

Thirty-first Mary Frances Hobson Prize for Distinguished Achievement in Arts and Letters



Chowan University is pleased to announce that Stephanie Powell Watts is the recipient of the 2025 Mary Frances Hobson Prize for Distinguished Achievement in Arts and Letters.

Ms. Powell Watts’s stories explore the lives of African Americans in fast food and factory jobs, working door to door as Jehovah’s Witness ministers, and pressing against the boundaries of the small town, post-integration South. Her debut novel, *No One Is Coming to Save Us*, follows the return of a successful native son to his home in North Carolina and his attempt to join the only family he ever wanted but never had. As Ms. Powell Watts describes it, “Imagine *The Great Gatsby* set in rural North Carolina, nine decades later, with desperate black people.”

Initiated in 1995 by the Hobson Family Foundation of San Francisco, the award serves as a memorial to Mary Frances Hobson (1912-1993), a journalist and poet, who was the first woman to receive the Algernon Sydney Sullivan Award in journalism from the University of North Carolina. Previously honored recipients are Kaye Gibbons (1995), Mark Richard (1996), Jill McCorkle (1997), Randall Kenan (1998), G.D. Gearino (1999), Amy Hempel (2000), Allan Gurganus (2001), Padgett Powell (2002), Sheri Reynolds (2003), Chuck Sullivan (2004), Sheila Moses (2005), Michael Parker (2006), Josephine Humphreys (2007), Judy Goldman (2008), Darnell Arnoult (2009), Lee Smith (2010), Robert Morgan (2011), Silas House (2012), Joseph Bathanti (2013), Sharyn McCrumb (2014), Dorothy Allison (2015), Edward P. Jones (2016), Kevin Wilson (2017), Jim Grimsley (2018), Wiley Cash (2019), Crystal Wilkinson (2020),

Michel Stone (2021), Daniel Wallace (2022), David Sanchez (2023), and De'Shawn Charles Winslow (2024)

The annual event brings the university and community together each spring to celebrate the accomplishments of an author of the South or who writes about the South. The 31th prize will be conferred on Monday, April 7, 2025, at 6:00 p.m. at a dinner in the Chowan Room in Thomas Dining Hall. Following the dinner and conferral, Watts will deliver the Hobson Lecture at 7:30 in Vaughan Auditorium in Robert Marks Hall.

Stephanie Powell Watts won the Ernest J. Gaines Award for Literary Excellence for her debut story collection, *We Are Taking Only What We Need* (2012), also named one of 2013's Best Summer Reads by O: The Oprah Magazine. Her short fiction has been included in two volumes of the Best New Stories from the South anthology and honored with a Pushcart Prize.

Born in the foothills of North Carolina, with a PhD from the University of Missouri and a BA from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, she now lives with her husband and son in Pennsylvania where she is Professor and Robert D. Rodale Chair in Writing at Lehigh University.

The public is invited to attend the Hobson Prize Lecture. To make reservations, contact the Office of the Provost at 252-398-6211 or cuprovost@chowan.edu.