



January 16, 2019

GLCA Announces Winners of the 2019-20 New Writers Award

From a submission list of over 150 volumes in three categories, the Great Lakes Colleges Association (GLCA) announces the winners of the 2019-20 GLCA New Writers Award for Poetry, Fiction, and Creative Non-fiction. Now in its 50th year, the New Writers Award confers recognition on promising writers who have published a first volume in one of the three genres. Winning writers receive invitations to visit GLCA member colleges – where they give readings, meet with students and faculty members, and discuss technique and creativity in the writing process.

The 2019 winner for Poetry is **Marcelo Hernandez Castillo**, *Cenzontle*, published by BOA Editions, Ltd. Our GLCA judges note:

Castillo's narrative itself couldn't be more timely and significant: it's a story of undocumented immigrants, border crossing, transgression, and the tantalizing fictions and facts of the American dream. From the opening poem, one is immediately drawn into the lush, honed music of these lines, which imaginatively translate states of dislocation, high anxiety, grief, and desire into a distinctive, urgent voice. The title word itself is Nahuatl for "four hundred years" – likely alluding to the approximate time of colonialism in the Americas. But it also refers specifically to a type of mockingbird, a bird in south-central Mexican and Aztec mythology, with four hundred voices. The second-person intimacy, the use of white space, the very idea of the mockingbird and its multiple voices and songs infuses the entire collection with mystery, beauty, and wisdom. To read these poems is to participate in a journey – and an unexpected one towards illumination and the complexities of longing and belonging. Castillo's sweep is large but his voice is particular and clarified. This is mature, engaged poetry.

The 2019 winner for Fiction is **Lesley Nneka Arimah**, *What it Means When a Man Falls From the Sky*, published by Riverhead Books. Our GLCA judges note:

This is a superb collection with each story carefully crafted and moving. It ranges widely, from a traditionally-structured fable, through classical realism, to several stories with magical or dystopian elements. The intertwining of contemporary and traditional modes of storytelling is essential to Arimah's larger themes: generational conflict, transnational migrations, the unexpected ways that the past can reach forward to throw the present off course. Arimah's voice is always assured, the writing often beautiful and occasionally breathtaking. There's a matter-of-factness here that sparkles, a lack of sentimentality that drives home the high stakes in each story. These characters have

stories they want to tell – about family, especially mothers and daughters; about love and its dangers; about the struggle of women to be heard against the social chorus of gendered expectations. It is a memorable collection both for its subject matter and the strong female characters navigating between two worlds.

The 2019 winner for Creative Non-fiction is **Dawn Davies, *Mothers of Sparta: A Memoir in Pieces***, published by Flatiron Press. Our GLCA judges note:

Dawn Davies' *Mothers of Sparta* deploys an accomplished and startling combination of funny and deeply serious language. Davies explores her identities of mother, wife, and partner, but also brings wry-self-awareness to the reality that our chosen identities transform us. She is able to produce paragraphs that are simultaneously hilarious and horrific, and also balance statements of unbearable pain with others of lightness, without slipping into either slightness or overbearing melancholy. Davies writes direct and probing essays about death, depression, sexuality, and parenthood from surprising angles. She deftly weaves her experiences as a woman with a simplicity of language, an elegant structure and a depth of emotion in these often redemptive essays. "Mothers of Sparta," among the book's most powerful pieces of writing, explores parenting with compassion and responsibility, making a significant contribution to our cultural conversation about disability. These essays examine our modern ways of being and becoming.

Judges of the New Writers Award are faculty members of creative writing and literature at GLCA's member colleges.

The judges of the 2019 award in Poetry were:

David Baker, Denison University
Joe Heithaus, DePauw University
Lynn Powell, Oberlin College

The judges of the 2019 award in Fiction were:

Danit Brown, Albion College
Eric Freeze, Wabash College
Jennifer Hayward, The College of Wooster

The judges of the 2019 award in Creative Non-fiction were:

Matthew Ferrence, Allegheny College
Marin Heinritz, Kalamazoo College
Rhoda Janzen, Hope College

For more information on the New Writers Award, please contact Gregory Wegner, Director of Program Development (wegner@glca.org), or Colleen Monahan Smith, Executive Assistant to the President (smith@glca.org) at the GLCA.

Additional information is available on the GLCA web site: [GLCA New Writers Award](#)