

**DISTINGUISHED WRITERS TO BE INDUCTED INTO
THE TEXAS INSTITUTE OF LETTERS 2020**



**January 27, 2020
For Immediate Release
TEXAS INSTITUTE OF LETTERS ANNOUNCES
NINETEEN DISTINGUISHED WRITERS
TO BE INDUCTED**

For the 84th year, members of the Texas Institute of Letters (TIL) have decided on the induction of new members to join the ranks of the distinguished honor society founded in 1936 to celebrate Texas literature and to recognize distinctive literary achievement.

The TIL's membership consists of the state's most respected writers – including winners of the Pulitzer Prize, National Book Award, PEN/Faulkner Award, Academy Award, Americas Award, International Latino Book Award, and the MacArthur “Genius” grant. Membership is based on ongoing and exceptional literary accomplishment. Members of the Texas Institute of Letters have overwhelmingly approved nineteen writers to join the ranks of the TIL.

The 2020 honorees include poets **Cyrus Cassells**, **ir'ene lara silva**, **Emmy Pérez**, and **Loretta Diane Walker**; award-winning playwrights **Octavio Solis** and **Regina Taylor** (also a Golden Globe winner); novelists **Glenn Blake**, **Kathleen Kent**, and **Natalia Sylvester**; bestselling journalists/editors/publishers **Nate Blakeslee**, **Dan Goodgame**, and **Dan Williams**; award-winning songwriters **James McMurtry** and **Robert Earl Keen**; environmental writer and editor **Andrew Sansom**; scholars **Andrew R. Graybill** and **Emma M. Pérez**; children's and YA author **J.B. (Jessica) Powers**; and photo-historian of award-winning Southwestern cultural histories **Bill Wright**.

Dr. Carmen Tafolla, President of the Texas Institute of Letters states, “The move to diversify and include a wide variety of literary genres in our analysis of literary accomplishment has continued to bring us a rich base of outstanding word-crafters. We are extremely proud of the exceptional work these individuals represent. These nineteen literary masters and innovators span the creative gamut from stage plays to song lyrics and from novels to poetry, journalism, short stories, publishing, children's works, and scholarly books.”

New members will be inducted at the upcoming TIL annual meeting, to be held in Georgetown, Texas March 27-29. The Annual TIL Literary Awards will also be presented at the weekend's events. For more information, please visit the TIL website: www.texasinstituteofletters.org or email Carmen Tafolla, president@texasinstituteofletters.org.

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NEW 2020 INDUCTEES TO THE TEXAS INSTITUTE OF LETTERS



Glenn Blake, author of *Drowned Moon*, *Return Fire*, and *The Old and the Lost*, currently serves as Senior Editor at *Boulevard*. Born and raised in Liberty on the Trinity, Blake taught in the English Department at Rice University, the Creative Writing Program at the University of Houston, and The Writing Seminars at Johns Hopkins.



Nate Blakeslee is the author of the *New York Times* bestseller *American Wolf: A True Story of Survival and Obsession in the West* and *Tulia: Race, Cocaine, and Corruption in a Small Texas Town*. A writer-at-large for *Texas Monthly*, he served as a senior editor there from 2006-14. Blakeslee was also a former editor of *The Texas Observer*. Born and raised in Arlington, Texas Blakeslee now lives in Austin.



2019 Guggenheim fellow **Cyrus Cassells** won the National Poetry Series, a Lambda Literary Award, a Lannan Literary Award, the William Carlos Williams Award and two Pushcart Prizes. His 2018 volume *The Gospel according to Wild Indigo* was a finalist for the Balcones Prize, the NAACP Image Award, and the Texas Institute of Letters Helen C. Smith Award. The author of six books of poetry and a tenured professor of English, Cassells teaches in Texas State University's MFA program in creative writing.



Dan Goodgame is Editor-in-Chief of *Texas Monthly*, overseeing the 40 journalists who produce the prize-winning, 46-year-old magazine, as well as its website, live events, and podcasts. A Pulitzer Prize finalist and best-selling author, he was Editor-in-Chief of *Fortune Small Business*, and worked for *TIME* as White House Correspondent, Washington Bureau Chief, and Assistant Managing Editor, as well as at the *Miami Herald*, including as a correspondent in the Middle East. Goodgame co-authored "*Marching in Place*," a book about the first President Bush, and was a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford University, where he earned his Masters' of Philosophy.



