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Cottom, Tilghman, and Kingsley Receive Literary Awards 2020 recipients honored by the Library of Virginia

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(Richmond, Virginia) – The Library of Virginia is pleased to announce the winners of the 23rd Annual Library of Virginia Literary Awards, which were held virtually this year. Sponsored by Dominion Energy, the October 17 awards celebration was hosted by best-selling author and award-winning filmmaker Adriana Trigiani. Awards categories were nonfiction, fiction, and poetry; People's Choice Awards for fiction and nonfiction; and Art in Literature: The Mary Lynn Kotz Award. Winners in each category receive a monetary prize and a handsome engraved crystal book.

The winner of the **2020 Literary Award for Nonfiction** is **Tressie McMillan Cottom** for her book *Thick: And Other Essays*. “The provocative and brilliant chapters hold a mirror to the soul of America in painfully honest and gloriously affirming explorations of contemporary culture,” wrote the award judges. “Streetwise and erudite, Cottom explodes the myth that the ‘personal essay’ is the only genre in mainstream publishing and journalism open for public commentary by female writers of color.”

Cottom, who has just been named a 2020 MacArthur Fellow, is a recipient of the Doris Entwisle Award of the American Sociological Association for her scholarship on inequality, work, higher education, and technology. In addition to *Thick*, she is the author of *Lower Ed* and her work has been featured by the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, *The Atlantic*, PBS, NPR, *Fresh Air*, and *The Daily Show*, among others. She recently left Richmond, where she had been an associate professor of sociology at Virginia Commonwealth University, for a position at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill.

The other finalists for the nonfiction prize were Erik Nielson and Andrea L. Dennis for *Rap on Trial: Race, Lyrics, and Guilt in America* and Mary M. Lane for *Hitler's Last Hostages: Looted Art and the Soul of the Third Reich*.

Christopher Tilghman won the **2020 Emyl Jenkins Sexton Literary Award for Fiction** for his book *Thomas and Beal in the Midi*. “This lushly written novel follows an interracial American couple in a family saga after they emigrate to escape bigotry in 1892,” wrote the award judges. “Its evocative descriptions of fin de siècle France and skillfully drawn characters add up to a sensitive and satisfying portrait of a marriage.”

Tilghman is the author of two short-story collections, *In a Father's Place* and *The Way People Run*, and three previous novels, *Mason's Retreat*, *The Right-Hand Shore*, and *Roads of the Heart*. He is a professor of English at the University of Virginia and lives with his wife, the novelist Caroline Preston, in Charlottesville, Virginia, and in Centreville, Maryland.

The other finalists for the fiction award were Angie Kim for *Miracle Creek* and Tara Laskowski for *One Night Gone*.

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Benjamín Naka-Hasebe Kingsley is the winner of the **Poetry Award** this year for his book *Colonize Me*, which explores the experience of living as a Native American in today's America. "The poems emerge from overlapping histories of violence and struggle not as fractured identity but as integrated multiplicity" wrote the award judges. "Kingsley uses form and language to indict the micro and macro aggressions of colonization with irony, heartbreak, and joy."

An Affrilachian author and Kundiman alum, Kingsley is a recipient of the Provincetown Fine Arts Work Center and Tickner Fellowships. He is also the author of *Not Your Mama's Melting Pot* (2018) and *Dēmos* (coming in 2021). He is an assistant professor of English in Old Dominion University's MFA program.

The other finalists for the poetry award were Lauren K. Alleyne for *Honeyfish* and David Huddle for *My Surly Heart*.

The Art in Literature: The Mary Lynn Kotz Award went to **Philip J. Deloria** for his book *Becoming Mary Sully: Toward an American Indian Abstract*. In *Becoming Mary Sully*, Deloria reclaims the artist's work from obscurity, exploring her stunning portfolio through the lenses of modernism, industrial design, Dakota women's aesthetics, mental health, ethnography and anthropology, primitivism, and the American Indian politics of the 1930s. Presented by the Library and the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, the Art in Literature Award recognizes an outstanding book published in the previous year that is written primarily in response to a work (or works) of art while also showing the highest literary quality as a creative or scholarly work. This unique award, established in 2013, is named in honor of Mary Lynn Kotz, author of the award-winning biography *Rauschenberg: Art and Life*.

The winners of the **People's Choice Awards** are *The Substitution Order* by **Martin Clark** in the fiction category and *Mary Ball Washington: The Untold Story of George Washington's Mother* by **Craig Shirley** in the nonfiction category. Winners are chosen by online voting.

"*The Substitution Order* mixes legal expertise and wry humor in a story rich with atmosphere, memorable characters, and surprises right up to the end," wrote the judges about the novel by Martin Clark, who is a circuit court judge in Patrick County, Virginia.

"Craig Shirley's sprightly biography suggests that George Washington's first fight for independence was from his controlling, singular mother—a resilient widow who singlehandedly raised six children on a large farm," wrote the judges about *Mary Ball Washington*. Shirley is an author and public affairs consultant who splits his time between homes on the Rappahannock River in Lancaster County and a 300-year-old Georgian manor house in Tappahannock, Virginia.

The evening's featured speaker was **Douglas Brinkley**, who was honored for his outstanding contributions to American history and literature as an award-winning, best-selling author and U.S. presidential historian. In addition to our presenting sponsor, Dominion Energy, the Literary Awards were made possible by Liz and Preston Bryant Jr., Christian & Barton LLP, MercerTrigiani, Anna Moser and Peter Schwartz, Kathy and Steve Rogers, the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Carole and Marcus Weinstein, Weinstein Properties, and the Library of Virginia Foundation.

Next year's Library of Virginia Literary Awards Celebration will be held on October 16, 2021.

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October 17, 2020