

Michener Grad's Debut Among Year's Best

Posted on **January 7, 2013** by **Jessica Sinn**

*Article and photos provided by the editors of **Know***

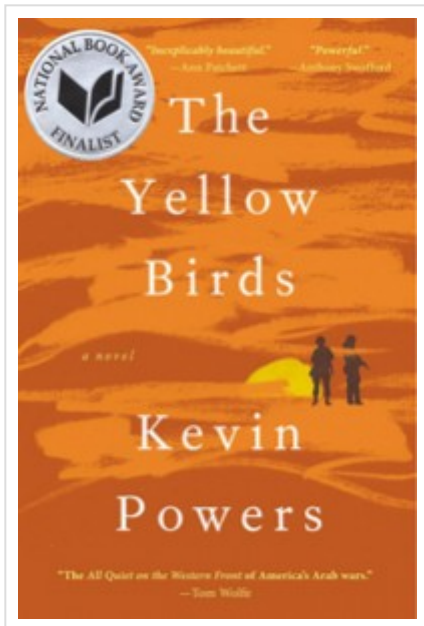


Kevin Powers, MFA '12, has written one of the best books of the year, according to The New York Times and The Guardian, the British national daily newspaper that gave Powers its Guardian First Book Award. The prize, awarded in late November, is the latest of several accolades for "The Yellow Birds," Powers' debut novel about two young soldiers in the Iraq War.

"It's really quite incredible," Powers said in an interview with The Guardian. "I think back to the long hours I spent writing this book by myself, wondering if anybody would read it or have any interest in it. So to have this kind of affirmation is really incredible."

"The Yellow Birds" was also a National Book Award finalist.

In its "10 Best Books of 2012" list, The New York Times writes,



“A veteran of the Iraq war, Powers places that conflict at the center of his impressionistic first novel, about the connected but diverging fates of two young soldiers and the trouble one of them has readjusting to life at home. Reflecting the chaos of war, the fractured narrative jumps around in time and location, but Powers anchors it with crystalline prose and a driving mystery: How did the narrator’s friend die?”

Powers returned to school — first to Virginia Commonwealth University, and then to the Michener Center for Writers at the University of Texas at Austin — after completing his military service. He wanted to pursue a childhood dream.

“Growing up, when I was young, as a teenager, reading and writing was really important to me,” he told *The Guardian*. “I’ve been writing poetry and stories since I was 13, but it never occurred to me that it was something someone like me could actually do. One of the things my service in Iraq did give me was this freedom from fear of failure...or any kind of expectation that I had to take a standard path.”

Michener Center Director James Magnuson read swatches of Powers’ novel in a fiction workshop during Powers’ first year in the program. “The battle scenes were so intense and poetic. I knew there was something really special going on,” he said in a May 2012 article about Powers in *KNOW*.

“I hope that when people read it, they will feel that they’ve had an experience that they might not have otherwise,” Powers said in the *KNOW* article. “The stories of the men and women who fight our wars are often — I believe — seen in our culture as incomprehensible, that if you haven’t been there you can’t understand. I don’t know if I agree with that notion.”

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