

# A Prologue to Autumn at the Brooklyn Book Festival



*Some booths in the distance at the BBF.*

Last weekend's Brooklyn Book Festival fell on a crisp, cool day. The area outside the Brooklyn Courthouse flooded with people who wanted nothing more than to shell out cash for books. Readers, writers, and other city-dwellers just looking for something to do came out to the annual festival, and they were not disappointed by the countless free programs and the three blocks' worth of vendors. Starting at ten in the morning, this eight-hour event made the most of what felt like the first day of autumn.

Roofed by white tarp-like tents, indie bookstores and bigger publishing names alike sat behind tables stacked with piles of their books. The bulk of these booths housed small, independent publishers and literary magazines, including Akashic Books and *n+1*. Customers walked shoulder to shoulder, moving with and against the flow of the crowd to stop at each booth along the way. Booksellers boasted cheaper-than-retail prices—which were cut down even more as the festival drew to a close—and were quick to make conversation and give recommendations.

What made the whole affair a true festival were the dozens of free, hour-long panels scheduled throughout the entire day. These panels were wildly popular; lines would form outside the designated public forum half an hour before the events began, winding all the way around the block. Panelists included celebrated authors like Joyce Carol Oates, and discussion topics ranged from writing humor to tackling issues like death.



Panelists at the “Transgressive Writer” panel. “I write to piss people off, especially people in positions of authority,” said Mona Eltahawy, author of *Headscarves and Hymens* and panelist at the *The Transgressive Writer: Sexuality, Politics, History* panel, which took place just an hour after the festival’s start. This sentiment, judging by the eruption of laughter that followed it, spoke to the audience on some level—and perhaps spoke to the energy of the festival as a whole. Overwhelmingly, the people who attended the festival—though the demographic did range from toddlers in strollers to elderly couples—were young women, hair-dyed, backpack-clad, and eager to hear, read, and be inspired by words similar to what Eltahawy imparted. And with the presence of nonprofit or independent publishing companies like The Feminist Press and Belladonna, as well as so many poignant panelists speaking out about the themes of social justice in their writing, this year’s Brooklyn Book Festival proved to be a surprisingly subversive success.