* is the kind of book that makes being on the FAW Literature Awards Committee delightful (and if you're not, you should definitely consider joining us!) I opened this book with the odd title last September, not expecting to find much of interest, and was quickly pulled into a gritty neighborhood of North St. Louis through the exuberant language of its narrator, the nine-year old Avery Colt. Through linked short stories, I followed an ever-maturing Avery through young manhood, in a series of misadventures through which he tries to make sense of the adult world, which often makes no sense at all.

Avery despairs at his "weakness", that he is "soft as pudding," although that's the very quality that will likely save him. He's constantly failing at "manly" tasks like unclogging toilets, drowning possums, or by feeling horror at the robbery of a beaten man while others laugh with assumed power. He listens to the dubious advice of a colorful assortment of elders; every so often he gets advice worth listening to. This St. Louis community is closely knit, a sharply drawn cast of parents, siblings, aunties and uncles, parents, grandparents, and their current and former lovers, teachers and friends, with everybody in everybody else's business.

The writing in these stories is impressive, poetically playing with language rhythms, metaphor, and forms, and even with print and fonts. Some of the text is hand-written notes from one character to another, or lists, or recipes; here and there is a drawing. The author never goes for the obvious plot twists and events really move along, so this very literary book is also a page-turner.

As Avery Colt survives and matures, he turns from a frightened boy who wants to be cool into a young man willing to help, to turn a harsh history of cumulative losses into strength. The transformation is not dramatic, but it feels real and satisfying.

Threaded through this book is an adult Avery looking back, making sense of what he learned growing up. "I couldn't articulate it back then," he writes, "but I was beginning to learn how anxiety could hijack the circuitry in my brain and redraw the world in wobbling, surreal lines." A little later, he captures how well anxiety can be mixed with nostalgia, a sense of place, an a child's remembered voice:

*Folks loved the corner store. But I used to hate it so bad. Granddad and Grandma always put me to work sweeping ashes out of the smoker, washing grit out of collard greens, sponging pig's blood off the butcher's table. I didn't understand that years later, after the corner store was nothing but weeks and rubble, I'd still smell ancient charcoal smoke on my skin, feel grit under my fingernails, see my palms stained with blood, and succumb to a crippling grief, the kind that closes over you like wings, eclipses the best days.*

At its heart, this is a book about family and community: Avery's namesake who was in the drug trade, his grandmother and her recipes that can't be duplicated by ingredients alone, a granddad known "for handing out good, country-ass whoopings" and a mother and sister who fight so hard only a "soft" son could bring them together.

I read many of the seventy-something books submitted for the Literature Award this year, and forgot most of them soon after I closed them. Avery Colt is a Snake, a Thief, a Liar has stuck with me these many months, and was a favorite of the committee as well. This gem of a book, above all is a great read.

**About the Author** Ron A. Austin holds a MFA from the U. of Missouri-St. Louis and is a 2016 Regional Arts Commission Fellow.

### [You Might Like to Read](#)

<i>A Visit from the Goon Squad</i>	Jennifer Egan	Fiction
<i>Little Faith</i>	Nickolas Butler	Fiction, Faith
<i>The Sympathizer</i>	Viet Thanh Nguyen	Historical Fiction
<i>Moonlight Mile</i>	Dennis Lehane	Fiction, Mystery, Thriller
<i>The Book of Lost Friends</i>	Lisa Wingate	Historical Fiction
<i>The Library Book</i>	Susan Orlean	Nonfiction, History
<i>Pilgrim at Tinker Creek</i>	Annie Dillard	Nonfiction, Nature, OBG*
<i>Moneyball: The Art of Winning an Unfair Game</i>	Michael Lewis	Nonfiction, Sports, Baseball, OBG

\*OBG – Oldy but Goodie

The amount of email each of us receives in a day can be overwhelming, but it is also the most cost-effective and quickest method for Friends of American Writers to communicate with members. How can you make sure you receive the email version of the FAW newsletter? Number one – make sure we have your correct email address. Number two – add [Newsletter@fawchicago.org](mailto:Newsletter@fawchicago.org) to your contacts or safe list.

Online version - <http://fawchicago.org/May152020.html>