Andrew R. Graybill, Distinguished Lecturer for the Organization of American Historians and founding co-editor of the David J. Weber Series in New Borderlands History at the University of North Carolina Press, is the Director of the William P. Clements Center for Southwest Studies at Southern Methodist University. He has authored or edited 4 books and numerous reviews for *The American Scholar*, *The New York Times*, *Texas Monthly*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and others.



Robert Earl Keen is an Americana singer-songwriter from Houston, Texas who has been writing, recording, and performing for over thirty years. Keen's acclaimed narrative-driven songwriting style has distinguished him as a notable influence in the songwriting community, whilst simultaneously capturing the hearts and imaginations of audiences around the world. Keen was inducted in 2012 into the Texas Heritage Songwriters Hall of Fame, and in 2015, with 19 albums to his credit, he became the first recipient of BMI's official Troubadour Award. In 2019 he was inducted into the Texas Cowboy Hall of Fame and presented with the Rick Smith "Spirit of Texas Award". Keen's songs have been recorded by many artists, including George Strait, Joe Ely, Nanci Griffith, Lyle Lovett, and the Dixie Chicks.



Kathleen Kent's fifth book titled *The Burn*, sequel to the Edgar-nominated *The Dime*, is a contemporary crime novel set in Dallas, and will be published in 2020. She also wrote three bestselling, award-winning historical novels, *The Heretic's Daughter*, *The Traitor's Wife*, and *The Outcasts*. Her short stories and essays have been published in *D Magazine*, *Texas Monthly*, *CrimeReads* and *LitHub*, and *Dallas Noir*.



The songs of **James McMurtry** have attracted national attention for a quarter century. His 2011 hit *We Can't Make It Here* was cited among *The Nation's* "Best Protest Songs Ever" and won the Americana Music Song of the Year. The critically acclaimed *Childish Things* spent six weeks at No. 1 on the Americana Music Radio Chart in 2005 and 2006, winning the Americana Music Award for Album of the Year. McMurtry received more AMA nominations for 2008's "Just Us Kids." The incisive and socially astute excellence of his lyrics have impacted thousands.



Emma M. Pérez is a Research Social Scientist at the Southwest Center of the University of Arizona and a Professor in the Department of Gender & Women's Studies. Her first novel, *Gulf Dreams*, in 1996, is considered one of the first Chicanax queer/lesbian novels. Her second novel, *Forgetting the Alamo, Or, Blood Memory* (2009) earned the Isherwood Writing Grant (2009), 2nd place in Historical Fiction from International Latino Book Awards (2010) and the NACCS Regional Book Award for fiction (2011). Emma B. Pérez has also published numerous essays and the history monograph, *The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas into History* (1999).



2020 Texas Poet Laureate **Emmy Pérez** is co-founder of Poets Against Walls and a Macondo Writers Workshop member. The author of several books of poetry, including *With the River on Our Face* and *Solstice*, she received poetry fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, CantoMundo, and others. Emmy Pérez is Professor of Creative Writing at The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, where she also serves as Associate Director of the Center for Mexican American Studies.



J.L. Powers is the author of many award-winning children's and YA books, including *The Thing Called the Future*, winner of the Patterson Prize for Books for Young People and the TIL's Best Young Adult Book Award. She launched Catalyst Press in 2017 to publish African writers and African-themed books. She has an MFA in Writing from The University of Texas at El Paso and two master's degrees in African history from State University of New York at Albany and Stanford University. The recipient of a Fulbright-Hayes grant, she splits her time between California, Texas, and South Africa.



