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## Willie Morris Awards for Southern Writing Announces Fiction Shortlist

Partnership with Oxford Conference for the Book aids mission to celebrate authors, books and reading

SEPTEMBER 15, 2020 BY SUSAN NICHOLAS



Chanelle Benz. Photo by Kim Newmoney

OXFORD, Miss. – The judges for the **Willie Morris Awards for Southern Writing** have announced their 2019 fiction shortlist. The three finalists for this year’s prize are Chanelle Benz, for “The Gone Dead”; Margaret Wilkerson Sexton, for “The Revisioners”; and De’Shawn Charles Winslow, for “In West Mills.”

The Willie Morris Awards are administered by the **Department of Writing and Rhetoric** at the **University of Mississippi**. A national panel of judges looks for novels that enact, in the words of the late author, “hope for belonging, for a belief in people’s better nature, for steadfastness against all that is hollow or crass or rootless or destructive.”

“We hope that everyone will read the shortlisted novels,” said Stephen Monroe, chair of the Department of Writing and Rhetoric. “We invite all readers to Oxford this March to celebrate great writing and to hear from this year’s winner.”

The finalists are the first to be named since the awards moved to the university earlier this year. The awards were created in 2008 by Reba White Williams and Dave H. Williams, of Connecticut, to promote contemporary Southern writers while also preserving the life and legacy of Morris, their longtime family friend.

Morris was a UM writer-in-residence and instructor from 1980 to 1991.

Benz has published stories in a variety of periodicals and collections and her 2017 collection “The Man Who Shot Out My Eye Is Dead” attracted widespread critical acclaim. She lives in Memphis, where she teaches at Rhodes College.

A New Orleans native, Sexton studied creative writing at Dartmouth College and law at the University of California at Berkeley. She was a recipient of a Lombard Fellowship and spent a year in the Dominican Republic working for a civil rights organization and writing. Her debut novel, “A Kind of Freedom,” was long-listed for the National Book Award.

Winslow, a native of Elizabeth City, North Carolina, earned a bachelor’s degree in creative writing and a master’s in English literature at Brooklyn College before completing an M.F.A. in creative writing at the University of Iowa. He lives in New York.

The Willie Morris Awards and the **Oxford Conference for the Book** will partner to honor the winner at a celebration March 12, 2021 in Oxford. The award includes a \$10,000 prize.

Past recipients include Kim Wright in 2016, for “The Last Ride to Graceland”; Bren McClain in 2017, for “One Good Mama Bone”; and Tiffany Quay Williams in 2018, for “The Past Is Never.”

The **Oxford Conference for the Book** is an annual three-day gathering that takes place in Oxford and on the Ole Miss campus to celebrate books, reading and writing. The conference, which explores topics such as literacy, freedom of expression and the book trade itself, was founded in 1993 by the **UM Center for the Study of Southern Culture** and **Square Books**,

Oxford’s award-winning independent bookstore.



Margaret Wilkerson Sexton. Photo by Melissa Schmidt

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OXFORD, Miss. – The University of Mississippi is asking the community to help spread a little joy this holiday season by donating to the 25th annual Books and Bears program. Donations such as toys, books, dolls, bicycles and other children’s play items are being accepted through Dec. 14. All donations will be collected and sorted

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"We are delighted to partner with the Willie Morris Awards in a celebration of books," said Katie McKee, director of the Southern studies center. "Having this award at the University of Mississippi is a fitting tribute to Willie Morris, who knew and loved this place and understood its deep connection to literature."

"James Meredith: Breaking the Barrier," a collection of essays edited by UM professor of journalism Kathleen Wickham, honors this historic milestone with

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De'Shawn Charles Winslow.  
Photo by Julie Keresztes

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