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Starrett poetry prize winner writes she “will always see blood on the leaves”

PITTSBURGH, Pa.—Tiana Clark is the 2017 winner of the Agnes Lynch Starrett Poetry Prize from the University of Pittsburgh Press for her collection *I Can't Talk about the Trees without the Blood*. It will be published by UPP this fall.

“I’m bursting with gratitude and joy!” the Madison, Wisconsin, poet said about winning the prize. “My mentor, Kate Daniels, won this award in 1983, and it’s incredible to share this fantastic moment with her 34 four years later. I’m honored to join the Pitt Poetry Series family. Massive thank you to Ed Ochester for selecting my book.”

Explaining her inspiration for *I Can't Talk about the Trees without the Blood*, Clark stated, “For me, trees will never be just trees. They will also and always be a row of gallows from which Black bodies once swung.

“This is an image that I cannot escape,” she explained, “but one that I have learned to lean into as I delve into personal and public histories, explicating memories and muses around race, elegy, family, and faith by making and breaking forms as well as probing mythology, literary history, my own ancestry, and, yes, even Rihanna.” According to Clark, “I cannot engage with the physical and psychic landscape of the South without seeing the braided trauma of the broken past—I will always see blood on the leaves.”

A native of Los Angeles, California, the 33-year-old Clark is the author of *Equilibrium*, selected by Afaa Michael Weaver for the 2016 Frost Place Chapbook Competition. She won the 2017 Furious Flower’s Gwendolyn Brooks Centennial Poetry Prize, the 2016 Academy of American Poets University Prize, and 2015 Rattle Poetry Prize. Clark is currently the 2017-2018 Jay C. and Ruth Halls Poetry Fellowship at the Wisconsin Institute of Creative Writing.

Clark’s writing has appeared in or is forthcoming from *The New Yorker*, *Kenyon Review*, *American Poetry Review*, *New England Review*, *Best New Poets 2015*, *BOAAT*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *Thrush*, and *The Journal*, among other venues. A recent graduate of Vanderbilt University’s M.F.A. program, she served as the poetry editor of the *Nashville Review* there.

Clark is the recipient of scholarships to the Bread Loaf Writers’ Conference, Sewanee Writers’ Conference, and Frost Place Poetry Seminar. In the fall of 2018, she will teach creative writing at Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville. You can find her online at www.tianaclark.com.

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