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Woodsburner by John Pipkin
Awarded the Center for Fiction's 2009 First Novel Prize

Gerald Howard, Executive Editor at Doubleday,
Honored with 2009 Maxwell E. Perkins Award

New York, November 9, 2009 – **The Center for Fiction**, founded in 1820 as the Mercantile Library, is pleased to announce that **John Pipkin** has won the **2009 Center for Fiction First Novel Prize** for his novel, *Woodsburner* (Nan A. Talese/Doubleday). The annual prize includes a \$10,000 cash award and was presented at The Center for Fiction's Annual Benefit and Awards Dinner in New York City on November 9.

A review from the Washington Post calls the book “a terrifically exciting story...a profound and thoughtful novel.” Doris Kearns Goodwin says: “What a terrific tale John Pipkin spins! He has taken a dramatic episode in the life of Henry David Thoreau and transformed it into a gripping and profound work of fiction.”

A former professor of writing and literature, John Pipkin currently lives in Austin, Texas, where he has most recently served as the Executive Director of the Writers' League of Texas, a nonprofit, literary arts organization. Born and raised in Baltimore, Maryland, he attended Washington & Lee University and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and received his Ph.D. in British Literature from Rice University in 1997. He has taught writing and literature at Saint Louis University, Boston University, and Southwestern University.

Set in Concord, Massachusetts in the spring of 1844, *Woodsburner* tells the story of a forest fire accidentally ignited by Henry David Thoreau, a year before he decides to live alone at Walden Pond. The events of that chaotic day appear to have altered the course of Thoreau's life and American history. This is the historical footnote that sparked the creation of *Woodsburner*, which offers a beautifully

nuanced portrait of a young and less recognizable Thoreau, whose philosophy begins to materialize as the flames lay waste.

Beginning in 2010, thanks to the very generous support of writer Nancy Dunnan, a member of the board of The Center for Fiction, the Center's First Novel Prize will be renamed the Flaherty-Dunnan First Novel Prize in honor of Ms. Dunnan's late father, Ray Flaherty.

In addition to awarding the First Novel Prize, The Center for Fiction presented Gerald Howard, Vice President and Executive Editor at Doubleday, with the fifth annual **Maxwell E. Perkins Award for Distinguished Achievement in the Field of Fiction**. This award honors an editor, publisher, or agent who over the course of his or her career has discovered, nurtured, and championed writers of fiction, carrying on the tradition exemplified so well by Maxwell Perkins.

About The Center for Fiction

This fall, one of the oldest cultural institutions in America, the Mercantile Library of New York, marks its new identity as The Center for Fiction—the only organization in the United States devoted solely to this vital art form. The mission of The Center for Fiction is to encourage people to read and value fiction and to support and celebrate its creation and enjoyment. With all our resources, including our exceptional book collection, our beautiful reading room, our expanding website, and our ever-growing array of creative programs, we seek to serve the reading public, to build a larger audience for fiction, and to create a place both in our beautiful building in New York and on-line where readers and writers can share their passion for literature.

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