Writer Yiyun Li to Join Princeton’s Creative Writing Faculty

(Princeton, NJ) Award-winning writer Yiyun Li will join the Lewis Center for the Arts’s Program in Creative Writing faculty at Princeton University in September 2017. She has been appointed a full Professor of Creative Writing and will be teaching undergraduate creative writing workshops.

Li’s debut short story collection, *A Thousand Years of Good Prayers*, won the Frank O’Connor International Short Story Award, PEN/Hemingway Award, *The Guardian* First Book Award, and California Book Award for first fiction. Her novel, *The Vagrants*, won the gold medal of California Book Award for fiction, and was shortlisted for International Dublin Literary Award.
Gold Boy, Emerald Girl, her second collection, was a finalist of Story Prize and shortlisted for the Frank O'Connor International Short Story Award. Kinder Than Solitude, her latest novel, was published to critical acclaim. Her books have been translated into more than twenty languages. Her most recent book is a memoir, Dear Friend, from My Life I Write to You in Your Life, published in February 2017. She is also the recipient of The Sunday Times/EFG Short Story Award, Benjamin H. Danks Award from The American Academy of Arts and Letters, and a MacArthur Foundation Fellowship. She was named by The New Yorker as one of the “20 under 40” fiction writers to watch. Her work also has appeared in The New Yorker, A Public Space, Granta, The Best American Short Stories, and The O. Henry Prize Stories, among others.

Praising Li’s short story collection Gold Boy, Emerald Girl, celebrated writer Junot Díaz noted, “Li is extraordinary...a storyteller of the first order...Li inhabits the lives of her characters with such force and compassion that one cannot help but marvel at her remarkable talents.”

Li grew up in Beijing and came to the United States in 1996 to pursue a science career in immunology before she became a writer. She earned a B.S. from Peking University in Beijing in 1996 and earned her M.S. and an M.F.A. in creative nonfiction writing from Iowa University in 2000 and 2005, respectively. She most recently taught fiction at the University of California, Davis, where she received the 2011 Chancellor’s Fellowship, one of the highest and most prestigious faculty honors at the University.

In announcing the appointment, Tracy K. Smith, Director of the Program in Creative Writing and a Pulitzer Prize-winning poet, noted, “We are impressed by Yiyun’s philosophy of teaching writing, which cleaves closely to her philosophy of reading in its emphasis upon ‘curiosity, generosity, and finding connections that make writers not separate beings but a conscious part of conversations that span decades and centuries and continents.’ Her generosity of spirit, her commitment to service and her empathy for her students make us confident that her presence will add immeasurably to the creative writing community at Princeton.”

“After reading her first book about a dozen years ago,” adds Michael Cadden, Chair of the Lewis Center, “I sent Yiyun a fan’s note, encouraging her to apply for a fellowship at Princeton. She is an ever more accomplished and, of course, celebrated writer now. Her fiction continues to
surprise, disturb and delight; her recent memoir speaks eloquently of the power of great writing to heal us. The Lewis Center eagerly anticipates all she will bring to the University.”

The MacArthur Foundation, in its citation to Li’s 2010 Fellowship, praised her body of work for offering readers, “intimate and elegantly constructed portraits of people largely ignored by history—Chinese nationals as well as expatriates in the United States.”

Li will join Program in Creative Writing faculty Jeffrey Eugenides, Jhumpa Lahiri, Paul Muldoon, Joyce Carol Oates, James Richardson, Tracy K. Smith, Kirstin Valdez Quade, Susan Wheeler, and Edmund White, and a number of distinguished visiting lecturers.

Through the program’s courses, students have the opportunity to pursue original work at both beginning and advanced levels in fiction, poetry, screenwriting and translation under the guidance of these practicing, award-winning writers. Students can earn a certificate in creative writing in addition to their degree in a major. Each year two dozen seniors work individually with a member of the faculty on a creative writing thesis, such as a novel, screenplay, or a collection of short stories, poems, or translations.

"I am thrilled to join the Lewis Center for the Arts and Princeton University,” notes Li. “I look forward to being part of an intellectually and artistically dynamic conversation with students and colleagues.”

To learn more about the Program in Creative Writing and the Lewis Center for the Arts, including the more than 100 performances, exhibitions, readings, screenings, concerts and lectures presented each year, most of them free, visit arts.princeton.edu.