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**WINNER ANNOUNCED FOR THIRD ANNUAL
CROOK'S CORNER BOOK PRIZE**

January 6, 2016 CHAPEL HILL, NC –THE MARAUDERS by Tom Cooper is the winner of the third annual Crook's Corner Book Prize for best debut novel set in the American South. The prize, awarded by the iconic Southern restaurant, Crook's Corner Bar & Café in Chapel Hill, NC, was inspired by the prestigious literary awards long given by famous cafés in Paris. Cooper received a cash prize of \$1000 and, in a nod to the Parisian inspiration for the award, will be entitled to one glass of wine a day at Crook's Corner during his prize year of 2016.

Cooper traveled from New Orleans to accept his award at a reception on January 4th at Crook's Corner, where he was surprised to find, in an unfamiliar town, a room full of people who had read THE MARAUDERS. "This is a great way to start the New Year," said Cooper who once lived in Asheville, NC. "I'd forgotten how hospitable North Carolina is to writers. As to writing another novel, this is a great inspiration." In a delightful coincidence, Cooper continued, the French translation of THE MARAUDERS will soon be out and he has been offered a writing residency in Paris.

"Our Crooks Corner Book Prize winner has got it all, in my opinion," said this year's judge, noted author Lee Smith, whom Cooper described as "a writing hero of mine." Smith said, "**Writing like some dark angel, Tom Cooper has fashioned a**

wildly original turn in the deep, weird South. Scenes crackle. I was reminded of Flannery O’Conner. Even the most depraved characters are portrayed with a deep humanity, while mordant hilarity infuses all. At one point I ran upstairs and finished reading a chapter while I was in the middle of giving a dinner party! That is certainly something I’ve never done before."

A native of Fort Lauderdale, Florida, Cooper lived in a variety of places all over the South before taking root in New Orleans around the time of the BP oil spill. A prolific short story writer, he has been nominated four times for the Pushcart Prize. *Kirkus Reviews* called THE MARAUDERS "one hell of a debut novel," an opinion echoed in reviews from such disparate sources as Stephen King and the *Wall Street Journal*. Cooper is currently at work on several projects, including TV scripts and at least a couple of new novels.

The literary prize was established as a collaboration between Crook's Corner Bar & Café and the Crook's Corner Book Prize Foundation. "Our purpose is to encourage emerging writers in a challenging publishing environment, which seems to reinvent itself daily," said Foundation president, Anna Hayes. The prize is open to self-published as well as traditionally published authors. "This year we had so many strong entries that we could not pare the longlist to fewer than eighteen books. These works were so accomplished, so powerful, it was hard to believe they were first novels." From the longlist, the Foundation Board members narrowed the choices to a shortlist of four books, from which judge Lee Smith made the final selection. The four finalists were:

JAM ON THE VINE, by LaShonda Katrice Barnett (Grove Press). The story of a black female journalist in the Jim Crow South, this is a rich family saga and work of historical fiction. Barnett, born in Kansas City, Missouri, has taught literature and history at Columbia University, Sarah Lawrence College, Hunter College, and Brown University.

THE MARAUDERS, by Tom Cooper (Crown). Set in the post-BP oil spill Gulf Coast, this is a riotous tale of outlandish characters driven by dreams generally but not always indistinguishable from greed. Cooper lives in New Orleans.

SOIL, by Jamie Kornegay (Simon & Schuster). A dark and powerful tale of an idealistic environmental scientist's descent into madness, this book is set in the Mississippi hill country and recalls the masters of Southern Gothic tragedy. Kornegay runs an independent bookstore in the Mississippi Delta.

AGAINST THE COUNTRY, by Ben Metcalf (Random House). Polemic and metafiction combine in a screed against the vaunted virtues of country living. Metcalf, the former literary editor of *Harper's Magazine*, challenges literary convention and the national myth of rural goodness versus urban evil.

INSPIRATION FOR THE PRIZE - "It's an idea that we flat-out stole from the French," said Hayes, referring to the prestigious literary awards given by famous Parisian cafés such as the Deux Magots and the Café de Flore. Crook's Corner is a James Beard America's Classics restaurant and has a rich history of supporting artists. "The French have always understood the link between food and literature," she said, "and the connection between cafés and creativity!"

Katharine Walton, Southern publicist and board member for the Prize, noted, “Crook's Corner is the only restaurant in the United States that offers a literary prize. We are hoping to start a trend and want other restaurants to join in with their own version of the Crook’s Corner Book Prize.”

FOR LINKS TO ARTICLES AND SUBMISSION GUIDELINES visit

www.crookscornerbookprize.com

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