

Tiffany Quay Tyson Receives \$10,000 Willie Morris Award for Southern Fiction for *THE PAST IS NEVER*

Melissa Cannon awarded \$2,500 Inaugural Willie Morris Award for Southern Poetry for Original Poem

New York, October 22 – The Willie Morris Awards yesterday named the recipients of its 2018 literary award and inaugural poetry prize: Tiffany Quay Tyson for her novel *The Past Is Never* (Skyhorse Publishing) and Melissa Cannon for her poem, “The Mercury Poises on the Pinnacle of Nashville’s Bygone Union Station.” Tyson and Cannon were honored yesterday evening at a ceremony at the New York Yacht Club, where they were respectively awarded \$10,000 and \$2,500.

Since its inception in 2008, the Willie Morris Award for Southern Fiction, founded by novelist Reba White Williams and her husband Dave H. Williams, has recognized annually a writer whose work is set in the South, exemplifies the tenets of Southern literature—quality of prose, originality, and authenticity of setting and characters—and reflects, in the words of Willie Morris, “hope for belonging, for belief in a people’s better nature, for steadfastness against all that is hollow or crass or rootless or destructive.” Past recipients include Katherine Clark, 2015 for *The Headmaster’s Darlings*, Kim Wright, 2016 for *The Last Ride to Graceland*, and Bren McClain, 2017’s honoree for her novel *One Good Mama Bone*.

2018 fiction award winner Tiffany Quay Tyson is a native Mississippian, who now resides in Denver, Colorado. *The Past Is Never* is her second novel and in addition to widespread acclaim was also the winner of the Janet Heidinger Kafka Prize, 2019 Mississippi Institute of Arts and Letters Award for Fiction, and the Mississippi Author Award for Adult Fiction by the Mississippi Library Association. Tyson’s debut novel was a finalist for both the Colorado Book Award for Literary Fiction and the Mississippi Institute of Arts and Letters Award for Fiction.

On learning that *The Past Is Never* won the 2018 Willie Morris Award for Southern Fiction, Tyson said, “I’m thrilled and humbled. As a girl growing up in Mississippi, I loved reading Willie Morris’s books. I studied his work in college. When I began to write, I often looked to his work for inspiration. To have one of my books receive an award named for Willie Morris seems almost too wonderful to be real.”

“*The Past Is Never*, with its nod to Faulkner, is steeped in local lore, mingling history and the mystery of a missing child into a heart-wrenching ride all the way to redemption,” says fiction judge Mindy Friddle. “Tiffany Quay Tyson weaves a gripping tale in this stellar novel, taking readers from a haunted quarry in a Mississippi town to the menacing, gorgeous Florida Everglades. She is a masterful storyteller whose grand leaps of imagination, memorable characters and lyrical language delight the reader. *The Past is Never* is an important addition to contemporary southern fiction.”

New to the ceremony this year was the Willie Morris Award for Southern Poetry. “The Willie Morris Award for Southern Poetry is a great gift to readers and writers, stimulating hundreds of poems evoking the south,” remarked Susan Kinsolving, director of the award. “Melissa Cannon’s poem entitled, ‘Mercury Poises on the Pinnacle of Nashville’s Bygone Union Station,’ embraces southern history through the metaphor of a classical statue. Among the many fine submissions, her artistry and specificity were outstanding.”

Inaugural poetry winner Melissa Cannon lives and writes in Nashville. Her poems have been published in over 100 small-press journals and anthologies, including *HomeWorks* and *HomeWords*, two volumes of Tennessee writers from the University of Tennessee Press.

Reba and Dave Williams were inspired to create the Willie Morris Award for Southern Fiction in 2008 after Reba learned that her two nieces in high school in Charleston, SC had never read Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Reba, who was born in Mississippi and raised in North Carolina, remembered how her own introduction to classic Southern novels as a young student sparked a lifelong love and appreciation for Southern literature and its unique style, elaborate prose, evocative language, and sense of place. Envisaging the future of the Southern literary tradition, Reba decided that Southern writers and novels—especially contemporary works—deserved more attention. The result was the Willie Morris Award, named for celebrated Southern writer and long-time Williams family friend Willie Morris. A native of Yazoo City, Mississippi, Morris was a journalist, editor-in-chief of *Harper’s* magazine, and author of several novels set in the South, some of which remain required reading in public schools in his home state.

Authors, agents, publishers and booksellers are invited to submit books for consideration. The winner is selected by a prestigious panel of academics and writers, including previous award winners.

The Willie Morris Award for Southern Fiction is now accepting submissions for the 2019 prize, to be awarded in 2020.

The Willie Morris Awards for Southern Poetry is accepting submissions postmarked between the dates of January 1 - Feb 29, 2020 for the 2020 prize, to be awarded in 2020.

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FOR MORE INFORMATION about The Willie Morris Award for Southern Fiction and Poetry, including submission guidelines, please visit <https://williemorrisaward.org/>

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