Andrew Sansom is a prominent environmental writer, author of 8 books and Series Editor of 23 books on Texas. He is former Executive Director of both Texas Parks and Wildlife and Texas Nature Conservancy, and founder of the Meadows Center for Water and the Environment at Texas State. Sansom founded and is editor for the “River Series” books published by Texas A&M University Press. His published works have appeared in Texas Monthly, The Texas Observer, Houston City Magazine, Politics Today, Texas Highways, Texas Parks and Wildlife and Texas Town and City.



ire'ne lara silva is the author of three poetry collections, *furia*, *Blood Sugar Canto*, and *CUICACALLI/House of Song*, as well as a short story collection, *flesh to bone*, which won the Premio Aztlán 2013. She and poet Dan Vera co-edited *Imaniman: Poets Writing in the Anzaldúan Borderlands*, a collection of poetry and essays. lara silva received a NALAC Fund for the Arts Grant (2017), the Alfredo Cisneros del Moral Award (2014), and the Gloria Anzaldúa Milagro Award (2008) and was a founding fellow of the CantoMundo Writers Conference. Her poems have appeared in *The New York Times*, *Acentos Review*, *Pilgrimage*, and *Yellow Medicine Review* and *The Weight of Addition: An Anthology of Texas Poetry*.



A playwright and short story writer, **Octavio Solis** has written more than twenty plays as well as a memoir. His latest play, *Quixote Nuevo*, opens this month in Houston and is featured in January's Texas Monthly. His works have played in theatres across the nation, including the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, California Shakespeare Theatre, Yale Repertory Theatre, Denver Center for the Performing Arts, the Magic Theatre, South Coast Repertory Theatre, El Teatro Campesino, Campo Santo, and Cornerstone Theatre. His short stories have been published in *Zyzyva*, *Catamaran*, *Huizache*, and the *Chicago Quarterly Review*. Solis received the United States Artists Fellowship for 2011 and the 2014 Pen Center USA Award for Drama, among numerous other recognitions.



Born in Lima, Peru, and raised in Florida and the Rio Grande Valley, **Natalia Sylvester** teaches in the MFA program at Regis University. Her debut novel, *Chasing the Sun*, was named Best Debut Book of 2014 by Latinidad, and was chosen as Book of the Month by the National Latino Book Club. Her second novel *Everybody Knows You Go Home*, won an International Latino Book Award, the 2019 TIL Jesse Jones Award for Best Book of Fiction, and was named a Best Book of 2018 by Real Simple Magazine. Her third book, a debut YA novel upcoming in May from Clarion Books, has already been named a Junior Library Guild Selection.



Regina Taylor, playwright and actress, is the Denzel Washington Endowed Chair in Theatre of Fordham University. Her recognitions include a Golden Globe Award, 4 Helen Hays Awards, NAACP Image Award and others. Formerly Writer-in-Residence at the Signature Theater, the Dallas native is the author of the book *Night in Tunisia* and more than 20 screenplays, including *stop.reset*, *Millennium*, *Mambo*, *Escape from Paradise*, *Inside the Belly of the Beast*, and more. She is currently writing a screenplay about Sojourner Truth.



Loretta Diane Walker, a multiple Pushcart Nominee and Best of the Net Nominee, won the 2016 Phyllis Wheatley Book Award for poetry, for her book, *In This House*. Loretta was named “Statesman in the Arts” by the Heritage Council of Odessa. Her collection *Word Ghetto* won the 2011 Bluelight Press Book Award. Walker has published five collections of poetry, and her work has appeared in literary journals and anthologies in the United States, India, Canada, and the UK.



Dan Williams has published 19 books and more than fifty articles and essays. A recent book, *Past Purgatory, a Distant Paradise* won the Philosophical Society of Texas’s 2019 award for best book of poetry. His most recent book is *You Can’t Build a Company: The Life and Principles of Marlene and Spencer Hays*. Williams is Director of the TCU Press and the Honors Professor of Humanities in the John V. Roach Honors College, Texas Christian University.



Bill Wright won the Southwest Book Award for his first book, *The Tiguas: Pueblo Indians of Texas* and again for the more recent *Authentic Texas: People of the Big Bend* (a collaboration with Marcia Hatfield Daudistel). President Ronald Reagan selected Wright to serve on the National Council on the Humanities of the National Endowment for the Humanities.